

# PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

**SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 652**

## HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT  
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN  
AND NORTHERN IRELAND  
SIXTY-SEVENTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF  
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

**SESSION 2017 - 2019**

COMPRISING PERIOD  
7 January 2019—19 January 2019



# HER MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT

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# THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

## OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT OF THE  
UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND  
[WHICH OPENED 13 JUNE 2017]

### SIXTY-SEVENTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES

VOLUME 652

TWENTY-SEVENTH VOLUME OF SESSION 2017-2019

## House of Commons

*Monday 7 January 2019*

*The House met at half-past Two o'clock*

### PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## Oral Answers to Questions

### WORK AND PENSIONS

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### Universal Credit: Transition

1. **Christine Jardine** (Edinburgh West) (LD): What steps her Department is taking to support households transitioning from legacy benefits to universal credit.  
[908363]

**The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Amber Rudd):** The purpose of universal credit is to replace an outdated benefits system, ensuring that people are better off in work and that support is targeted to the most vulnerable. We recognise the challenge that this cultural shift represents. We currently provide advance payments and a transitional housing payment to claimants coming on to universal credit. Furthermore, we will spend over £3 billion on transitional protections for 1.1 million households as part of our managed migration regulations.

**Christine Jardine:** I thank the Secretary of State for her answer. I welcome reports that she is considering scaling back the roll-out of the migration to universal

credit for those on legacy benefits while problems with the system are identified and resolved. However, we have seen from the WASPI—Women Against State Pension Inequality—scandal that a letter from the Department is often not enough to stop even those who are not vulnerable from falling through the cracks. Why has the Secretary of State rejected the recommendation from her own social security advisory committee that legacy benefits claimants should be transferred to universal credit automatically? As a minimum, will she guarantee that nobody has their legacy benefits stopped without an application?

**Mr Speaker:** We are extremely grateful to the hon. Lady.

**Amber Rudd:** There was a lot in that question. I would like to reassure the hon. Lady that ensuring that the transfer from legacy benefits to universal credit is effective, fair and compassionate is absolutely central to the work the Department will be doing. The pilot announced some time ago, involving 10,000 people, will be taking place later this year. It will be absolutely central to ensuring that that is effective. I look forward to further discussions about that.

**Mr Iain Duncan Smith** (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend to her place. Her announcement is absolutely right. She knows the whole point of universal credit was the test and learn process, unlike, and learning lessons from, the mess of tax credits. Under tax credits, nearly 1 million people lost all their money. That will not happen under universal credit. I hope she will absolutely see the programme through.

**Amber Rudd:** I thank my right hon. Friend for his support and pay tribute to the incredible work he did to set up universal credit, particularly focusing on ensuring that universal credit helps people into work. We must remember that under previous legacy rates that took place under Labour, to which he rightly draws attention, there were marginal rates of tax of 90%. No wonder people were discouraged from going into work.

**Frank Field** (Birkenhead) (Ind): I am so confused. Might I ask the Secretary of State whether the best news we have heard since the benefit was introduced is in fact correct? Is she postponing the mass migration? Is she limiting it to the 10,000? Is she then going to see how those 10,000 are looked after in the transfer? If that is so, may I thank her and congratulate her, and say that it is a real pleasure that she has introduced so quickly a key recommendation of the Select Committee?

**Amber Rudd:** I am afraid the right hon. Gentleman is a little ahead in his fulsome praise for me, which I always appreciate. As I said to him in the Select Committee before Christmas, I will want to consider carefully when I bring to the House the vote for the 3 million managed migration, which is scheduled for 2020. I am still considering when to do that. I can reassure him that there will be a vote on that before it takes place. The 10,000-person pilot, which was announced some time ago, will, as always, inform us how we do that.

21. [908384] **Kevin Hollinrake** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): In Thirsk and Malton, some of my constituents get paid on four-weekly cycles. That means they can get paid twice in a month and can appear to be earning more than they actually do. What more can we do to ensure universal credit responds to such situations, so that people receive the right level of support at the right time?

**Amber Rudd:** I thank my hon. Friend for his question. He has raised this issue with us before. He is right that we need to ensure that universal credit delivers on what it intends to do, which is to give real time financial support based on an actual month's assessment. We have recently updated the guidance for universal credit so that work coaches can adjust to ensure that where the situation he describes occurs, appropriate adjustments are made.

22. [908385] **Luke Pollard** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): On 12 December, Neil Wright from Plymouth, who is disabled, received 1p in universal credit to live on. He is not able to claim another payment until 14 January. He said he had just 77p to live on at Christmas. Can the Secretary of State understand the utter hopelessness and anger that situations such as Mr Wright's cause? Will she agree to review his case, and, no matter the good intentions behind universal credit, will she admit that the system still causes misery and poverty for far too many people?

**Amber Rudd:** I am sorry to hear of the particular situation the hon. Gentleman raises. He must write to me, and of course I will take a careful look at it. However, I would just say also that I visited a number of jobcentres last Friday and was shown the work that a particular work coach had done to get three different people advances on the day of their universal credit application—the Friday before Christmas. We must not underestimate the good work that so many work coaches do to help claimants, which is in their interest and in ours.

**Vicky Ford** (Chelmsford) (Con): The Labour party often talks about benefit cuts, but can my right hon. Friend confirm that when universal credit is fully rolled out,

there will be £2 billion more going into the benefits system than there would have been under legacy benefits, thanks to the changes in the last Budget?

**Amber Rudd:** I thank my hon. Friend for giving me the opportunity to clarify that. It is such an important point that by 2020 the total system will cost approximately £62 billion, which is £2 billion more than the £60 billion that would have been anticipated under the previous benefits, so we are investing in our benefits.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Just before I call the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman), may I say to her—I think I do so with the support of the House—how sorry I was to see that her predecessor, an illustrious representative of the Bishop Auckland constituency, Mr Derek Foster, later Lord Foster, had passed away? He was well respected in this place and gave great service to it, and our sympathies go to his widow and the family.

**Helen Goodman** (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): Mr Speaker, thank you. I am sure all the people who live in Bishop Auckland will very much appreciate those sentiments.

The Secretary of State may know that five years ago 30,000 people were fined for wrongly claiming free prescriptions, but last year that figure was 1 million. That is because when people get their awards, they are not told whether they are entitled to free prescriptions. It is a simple piece of admin—will she sort it?

**Amber Rudd:** I thank the hon. Lady for drawing that to my attention. I am aware of the changes that need to be made and some of the things that have already been addressed, but I will write to her further to set out how we are addressing exactly what she raises.

**Helen Whately** (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): The roll-out of universal credit is going well in my constituency. Work coaches have told me—[*Interruption.*] Jobcentre work coaches have told me how they value being able to give extra help to my constituents to help them into work. Will my right hon. Friend advise me what work she is doing to ensure that housing benefit payments reach the landlords of some of my most vulnerable constituents?

**Amber Rudd:** I thank my hon. Friend for raising that point. I know she shares my concern that we must ensure that universal credit addresses the needs of the most vulnerable and that, where it needs to be paid directly to landlords, it can be. It is right that we have tried to limit that, but it is also right that we do not have one system that does not take into account the particular needs of the most vulnerable in our society. As we have had the opportunity to discuss, I will be looking further at what else can be done.

16. [908378] **Ruth George** (High Peak) (Lab): It is good to get clarification from the Secretary of State about managed migration, but in the meantime, more people will move on to universal credit by natural migration than by managed migration, with no protection whatsoever from the huge drop in income. The Department has published no conclusive list of all the reasons for people having a change of circumstances

and being moved on to universal credit. Will she commit to doing that at the earliest opportunity so that people are not transferred wrongly?

**Amber Rudd:** The hon. Lady is right that we now have 1.4 million people on universal credit and we expect another 1.6 million to move on to it during the next 12 months as part of natural migration. I am of course collecting information as we go to ensure that that is done fairly, accurately and efficiently, as I want it to be, but I will take her suggestion on board. I am very keen to ensure that everything we do is evidence-based.

**Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con):** Rugby jobcentre has quite a lot of experience with universal credit, having been a pilot centre since 2013 and on full service since May 2016. The staff there have had a hand in making the transition easier based on the test and learn approach. Will the Secretary of State acknowledge the hard work of staff at jobcentres such as Rugby's in making improvements to the universal credit system?

**Amber Rudd:** May I particularly thank the people in the Rugby jobcentre? I have had an opportunity to visit many different jobcentres since being appointed, and I find universally that the people who work in them are enthusiastic about universal credit and passionate, caring and compassionate about the claimants they work for. I urge Opposition Members not to underestimate the good work being done by work coaches in their constituencies to help the people most in need.

**Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP):** Happy new year, Mr Speaker.

Most people will have thought that the weekend's announcement was perhaps the start of a major shift by the Government with regards to universal credit, but unless it is followed up with meaningful interventions, changes and investment, such as to the benefits freeze, the two-child cap or the sanctions regime, it will be meaningless. Can the Secretary of State confirm if it is her plan to use the delay to the managed migration vote to introduce any changes to universal credit before the summer?

**Amber Rudd:** The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the whole principle of universal credit is test and learn, and so we are always looking to make changes and improvements. This is a tremendously ambitious project, bringing huge benefits to claimants and helping them into work and to stay in work, and we are always ready to learn from new developments as we proceed with the roll-out.

**Neil Gray:** By delaying the vote and bringing forward 10,000 guinea pigs to test the transfer from the legacy system to universal credit, the Secretary of State accepted that there might at least be some problems with universal credit, and yet she cannot come forward with any ideas or bring forward any changes. Does she accept that, unless she brings forward the changes being called for by Members across the House, the United Nations and expert charities and community groups, this exercise will be little more than kicking the can down the road?

**Amber Rudd:** I think that the hon. Gentleman misunderstands me. I am completely committed to the benefits of universal credit and to ensuring that it remains a force for good, helps people into work and does not repeat the terrible mistakes of the past under Labour and the legacy benefits. The new system will work much better for people, and, with the help of all Members of Parliament, people will find that their jobcentres are enthusiastic about it.

**Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab):** If reports over the weekend are true, it seems that the Government are finally waking up to the potentially devastating impact of their managed migration plans on claimants, over one third of whom will be sick or disabled. Therefore, will the Secretary of State now clarify the situation and what action she will take to address the central flaw in these regulations, which places all the onus on claimants to make a new claim for universal credit or risk losing support if they do not make an application on time?

**Amber Rudd:** I am grateful for a second opportunity to clarify the situation. As we announced last year, there will be a 10,000-person pilot this summer that will help us to learn how to be most effective in the managed migration. We have 1.4 million already on universal credit through natural migration and 1.6 million are expected to come on during the next 12 months. Making sure that the managed migration is effective, efficient and compassionate is absolutely central to the success of universal credit, and that will be coming forward in 2020.

**Margaret Greenwood:** Only about one third of households due to be claiming universal credit by the time it is fully rolled out were ever scheduled to transfer under managed migration and so receive transitional protection. Universal credit is being used as a vehicle for cuts to social security and is pushing many people into poverty, rent arrears and food banks. Will the Secretary of State now stop the roll-out?

**Amber Rudd:** I would ask the hon. Lady to think again about her approach to universal credit. It is doing a good job. I urge all Members who have not had the opportunity to visit their jobcentres and experience it for themselves—talk to the claimants and work coaches—and above all to compare it to the legacy benefits. If they do, they will see the confusion and complication that was there. Now, with our one simple system, it will be much more straightforward for individual claimants.

### Universal Credit: Childcare Costs

2. **Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op):** What support is available for childcare costs through universal credit. [908364]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Justin Tomlinson):** Universal credit supports working parents with childcare costs, regardless of the number of hours they work. This provides an important financial incentive to those taking their first steps into paid employment. People can recover up to 85% of their eligible childcare costs on universal credit, compared to 70% on the legacy system.



**Lucy Powell:** As the Minister will know, one of the big challenges with universal credit is that families have to pay their childcare costs upfront. Save the Children and the Centre for Social Justice have recently warned that this is leaving families in £1,000 of debt when they start work. Under the review that the Department now seems to be conducting, can it look again at this, and can it also look at their other recommendation of making it not 85% but 100% of childcare costs, because this would really benefit those on low pay?

**Justin Tomlinson:** I know that the hon. Lady has worked tirelessly on this issue. The Government recognise its importance, which is why we have increased our financial support by nearly 50% since 2010. We are making improvements specifically in relation to payment in arrears, improving communication and ensuring that the Flexible Support Fund is better known and better used to help those who would otherwise face a financial barrier.

**Andrew Bridgen** (North West Leicestershire) (Con): Can the Minister confirm that parents with disabled children will continue to receive additional support under universal credit?

**Justin Tomlinson:** Yes.

18. [908380] **Dr Rupa Huq** (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): Will the Minister ensure that no one else ever suffers the same indignity as Paulette Reid of Acton, a working mum with three kids who, over Christmas, found herself with £10 to her name for the entire holiday season? When she rang the DWP asking for the payment that we are told everyone receives in advance, she was told to go to a food bank. The people at the Department obviously do not understand that that involves a referral process. How can this be happening now in the fifth richest country on earth? It seems that "I, Daniel Blake" is becoming reality in Ealing, queen of the suburbs.

**Justin Tomlinson:** I am very sorry to hear about that case. The hon. Lady's constituent should have had access to an advance payment, and if she was down to her last £10, it should have been made on that day. If the hon. Lady will write to me with all the details, we will look at that specific case to see what went wrong.

**Dr Philippa Whitford** (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): I welcome the Secretary of State's announcement about examining the impact of universal credit on women, which, through women, often affects children. Will she look again at the single household payment, and consider separate payments to protect women from financial coercion, control and abuse?

**Justin Tomlinson:** This matter relates mostly to domestic abuse. I have been doing a huge amount of work with Women's Aid, Refuge and ManKind to increase awareness that split payments are available in those circumstances, and to ensure that more work is done to identify, refer and support such claimants.

### Employment Trends

4. **Royston Smith** (Southampton, Itchen) (Con): What assessment the Government have made of trends in the level of employment since 2010. [908366]

11. **Leo Docherty** (Aldershot) (Con): What assessment the Government have made of trends in the level of employment since 2010. [908373]

**The Minister for Employment (Alok Sharma):** Let me first wish you a very happy new year, Mr Speaker.

The UK's employment rate is at a joint record high of 75.7%, and more people are in employment than ever before. Thanks to the policies of this Conservative Government, 3.4 million more people are in work than in 2010, and wages are growing faster than inflation.

**Royston Smith:** Many of my constituents have been able to find work, but much of it involves low-paid service-sector roles and few career prospects. What is my hon. Friend doing to help those who are already in work to move towards higher-paid, more rewarding occupations?

**Alok Sharma:** About 75% of the jobs that have been created since 2010 are full-time, permanent, high-skill occupations attracting high wages, but my hon. Friend is right to say that we need to help people with low earnings to progress. That is why, under universal credit, work coaches offer one-to-one support, and we are undertaking trials to determine what further support we can provide to help people to move into better-paid work.

**Leo Docherty:** Since 2010, unemployment in my constituency has fallen by two thirds. Can the Minister tell us how many employment records the Government have broken?

**Alok Sharma:** My hon. Friend has highlighted an important point, which, of course, the Opposition never want to talk about. Under this Conservative Government, 18 new employment records have been set since 2015, underlining the confidence that employers have in our policies. That confidence would evaporate if that lot got anywhere near government.

**Kate Green** (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): Getting people into work is a good thing, but there is no point in trapping them in in-work poverty. About two thirds of children in poverty are growing up in working households. What is the Minister doing to address that?

**Alok Sharma:** The hon. Lady has raised an important point, but I should point out that there has been no particular increase in in-work poverty. Indeed, 1 million fewer people, and 300,000 fewer children, are living in absolute poverty. Ultimately, however, this is about helping people into work, and, as we have said, we are doing an enormous amount through universal credit to ensure that that happens.

**Meg Hillier** (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): Further to the question asked by the hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Royston Smith), will the Minister not acknowledge that there is a big challenge for many of my constituents who work in more than one job on low wages, who do not have the time or the money to progress to further training, and whose employers are not willing to invest? How will he help those people to move to better, long-term, secure jobs?

**Alok Sharma:** As I said in answer to an earlier question, 75% of the jobs created since 2010 are indeed in high-level occupations which attract higher wages, but of course we need to do more and that is why the Government are investing in apprenticeships for both young and more mature workers. We are also investing in a national retraining scheme and technical skills. That is what is going to create support for individuals looking for jobs in the market right now.

**Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): How do our low unemployment levels compare with those of France and other countries unfortunate enough to be trapped in the eurozone?

**Alok Sharma:** That is a typically forthright question from my right hon. Friend. To compare rates, in France the unemployment rate is over 9% I believe, but of course the other incredibly important progress we have made is in youth unemployment. That has been almost halved since 2010, thanks to the work we have been doing in government.

**Patricia Gibson** (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): Local authorities in Scotland—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. We are now moving on to question 5, but I say to the hon. Lady that it is the first day back and we should celebrate her enthusiasm.

#### Universal Credit Roll-out

5. **Patricia Gibson** (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): What progress her Department has made on the roll-out of universal credit. [908367]

9. **Ronnie Cowan** (Inverclyde) (SNP): What progress her Department has made on the roll-out of universal credit. [908371]

17. **David Linden** (Glasgow East) (SNP): What progress her Department has made on the roll-out of universal credit. [908379]

**The Minister for Employment (Alok Sharma):** The roll-out of universal credit is now complete and is available in every jobcentre across the United Kingdom. By 2023, all existing legacy claimants will have been moved to universal credit which, as set out in our business case, will result in £8 billion in economic benefits a year to the British economy.

**Patricia Gibson:** Local authorities in Scotland have spent over £20 million on mitigating the harmful effects of UC, thus diverting money from key local services. Does the Secretary of State think this is acceptable, and was it envisaged when universal credit was conceived? Is it not more evidence that this system needs to be stopped and fixed to make it fit for purpose?

**Alok Sharma:** We do of course have the policy of new burdens funding, and in 2017-18 the Government paid out £30 million to local authorities across the country. If the hon. Lady has specific issues in relation to local councils on her patch, she should come forward as I will be very happy to have a discussion with her outside this oral session.

**Ronnie Cowan:** I would like to highlight one particular universal credit case that my office is dealing with. My constituent has incurable skin cancer which requires using a cream treatment. He has to use the cream at home and it needs to be applied for several hours every day. He has been told that as his treatment for cancer is not radiotherapy or chemotherapy he should be able to attend work. My constituent has daily and lengthy treatment for an incurable condition. Can the Secretary of State or the Minister tell me what my constituent should be applying for?

**Alok Sharma:** I am very sorry to hear about the distress the hon. Gentleman's constituent is undergoing, and I thank the hon. Gentleman for his regular engagement with the jobcentre in his constituency. I would be very happy to discuss this case with him in detail and see what more we can do to support his constituent.

**David Linden:** Last night on Twitter Steven McAvoyn contacted me about the issue of disabled students being unable to access universal credit unless they have already passed their work capability assessment by the time they become a student. This is an incredibly difficult issue for some of the most vulnerable people in our constituencies, so will the Minister look into this again?

**Alok Sharma:** I would be happy to meet the hon. Gentleman to discuss the matter.

**Eddie Hughes** (Walsall North) (Con): Can the Minister reassure my constituents who have heard claims that some housing associations are refusing to accept tenants in receipt of universal credit by giving an assurance that the Government will make sure this is never the case?

**Alok Sharma:** My hon. Friend has huge experience of the housing sector of course, and I thank him for the work he does in his constituency; I have been to visit him. The landlord portal has now been rolled out across almost 70% of the social housing sector, but I will be happy to discuss with him any specific cases he wants to raise.

**Stephen Kerr** (Stirling) (Con): I very much look forward to welcoming the Secretary of State to Stirling shortly. When she comes will she take time to visit the Jobcentre Plus at Randolph Field, where she can talk to work coaches who will give a far more positive story about the impact—the positive, life-changing impact—of universal credit than the critics on the other side of the House have given?

**Alok Sharma:** The Secretary of State has already outlined the visits that she has made, and I know that she is going to make many more. What my hon. Friend describes is something that I also consistently find when I visit job centres—namely, the huge enthusiasm and the real desire to help individuals. For the first time, jobcentre workers and work coaches are able to do precisely that, through the one-to-one support that was not possible under the legacy system.

**Mike Amesbury** (Weaver Vale) (Lab): If true, the reported U-turn on managed migration in response to considerable pressure from the voluntary sector and those on the Labour Benches, is welcome, but any

attempt to avoid scrutiny is not. Can the Minister assure the House that those regulations will still be debated in full in this Chamber, and if so, when?

**Alok Sharma:** The Secretary of State has set out the position very clearly. Of course we will be bringing forward any potential new regulations. The hon. Gentleman and his colleagues talk a lot about supporting vulnerable people, but they voted against the £1.5 billion of support last year and against the £4.5 billion of support introduced in the Budget. He should be supporting those policies, not talking them down.

### Universal Credit: Helping People into Work

6. **Robert Courts** (Witney) (Con): What assessment the Government have made of the effectiveness of universal credit in helping people into work. [908368]

10. **Mike Wood** (Dudley South) (Con): What assessment the Government have made of the effectiveness of universal credit in helping people into work. [908372]

12. **Peter Aldous** (Waveney) (Con): What assessment the Government have made of the effectiveness of universal credit in helping people into work. [908374]

**The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Amber Rudd):** There are many good reasons why universal credit is effective at helping people into work. The most important is that the legacy system disincentivised people from taking up work, often by applying a tax rate of 90% and above, while the taper rate under universal credit is more likely to be 63%, which enables people genuinely to get into work.

**Robert Courts:** Will my right hon. Friend join me in commending the hard work of the Witney jobcentre? Will she also explain how jobcentres such as the one in Witney are using new technology to help people into work in the digital age?

**Amber Rudd:** I thank my hon. Friend for drawing this to my attention. I thank the Witney jobcentre for the work that it does in helping people into work, and I also thank him for his work on this as a Member of Parliament. Of course it is essential that we make advanced digital equipment available to our work coaches to ensure that the service they deliver really is first class, and we will always ensure that they do.

**Mike Wood:** At the Stourbridge jobcentre, the work coaches are evangelical about how the flexibility of universal credit allows them to better support the most vulnerable and the hardest-to-help claimants. Will the Secretary of State ensure that this best practice is shared around the country so that more people can find sustainable work for the first time?

**Amber Rudd:** I thank my hon. Friend for drawing my attention to the good work being done by the Stourbridge jobcentre and its work coaches. He really highlights the other true benefit of universal credit, which is the personalised approach. It is no longer about signing on; it is about individuals going to the jobcentres and being

offered real, tailored support to help them to deal with their challenges and to get into work. This is a revolutionary system.

**Peter Aldous:** Given that the planned objective of universal credit is to move people closer to and into the workplace, can the Secretary of State confirm that empirical, rather than anecdotal, evidence is being compiled on a national basis, and that it will be made available for public scrutiny so that the necessary adaptations can be made to ensure that universal credit ultimately achieves its goal?

**Amber Rudd:** My hon. Friend is right. Important though anecdotal evidence is—that is what MPs collect when they visit their job centres—it will also be absolutely critical to have full empirical evidence as well. In June last year, we published the universal credit full business case, which showed that universal credit will move more people into work. Once we have completed the managed migration pilot, we will also publish an impact assessment on the first phase.

**Laura Smith** (Crewe and Nantwich) (Lab): Figures from the Trussell Trust show that food bank use increased significantly in the 12 months after the full-service roll-out of universal credit in Crewe and Nantwich. Universal credit was intended to lift people out of poverty. What has gone wrong?

**Amber Rudd:** I hope that the hon. Lady has seen an improvement since the roll-out started in Crewe and Nantwich—

**Laura Smith** *indicated dissent.*

**Amber Rudd:** I suspect that if she speaks to the jobcentre there, she will be reassured that the number of people being paid on time has vastly risen—

**Laura Smith** *indicated dissent.*

**Amber Rudd:** I would ask the hon. Lady to come back to me, if she will, and to have a conversation about this. It is absolutely true that when universal credit initially started, the payments were not getting out in time and advance payments were not available. That is now being changed, and claimants are universally noticing a distinct difference.

**Liam Byrne** (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab): If the Secretary of State wants some empirical evidence, let me give her some: 55,410 people are on universal credit in Birmingham and food bank demand has increased by two thirds. Birmingham MPs, drawing upon our surgery experiences, have highlighted 13 different problems with the process. The *Birmingham Mail* has highlighted benefit delays of months on end. Unemployment in the inner city is not going down; it is actually going up. Rather than consider any further roll-out of managed migration, let us stop and fix the problems first before more families are plunged into poverty, homelessness and hunger.

**Amber Rudd:** I was in Birmingham last Friday, when I went to the Yardley jobcentre and saw for myself the remarkable work being done and some projects that are



reaching people who had never been reached before. Under the legacy benefits, the second named person in a household who was not earning was basically ignored for years and was not invited to participate. We now have a system whereby the people who were ignored for years under the right hon. Gentleman's Government's system are being obliged to engage. I am facing the facts, so perhaps he should face them as well. He can have his own views, but he cannot have his own facts.

**Mike Amesbury** (Weaver Vale) (Lab): An interim report commissioned by Centrepoint shows that the Government's youth obligation programme is failing young people on numerous counts. Almost half of participants dropped out without finding a job or training, young people on the programme were more likely to be sanctioned, many did not understand what the programme was for, and there is no central recording of job destinations beyond the programme. At what stage is the Secretary of State going to get a grip on that situation?

**Amber Rudd:** I am not as despondent about the programme as the hon. Gentleman is. I visited Centrepoint between Christmas and new year to find out for myself about the good work it is doing and about the relationship that it has with the universal credit service provider. It has a particular named person who helps with young people to ensure that they get additional personal help when they apply. Ensuring that personal help is available is exactly what universal credit is about, and Centrepoint confirmed to me that that is exactly what young people are getting.

#### Employment: Ex-offenders

7. **Huw Merriman** (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to support ex-offenders into employment. [908369]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Guy Opperman):** We know that employment is the best way to avoid repeat offending. I should declare that I wrote a book on prisoner rehabilitation called "Doing Time" so I am particularly passionate about the work being done at both the Ministry of Justice and the Department for Work and Pensions with the "See Potential" campaign, which contains guidance to encourage the recruitment of ex-offenders.

**Huw Merriman:** Happy new year, Mr Speaker.

**Mr Speaker:** The hon. Gentleman's politeness and the fact that he was born and brought up in my constituency are not altogether unrelated.

**Huw Merriman:** We share much in common, Mr Speaker.

A constituent of mine was convicted of an offence abroad 18 years ago when she was 20 years old. Since then, she has rebuilt her life and trained to become a social worker. She got a job, but she was told at the end of her probationary period that she could not keep it for reputational reasons. Will the Minister consider giving guidance to public sector employers to ensure that they will take a risk with people and do not continue to punish them long after their sentence has been spent?

**Guy Opperman:** I represented hundreds of people as a criminal legal aid barrister, and the vast majority of my clients deserved rehabilitation and a fresh start, so I wish my hon. Friend's constituent well. I can confirm that the Government will issue clearer guidance for the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 on that precise point.

**Chris Elmore** (Ogmore) (Lab): The Minister will be aware that the Ministry of Justice recently introduced the female offender strategy, so will he set out what work the DWP is doing to support women ex-offenders back into work, which is one of the biggest causes of social breakdown and why they cannot integrate back into the community?

**Guy Opperman:** The reality is that the Ministry of Justice's education and employment strategy allows each prisoner to be set on a path to employment when they arrive in prison, and the Ministry is working hand in hand with the more than 100 job coaches working inside our prisons.

#### Universal Credit: Self-employment

8. **Hugh Gaffney** (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (Lab): What assessment she has made of the effect of universal credit on self-employed people. [908370]

**The Minister for Employment (Alok Sharma):** Universal credit supports self-employed people to develop and grow their businesses where doing so is the best route for them to become financially self-sufficient. We recently announced changes to the grace period for the minimum income floor and the extension of the new enterprise allowance scheme, all of which provide additional support to self-employed claimants.

**Hugh Gaffney:** Citizens Advice estimated in October that self-employed workers could lose up to £630 a year because of the way universal credit payments are calculated. It also stated that 400,000 claimants could suffer losses because of the minimum income floor, which the Minister mentioned. Those claimants are people who are trying to make a living for their families and themselves. Will the Secretary of State commit to reviewing the effects of the minimum income floor on self-employed workers who are claiming universal credit?

**Alok Sharma:** As I highlighted in my earlier answer, we have made a change to the minimum income floor. The grace period will be extended to one year for all people coming in who are gainfully self-employed running a business. Ultimately, different businesses take different lengths of time to reach profitability, so, in the period before the minimum income floor is applied, we are giving people a chance to develop their business. That is also why we provide support through the new enterprise allowance.

**Bill Grant** (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Con): Mention was made earlier of the fantastic fall in youth unemployment since 2010—around 50%, I believe. What action can the Minister take, or is the Minister taking, to ensure that that trend continues evenly across the United Kingdom so that our young people get the best start to their working lives?

**Alok Sharma:** My hon. Friend highlights a very important point. Youth unemployment has almost halved since 2010, and we have the youth employment support programme to thank for that—the work we do through jobcentres in schools to make sure that people do not end up not in education, employment or training. Ultimately, however, this is about supporting people through the process, and that is what we are doing in universal credit.

**Stephen Timms** (East Ham) (Lab): I hope it does turn out to be the case, as reported, that the Secretary of State is going to pause the roll-out of universal credit in order to fix it. I hope she has noticed that the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith) congratulated her because he thought that that was what she had decided. Can the Minister assure the House that those who are being transferred to universal credit from other benefits will not have to wait five weeks before they are entitled to support? That is what is forcing them into debt.

**Alok Sharma:** I know the right hon. Gentleman cares very deeply about these issues, and we have had many discussions about this. It is precisely to help people with their cash flows that we have made advances available up front—up to 100%, if that is what they require—as well as two weeks of housing benefit run-on.

#### Pensions Dashboard

13. **Rachel Maclean** (Redditch) (Con): What steps the Government have taken to deliver the pensions dashboard. [908375]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Guy Opperman):** We published the pensions dashboard feasibility report in December, and the consultation closes on 28 January. We will shortly thereafter draft legislation, which will unquestionably benefit the 16,000 men and women in my hon. Friend's constituency who have an auto-enrolled pension at present.

**Rachel Maclean:** I thank the Minister for that answer, and I am delighted to hear of my constituents who are benefiting. What more can the Department do to encourage more women to save for their financial futures?

**Guy Opperman:** We believe that the dashboard will be a crucial part of that, but my hon. Friend will be aware that female participation in a workplace pension has increased by 3 million since 2012, thanks to auto-enrolment. In the private sector, female participation in a workplace pension has jumped from 40% to 80% in the last five years.

**Mike Hill** (Hartlepool) (Lab): In Hartlepool, one in five claimants lose their disability benefit, and we have an estimated nine food banks. We were one of the pilot areas for universal credit. Will the Secretary of State, as part of her investigations, please come to Hartlepool to see for herself the effects of universal credit on my constituents?

**Guy Opperman:** I am not sure that that has much to do with the pensions dashboard, but I can certainly say that universal credit is something that the Government support wholeheartedly, and that the individual matters will be looked into.

#### Universal Credit: Household Incomes

14. **Mary Creagh** (Wakefield) (Lab): What assessment she has made of the effect of the roll-out of universal credit on household incomes. [908376]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Justin Tomlinson):** Universal credit spends £2 billion more than the system it replaces. It simplifies the old system and makes work pay. It is already transforming lives across the country.

**Mary Creagh:** Happy new year, Mr Speaker.

What an extraordinary answer. Some 10% of children in the UK live in severely food-insecure households. That is the highest number in the European Union. However and whenever the roll-out of universal credit starts, begins or enters into its full flood, will the Minister work with the Office for National Statistics to measure the extent of childhood food poverty before and after the introduction of universal credit?

**Justin Tomlinson:** I think we all recognise that we need better-quality statistics. Various groups are working on alternatives, and the Government will take those seriously. As has been mentioned, there are 300,000 fewer children in absolute poverty. On the specific issue of food insecurity, in the past five years alone it has almost halved to 5.4%, which is 2.5% lower than the EU average.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** It is very good to welcome the hon. Member for North West Durham (Laura Pidcock) back to the House.

**Laura Pidcock** (North West Durham) (Lab): Happy new year, Mr Speaker.

I note the delays to the roll-out of universal credit announced over the weekend, but will the Minister please tell us what justification there can possibly be for people who have had to claim universal credit so far not receiving any protections? Will the Secretary of State agree to halt natural migration, compensate every single person who has lost out, and investigate the circumstances that have led people on to universal credit when there has been no change in their circumstance?

**Justin Tomlinson:** If the hon. Lady looked at the feedback we have had from stakeholders following this week's announcement, she would see that they make it absolutely clear that they support universal credit over the legacy system. We know that 700,000 people—some of the most vulnerable people in our society—are missing out on £2.4 billion of support because the legacy system is too complicated. Universal credit gives personalised, tailored support and makes sure that people get the support that they need.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** From one returning young mum to another—I call Jo Swinson.

**Jo Swinson** (East Dunbartonshire) (LD): Thank you, Mr Speaker.

I hope that the delay to the full roll-out of universal credit is a sign that the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions is open to making the many changes to universal credit that are needed. I urge Minister to look in particular at the harsh repayment timescales for loans, which led my constituent to say:

“I should never have taken that 3 month job. It made me worse off”.

Surely that is the very opposite of what the Government are trying to achieve with universal credit.

**Justin Tomlinson:** I, too, welcome the hon. Lady back.

This issue is a real priority for the Secretary of State. We have already made changes: initially, the repayment period was six months, then 12 months, and it is now 16 months, and we have moved the maximum deduction rate down from 40% to 30%. We will continue to review the situation.

#### Disability: Medical Assessments

15. **Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab): What recent steps her Department has taken to improve the accuracy of medical assessments of disability for the purpose of claiming benefit. [908377]

**The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work (Sarah Newton):** Ensuring the quality and accuracy of the assessments undertaken by qualified healthcare assessment providers is a top priority. The Department is implementing a wide range of improvements, as communicated to the Work and Pensions Committee and many stakeholders. All our assessment providers' claimant satisfaction reviews continue to exceed the minimum satisfaction level of 90%. Accuracy is improving year on year for both personal independence payment and work capability assessments, and the Department closely monitors performance, including through the independent audit of assessment reports.

**Kevin Brennan:** Some years ago, my constituent Robert Shafer was denied benefits after a Department for Work and Pensions medical assessment was deemed fit for purpose, despite its being contradicted by all other medical evidence and the medical examiner being sent for retraining. Robert Shafer's case has never been resolved. When will Ministers accept that the whole medical assessment process is in itself not fit for purpose?

**Sarah Newton:** I am very sorry to hear about that individual case. I would of course be more than happy to meet the hon. Gentleman to see what more we can do to help. The work capability assessment and PIP assessment process has been subject to a series of independent reviews, which we welcome, and we work vigorously to make sure that we make continuous improvements. For the vast majority of people, the processes work well.

**Marsha De Cordova** (Battersea) (Lab): Just before Christmas, the Minister announced yet another review of disabled people being wrong denied vital social security, after 4,600 disabled people had their disability living allowance wrongly stopped and were deprived of PIP. It is the seventh review of its kind in the past year and provides yet another example of the devastating impact of the chaotic shambles at the heart of the DWP.

Does the Minister agree that this latest review is the result of institutional indifference to the suffering of disabled people? Or is it simply the result of a Department in utter chaos?

**Sarah Newton:** Well, happy new year to the shadow Minister.

I utterly refute the idea that the Department for Work and Pensions and its staff, who work so hard, day in, day out—well, I will not even dignify those comments by repeating the allegations. The Department is there to make sure that people in our society get the benefits that they—[*Interruption.*] I am very happy to answer the question if the hon. Lady will refrain from chuntering so distractingly from sedentary position. We are utterly determined to make sure we have a benefits system that is compassionate, fair and fit for purpose. We are proceeding at pace to review the PIP claimant cases to make sure that people get all the benefits to which they are entitled.

**Maria Caulfield** (Lewes) (Con): I have a 31-year-old constituent who has the deteriorating condition cystic fibrosis. With lung function of less than 30%, he is now being assessed for a lung transplant. After a recent medical assessment, his PIP payments were stopped and he now has a 47-week wait for a tribunal date to appeal that medical assessment decision. Will the Minister meet me to discuss my constituent's case?

**Sarah Newton:** I thank my hon. Friend for bringing up this case, and I will be very happy to meet her. It is really worth reflecting on the fact that, for the vast majority of people, PIP works well. Many more people are benefiting from PIP than they were under the legacy system, but one mistake is one too many and I will of course work with her.

**Mr Speaker:** We are short of time, but I want to hear the hon. Member for Kettering (Mr Hollobone).

#### Leaving the EU: Departmental Spending

19. **Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): How much her Department has spent on preparations for the UK leaving the EU without a withdrawal agreement. [908381]

**The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Amber Rudd):** We have prepared for all eventualities that might take place after March this year, including no deal. Preparations have been undertaken by staff as part of their regular duties, and we are therefore unable to apportion costs to that. However, the Department has been allocated £15 million for 2019-20 for EU exit preparation.

**Mr Hollobone:** Will the Department for Work and Pensions be 100% ready in the event of a no-deal Brexit?

**Amber Rudd:** We are 100% ready for any eventuality.

**Debbie Abrahams** (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): When will the Government publish the report that was leaked to *The Times* just before Christmas, which revealed the different scenarios for Brexit and



their impact on unemployment, homelessness, poverty and much more? Will it be before next week's meaningful vote?

**Amber Rudd:** The Department regularly conducts internal inquiries to reassure ourselves that we are prepared for all eventualities, and I can reassure the hon. Lady that we are prepared.

**Mr Speaker:** Let us hear the voice of Amber Valley.

### Motability

20. **Nigel Mills** (Amber Valley) (Con): What assessment she has made of the implications for her policies of the findings in the December 2018 NAO report on the level of profit made by Motability from leasing cars to personal independence payment claimants. [908383]

**The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work (Sarah Newton):** Asking the National Audit Office to investigate was an important step towards ensuring that disabled people are provided with an excellent, value for money service. It is troubling that excessive amounts have been paid out in bonuses and are sitting in reserves. We accept all the NAO recommendations and will be meeting the chairman of Motability this week to discuss how the organisation plans to implement them.

**Nigel Mills:** Does the Minister agree that the great work done by that charity is being undermined by the amount of salary and bonuses that it is paying out? Will she work with it as soon as she possibly can to make sure that that money is used for the benefit of vulnerable people, not the directors of the business?

**Sarah Newton:** My hon. Friend makes a really important point. The Motability scheme is very much valued by disabled people and I want to make sure that all disabled people with mobility concerns can benefit from it, so we will be asking the organisation to use up its reserves and to make sure that it reaches more disabled people to help them play a full part in society.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The Minister is always most courteous in engaging with the person asking the question, but the rest of the House also wants to hear her, so it would be appreciated if she could look in our direction.

**Mr Paul Sweeney** (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): While Motability has created millions of pounds of profits, I have a constituent, 51 years of age and a former NHS nurse, who sustained a serious injury for which she has required more than 20 operations. After six months on sick pay, she was granted the highest PIP mobility rate as well as employment and support allowance at £73.10 a week. Her PIP was subsequently reduced to the lowest rate of £22 a week, and she lost ESA payment of £37 a week and has been deemed fit to work. She is struggling to buy food and to pay her bills. Her mobile phone was restricted by her provider due to two phone calls to the DWP costing her £47, so she has lost all her money. What will the Minister do to sort out this scandalous situation?

**Mr Speaker:** The question was an extraordinarily interesting one, and very comprehensive, but it was a classic example of what I call shoehorning. The hon. Gentleman was seeking to shoehorn his issue into a

question to which it did not really belong, but the Minister's dexterity is boundless and I feel sure that she will reply pithily.

**Sarah Newton:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. Of course, I will meet the hon. Gentleman to go through that case. It is well worth remembering that there are 600,000 people on the mobility scheme, which is many more than there were in 2010 before we had PIP. In fact, 144,000 people have been given enhanced mobility rates, and transitional protection is also available. I will be working with Motability to make sure that more people can benefit from that scheme, but of course we can meet and go through the details of that case.

### Care Leavers: Employment

24. **Mr Robert Goodwill** (Scarborough and Whitby) (Con): What steps she is taking to support care leavers into work. [908387]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Justin Tomlinson):** The Government are committed to supporting care leavers. We have introduced a £1,000 bursary for those starting an apprenticeship and a £2,000 bursary for those going into higher education, extended paid internship opportunities across Government and launched the care leaver covenant. We are also working closely with Barnardo's on an innovative work experience pilot.

**Mr Goodwill:** Care leavers are some of the most difficult people to get into employment. Social workers are helping with that transition through projects such as Staying Close and Staying Put, but what particular outreach support can the Department deliver to improve the statistics, which do not look good?

**Justin Tomlinson:** I know that my right hon. Friend worked tirelessly on this when he was a Minister in the Department for Education. We have 900 single points of contact who are supporting care leavers across the country. We are also working with a lot of businesses so that they can realise the huge potential that care leavers offer. I had two fantastic visits, to the Big House in London and PGL, which I saw at first hand were benefiting from giving care leavers work opportunities.

### Topical Questions

T1. [908388] **Giles Watling** (Clacton) (Con): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

**The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Amber Rudd):** Universal credit is a vital reform that overhauls a legacy system that trapped people out of work; with six different benefits and three different places, it was utterly confusing. All new claimants now receive universal credit. In the future, we will move claimants who have not changed circumstances from legacy benefits to universal credit in an approach known as managed migration. It is right that the Government eventually operate one system. The Department has long planned to support 10,000 people through this process before increasing the number of people migrated. That will provide an opportunity to learn how to provide the best support, while keeping Parliament fully informed of our approach.

**Giles Watling:** The local jobcentre staff in Clacton do some excellent work and should be commended. However, the Secretary of State will know—I raised this case with her a little while ago—that for various reasons one constituent was unable to access some services at the jobcentre. In the end we were able to help this man, but what more can the Department do to ensure that outreach is available so that these vital services can reach even claimants who cannot make it to the jobcentre or who, like me, have difficulty dealing with IT stuff?

**Amber Rudd:** I thank my hon. Friend for drawing this case to my attention and for all the work he does with the jobcentre to ensure that his constituents have the right access to universal credit. Work coaches are trained to give additional support where it is needed, whether that is with IT or for people who require a home visit. We estimate that there have been nearly 300,000 home visits in the past year to ensure that people get the tailored support they need.

**Jack Dromey** (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): Nearly half a million senior citizens living abroad, who have paid in all their life, currently enjoy the guarantee that their state pension will be uprated annually. The same is true for pension entitlement built up working in another European Union state. With 81 days to go until Brexit, does the Minister recognise that the Government's total mishandling of Brexit means that we might crash out with a no-deal Brexit, and that in those circumstances it would be not just our jobs and economy that would be put at risk but the security and dignity of a whole generation of pensioners?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Guy Opperman):** The Government have a cross-departmental strategy on Brexit. The reality is that the policy for overseas pensioners has continued since the second world war, was endorsed by the previous Labour Government and is continued by this Government.

T2. [908389] **Huw Merriman** (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): I have seen at first hand the benefits that universal credit can bring by giving people a job and helping them to turn their lives around, and I have also heard the frustrations of work coaches that there are still many people on legacy benefits who do not get that same good service. May I therefore welcome the latest test and learn approach, but ask the Secretary of State to ensure that we still move towards change and deliver?

**Amber Rudd:** I thank my hon. Friend for the good work that he has done as a champion of universal credit, recognising, as we all do on the Government Benches—and as I hope all Opposition Members will do—the good work that universal credit does at the hands of really caring, personalised work coaches, who ensure that the claimants we all seek to serve get the tailored support they need. I hope that my hon. Friend will take that as a resounding yes.

T3. [908391] **Mr Virendra Sharma** (Ealing, Southall) (Lab): Why have not the Government published a recent equalities impact assessment of the plans for managed migration to universal credit? What have they got to hide?

**The Minister for Employment (Alok Sharma):** We have previously published an equalities assessment and, as we have noted, we will do the same ahead of the full roll-out of managed migration.

T4. [908392] **Alan Mak** (Havant) (Con): As universal credit is rolled out in Havant, I welcome the use of new technology to help applicants. What support is available to those applicants to ensure that they make the best use of the new systems?

**Alok Sharma:** As my hon. Friend will know, we now have a new partnership with Citizens Advice to deliver universal credit support, and his constituency is part of the early mobilisation of that programme. However, it is important that for those who are not able to use such technology, we still make a freephone helpline available, and that, as the Secretary of State has outlined, home visits can be arranged.

T6. [908394] **Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): Church of England figures suggest that 5,500 children in my constituency alone may be affected by the roll-out of the two-child limit, which will restrict all new claims for universal credit to the first two children in a family. By the time this policy rolls out, it will affect 3 million children, pushing them into poverty. Will the Secretary of State meet me and campaigners from different organisations, from the Church of England to Rape Crisis and women's organisations, to discuss the impact that this policy will have? Will she pause the policy and stop it rolling out from 1 February this year?

**Amber Rudd:** We think this is the right thing to do. It is fair to taxpayers, some of whom are on very low incomes, to ensure that the support that we provide under universal credit is for two children so that people who are on benefits have the same choices to make as people on low incomes in thinking about whether to have a third child. On the other point that the hon. Lady raised, I am carefully considering what action needs to be taken.

T5. [908393] **Henry Smith** (Crawley) (Con): I am pleased that employment levels in Crawley are above the national average, but what further support can be provided to get more people into work so that they can realise their full potential and that of our economy?

**Alok Sharma:** I thank my hon. Friend for the enormous amount of work that he does in supporting employers so that they can create jobs. He is right. We need to make sure that the jobs market is very strong, and that is why we make support available through universal credit, with one-to-one interaction.

T7. [908395] **Matt Western** (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): Does the Minister think that a 47-week average wait for a PIP appeal hearing at the Coventry centre is acceptable, particularly considering that the person appealing will not receive any money during that time and that 80% of decisions are overturned at tribunal?

**The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work (Sarah Newton):** No, I do not think that that time is at all acceptable. That is why we have been working so closely with our colleagues in the Ministry of Justice to

make sure that people can have their appeals heard much more swiftly. The hon. Gentleman will be pleased to know that more than 200 new judges have been recruited to the tribunal, and that through the use of automation we are beginning to see waiting times for appeals reducing greatly. But let us look at this overall: PIP works for the vast majority of people, and of the decisions that have been made, only 9% have been taken to appeal and 5% overturned. We are constantly looking to make sure that we make the right decision the first time, but the situation is improving.

T8. [908396] **Stephen Metcalfe** (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): How are the Government supporting my young constituents to get into gainful employment?

**Guy Opperman:** It was a pleasure to visit my hon. Friend's constituency last summer and see the fantastic work and the jobs revolution that is taking place in Basildon. It was also a pleasure to meet dBD Communications, one of his top companies, which has done a fantastic job in creating new employment and getting new training work done, and has an expanded order book that is enhancing job opportunities in Basildon.

T9. [908397] **Martyn Day** (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): On 19 December, I received the observations of the Secretary of State in response to a public petition that I had submitted on behalf of my constituents calling for a halt of universal credit and for the problems to be fixed. Her response concluded that "we can see no reason to halt the rollout of Universal Credit". So what, if anything, has changed in the past three weeks?

**Amber Rudd:** I can reassure the hon. Gentleman that there has been no change. We are continuing with the plan to have a pilot of 10,000 people, which we will use to ensure that the managed migration in 2020 happens in the most effective, efficient and compassionate way.

**Andrew Selous** (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): While some employers do fantastic work to help ex-offenders into work, do Ministers agree that we now need some disclosure, to show up employers that blatantly discriminate against ex-offenders for no good reason to stop them getting jobs?

**Guy Opperman:** I agree with my hon. Friend, and I applaud his campaign to "ban the box". More companies should be like Timpson, which has been an outstanding

employer and has conclusively proved that employing ex-offenders is good policy and that they make great employees.

**Melanie Onn** (Great Grimsby) (Lab): We have been told time and again that people will not be worse off under universal credit, but my constituent is £463 a month worse off after transferring from tax credits in work to universal credit. Is that something the Government are proud of?

**Alok Sharma:** I am happy to look at the individual case that the hon. Lady raises, but I would point out that £2.4 billion was unclaimed under the legacy benefit system, and that is changing under universal credit.

**Heidi Allen** (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): I would like to put on the record my thanks to the Secretary of State for listening and changing her approach to managed migration. I think we will see a step change in how vulnerable claimants feel about their security under universal credit. I have given her a list of other areas of UC that need improving. I urge her to look at one area that will completely revolutionise how people feel about the system—the five-week wait has got to go. If we make the advance payment the first payment rather than a loan, we will see food bank usage and the whole system transformed immeasurably.

**Amber Rudd:** I thank my hon. Friend. There are many contributions on how we can improve universal credit. Some of them carry quite a big price tag, and some have had more success with the Treasury than others. I look forward to further conversations with the Chancellor in due course.

**Jessica Morden** (Newport East) (Lab): Under tax credits, under-25 lone parents got paid the higher over-25 rate. Under universal credit, they do not. What is the Secretary of State going to do about that? I ask her on behalf of the group of young parents from Newport who are worse off under this system and in hardship.

**Alok Sharma:** I am always happy to meet the hon. Lady to talk about these issues. As she will know, the changes we introduced in the Budget mean that work allowances are going up by £1,000 precisely to support those who need it—individuals with children and, of course, the disabled.



## EU Withdrawal Agreement: Legal Changes

3.37 pm

**Jeremy Corbyn** (Islington North) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Prime Minister if she will make a statement on progress made in achieving legal changes to the EU withdrawal agreement and the timetable in this House for the meaningful vote.

I would like to wish you, Mr Speaker, and all the House a happy new year.

**The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Stephen Barclay)**: In a tone that I am sure will reflect the year ahead, may I join the Leader of the Opposition in wishing you, Mr Speaker, and colleagues across the House a happy new year?

As the House will be aware, the Prime Minister today launched a new 10-year plan for the NHS, allocating an extra £20.5 billion a year in funding. I am therefore responding to this question on her behalf. I am sure colleagues across the House recognise the importance of the NHS plan.

As confirmed by the Leader of the House in her business statement before the Christmas recess, this Wednesday the House will debate a business motion relating to section 13(1)(b) of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018. That will be followed by the main debate on section 13(1)(b), which will continue on Thursday 10 January and, subject to the will of the House, Friday 11 January. Discussions are taking place through the usual channels as to the proposed length of that debate and the date of the vote, but ultimately it will be a decision for this House, through the business motion, which will be voted on this Wednesday. Debate will also take place in the House of Lords on Wednesday 9, Thursday 10 and Monday 14 January.

The decision to postpone the debate last year was not taken lightly. Over the two years of negotiations, the Prime Minister won hard-fought battles—most importantly, to agree a bespoke deal, rather than the flawed off-the-shelf options initially offered. But it was clear from the three days of debate held in this House that it was not going to pass the deal and that further reassurances should be sought, particularly on the issue of the backstop.

Following December's European Council, a series of conclusions were published that went further than the EU had ever gone previously in trying to address the concerns of this House. Over Christmas, the Prime Minister was in contact with a number of her European counterparts on the further legal and political assurances that Parliament needs on the backstop. She has been in touch with the Taoiseach, and indeed British and Irish Government officials have been in contact over the past week. Securing the additional reassurance that Parliament needs remains our priority, and leaders remain in contact. Leaving the EU with the deal that has been agreed is in the interests of both sides.

When the debate begins on Wednesday, the Government will make clear for the House what has been achieved since the vote was deferred last year. As I said when I spoke in the debate on 4 December, the deal will enable

us to deliver a fair, skills-based immigration system and to have control over our fisheries policy and agricultural policies—

**Joanna Cherry** (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): Nonsense!

**Stephen Barclay**: Unlike the Scottish National party, which wants to retain the European approach. We will have our own trade policy for the first time in more than three decades, and there will be an end to sending vast sums of money to the EU. It is a good deal, it is the only deal, and I believe that it is the right deal, in offering certainty for this country.

**Jeremy Corbyn**: Thank you, Mr Speaker, for granting this urgent question. With less than three months until we reach the article 50 deadline, there can be no more hiding and no more running away. This issue will define Britain's future and should not be decided by the internal machinations of the Conservative party. This House and this country deserve much better.

A month ago, the Prime Minister shamefully pulled the meaningful vote, promising to do everything possible to secure assurances from the EU on the temporary nature of the backstop. Now the time has come for the Prime Minister to tell the House exactly what legal assurances she has been given by EU leaders. She achieved nothing at the December summit, but now surely she has plenty to update us on. Although I am delighted to see the Brexit Secretary here today, it is the Prime Minister who should be here to answer these questions. She suggested that a breakthrough had been secured last week. She is not here because she is busy promoting "Project Fear." It is all hot air.

There also seems to be confusion about exactly what the Prime Minister is demanding from EU leaders. The Leader of the House promised "legal reassurances", but yesterday the Prime Minister told the BBC:

"We're not asking for anything new".

Can the Secretary of State clear this up and tell the House exactly what is being requested, because this morning Ministers in his own Department did not seem to have a clue? When asked what the PM was demanding, the Brexit Minister had to concede that he did not know, but he reassured the whole world by saying that he was "an important person", so that is all right.

I fear that the reason so many members of the Cabinet are in the dark is that there is nothing to know. If that is the case, what guarantees do we have from the Secretary of State that, faced with yet another humiliating defeat, the Prime Minister will not just run away? Can he do what the Prime Minister should be doing here today by confirming the timetable for the meaningful vote and providing what we have not received so far: a cast-iron promise that it will not be reneged on yet again?

The Government are trying to run down the clock in an attempt to blackmail this House and the country into supporting a botched deal. The Prime Minister has refused to work with the majority over the past few months, in a desperate attempt to spark life into what is actually a Frankenstein's monster of a deal. Now we are told that, if we do not support the deal, the Government

[Jeremy Corbyn]

are prepared to push our whole economy off the cliff edge. To prove this, preparations for no deal are now under way.

The Transport Secretary, who has a PhD in incompetence in running Ministries, has awarded a shipping contract to a company that does not have any ships. Even today, we see the farce of lorries being lined up to stage a fake traffic jam in Kent to pretend to the EU that the Government are ready for a no deal—a stunt that the Road Haulage Association describes as “window dressing” and that one of the drivers describes as a “complete waste of time.” The Government are fooling nobody. These shambolic preparations are too little, too late.

The reality is that there is no majority in this House to support no deal. Why will the Government not face up to this truth and stop wasting our time and our money? The Prime Minister should be here updating MPs on what progress she has achieved, if any. Instead, she is continuing her approach, as before Christmas, of ducking scrutiny and dodging accountability. We will hold this Government to account for their incompetence.

**Stephen Barclay:** Based on the lack of content in that, it is good to know that the Leader of the Opposition had a good break over Christmas. He talks about colleagues not knowing. What they do not know is what Labour’s plan is. However, what they do know is that it is riddled with contradiction. Labour say they want to remain in a customs union, yet they also say that they intend to have an independent trade policy, even though the EU has made it clear that that is an area of EU competence. They say they want to be in the internal market but, at the same time, end free movement, even though the two are contradictory.

The shadow Business Secretary says that he does not want to rule out the option of a second referendum, yet the shadow Education Secretary says that that would be a betrayal of the democracy of the main referendum vote. Page 24 of Labour’s manifesto said that they would respect the referendum result; now they seem to have a policy to go back on that. So the confusion we have is as to what the Leader of the Opposition actually believes. He started out saying in interviews that we could not stop Brexit, yet his shadow Brexit Secretary says that they can.

I am pleased that the Leader of the Opposition started his remarks by seeming to upgrade me. Last time he said that my role is purely ceremonial. Now he seems to welcome me to my post. Yet he seems to suggest that the NHS 10-year plan, with an extra £20.5 billion of investment, is in some way “Project Fear.” Well, we are used to “Project Fear” on the NHS; it is “Project Fear” that we see from the Opposition on a regular basis.

The reality is that the right hon. Gentleman opposes the preparations for no deal, which any responsible Government need to make, while at the same time saying that he will vote against the deal. It is that internal machination in the Labour party that he needs to address, and nothing in his contribution to the House today sought to clarify that. It is now time he became clear. Does he maintain the position in the manifesto, that Labour will respect the referendum result, or does he agree with his shadow Brexit Secretary and want a second referendum?

**Mr Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe) (Con):** We have only about 80 days left. The Government face a deadline which depend crucial decisions that will affect future generations and the whole basis of our political and economic relationships with the rest of the world. We are nowhere near consensus, either in this House or in the country, on what new arrangements with the European Union we are actually asking for, let alone on the arrangements that we are likely to achieve. Now we have a completely ridiculous urgent question from the Leader of the Opposition, who has no idea what he wants but who just feels that he has to say something about the crisis we are in.

As we are in this position and as 29 March is an entirely arbitrary date—it was accidentally set when the Prime Minister, for no particular reason, decided to invoke article 50 before she knew what she was going to ask for—may I ask my right hon. Friend: is not it obvious that the national interest requires that we now delay matters by putting off the implementation of article 50 in order to put ourselves in the position where we can negotiate with 27 serious Governments by showing that we know what we are asking for and can deliver from our side, and to protect the national interest and future generations?

**Stephen Barclay:** It is always good to hear from my right hon. and learned Friend, but I take issue with his question. First, he says this is an arbitrary date. The article 50 process set a two-year timeline and, indeed, this House voted for the date to be set in the Bill. Secondly—he touched on this in his interview on the “Today” programme, when he suggested that we revoke article 50 with a view to having a second referendum decision—the European Court of Justice was clear that revoking article 50 cannot be done as a tactical device in order then to go back on that decision; it has to be a confirmed intention at that time. If this is about extending that, an extension requires the agreement of all 27 member states, but if it is about revoking it, the Court was clear that revoking article 50 is not about buying more time; it is about making a clear decision that we do not intend at that point to proceed.

**Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP):** May I wish you, Mr Speaker, and all Members and staff a happy new year?

It is with regret that we return after the Christmas break with no progress from the Government on the withdrawal agreement and—even more remarkable—that we return with no Prime Minister in Parliament. She cannot be bothered to be here. We are now just days away from the deadline to get a deal to protect our economy and the Prime Minister is not in Parliament to explain her lack of progress. Why is the Prime Minister not responding to this urgent question?

It is now clear beyond doubt that the Prime Minister’s tactic is to run down the clock and deprive Parliament of any alternative to her Brexit proposals, bringing the prospect of a no deal closer. The SNP we will work across this House to get support for an alternative that is about having another EU referendum and letting the people take back control from this Government. I say to the Leader of the Opposition: get off the fence and join us. Stop this Government’s chaotic Brexit plan.



Shamefully, we are in exactly the same situation as before Christmas, with the Tory Government again facing defeat but having wasted a month of precious time. The risks are real. The economic disaster facing our communities across these islands is real. It is suggested that the proposed letter between the UK and the EU regarding the backstop will not come before the debate and the meaningful vote. We cannot operate in the dark. This Government must show us the detail and tell us today how they believe these assurances will be enough to win support for their shambolic deal. Moreover, if, which is extremely unlikely, this Government manage to get their vote through, will they commit to extending article 50 immediately and remove the threat of the cliff edge?

The First Minister of Scotland was very clear today that the events of the last few years have made the case for Scotland being an independent country in charge of our own destiny even stronger. Scotland will not be dragged out of the European Union against its will. Our Parliament's powers are being eroded. The UK Government are treating the Scottish Government with contempt. Even when we seek compromise, our voice—Scotland's voice—is sidelined. This Government should wake up to the reality. Scotland knows who is leading in our interests, and it is not the Government in Westminster.

**Stephen Barclay:** I think that Members across the House will recognise that this Prime Minister has spent probably more time at this Dispatch Box answering questions from colleagues across the House than any of the previous incumbents. The right hon. Gentleman asked where she is. As I said in my opening remarks, she is launching the NHS 10-year plan because this party—Members on this side of the House—is committed to ensuring that we have an NHS fit for the future, which is what that announcement is about.

There seems to be, inherent in the right hon. Gentleman's questions today and in previous questions, a constant refrain from the SNP. On the one hand it calls for referendums, but on the other it cannot seem to cope with the results of the referendums in 2014 or 2016.

The right hon. Gentleman is right as to the concern about a no-deal outcome. That is why the best mitigation of a no deal is to vote for the Prime Minister's deal. It is the only deal on the table and it reflects over two years of hard-fought negotiation with the EU.

On the right hon. Gentleman's point about extending article 50, I touched on that in my reply to the Father of the House. The reality is that extending article 50 is not a unilateral decision: it would require the consent of the other 27 member states. It would also raise all sorts of practical issues, not least in relation to the timing of the European parliamentary elections at the end of May. It is the Government's firm intention not to extend article 50 and to leave the EU as the Prime Minister set out. The SNP should respect the largest vote in the United Kingdom's history.

**Mr Speaker:** In calling the right hon. Member for Wokingham, I warmly congratulate Sir John Redwood.

**John Redwood** (Wokingham) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker. Do the Government understand that opposition to the withdrawal agreement goes way beyond the unacceptable Irish backstop and includes paying

huge sums of money with nothing nailed down over the future partnership? Worse still, it would plunge us into 21 to 45 more months of endless rows and disagreements, with all the uncertainty that would bring.

**Stephen Barclay:** May I join you, Mr Speaker, in congratulating my right hon. Friend on his well-deserved knighthood? As regards the interplay between the financial settlement and how a no-deal scenario would be managed, there is a contradiction in saying on the one hand that we can leave the EU with no financial contribution, and on the other that there would be sufficient good will on the EU side for them to move beyond anything more than contingency planning and offer some sort of managed deal, when, at the same time, we are not honouring the legal obligations we have.

**Sir Vince Cable** (Twickenham) (LD): The Leader of the Opposition clarified, over the recess, that in the event that the Labour party obtains and wins a general election it will proceed with Brexit, so what are the Minister's civil service advisers telling it that is in any way different from what the Government are doing?

**Stephen Barclay:** It is not for me to speculate on what civil servants tell the Leader of the Opposition. I am not sure they would be having those discussions. The reality is that the Leader of the Opposition's party was the first to offer an in/out referendum. His party should therefore respect the decision, as its then leader said it would. It was the biggest vote in our country's history and that is why it is right that we avoid further divisiveness and ensure we leave as we said we would.

**Sir William Cash** (Stone) (Con): First, may I endorse the comments by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (John Redwood) about the money side of things? It is not just that the backstop is not sufficient in itself. It is a vital issue, but it is not the whole story by any means. We have the European Court of Justice, the question of control over laws, the question of the extension of time under article 132, the issue of state aid and the incompatibility of the agreement with the repeal of the European Communities 1972 Act. So many aspects of the withdrawal agreement are, if I may say so to the Secretary of State, matters that go way beyond mere reassurances. Reassurances will get nowhere. They are certainly not going to convince anybody who is thinking hard about this when it comes to the vote next week.

**Stephen Barclay:** As my hon. Friend will know, the Prime Minister made clear that she has heard the concerns of the House in relation to the backstop and that is subject to the further discussions with European leaders. In terms of its scope, it is worth reminding the House that 80% of our economy is covered by services that would not be within the scope of the backstop. It is worth having some proportion with regard to that discussion. On the other issues, I was not sure whether he was saying he wants more freedom for state aid, which would be the Leader of the Opposition's position. That is not, characteristically, what I would expect my hon. Friend to be calling for. The reality is that any deal we enter into with the EU will require a backstop. That is the substance of it. Whether that is a Canada option,

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a Canada-plus, a Canada-plus-plus or a Canada-plus-plus-plus, the reality is that, whatever the deal, it will require a backstop.

**Hilary Benn** (Leeds Central) (Lab): Nearly a month has passed since the vote on the Prime Minister's deal was cancelled, and the EU shows no signs of being willing to offer her the legal assurances she says she is seeking about how long the Northern Ireland backstop might last. Unless the Secretary of State can reassure the House today that such assurances will be forthcoming, I urge the Government to take at least one decision in the national interest now and rule out the disaster that a no-deal Brexit would be for this country.

**Stephen Barclay**: I am very mindful of what the Chair of the Exiting the European Union Committee says, and of the letter on this issue signed by a significant number of Members. The core point about ruling out no deal is that the House has to be for something rather than simply to agree what it is against. It is clear that the signatories to the letter suggesting that no deal should be ruled out support a whole spectrum of issues. The House has to decide what it is for, not simply what it is against.

**Antoinette Sandbach** (Eddisbury) (Con): Does the Secretary of State agree with my constituent who runs a chemical business, who says a no deal would be a disaster for him? Can my right hon. Friend give a direct assurance that we will proceed to a vote on the deal next week?

**Stephen Barclay**: I think we need to move away from some of the more inflammatory language around the consequences of no deal, but I do agree with my hon. Friend that there will be significant issues arising from no deal. I do not support the view expressed by some Members, including the Democratic Unionist party spokesman, who is supremely relaxed about the consequences of no deal. I think the consequences of no deal will be material, but I do not think they will be of the inflammatory sort that we sometimes hear and read about in the press.

**Liz Saville Roberts** (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): Diolch yn fawr iawn, Lefarydd, a blwyddyn newydd dda i'r Tŷ i gyd.

It is generally regretted that the British Government triggered article 50 in March 2017. They did so with the aid of the Labour party and without any semblance of a plan. The result, as people see, is a Parliament consumed by chaos and disorder. Delaying the meaningful vote a day longer only delays the inevitable. Will the Minister admit that the Government are now acting as a willing agent of crippling economic uncertainty, and immediately make good the harm they are choosing to do by bringing forward the vote to this week?

**Stephen Barclay**: I feel I must slightly correct the hon. Lady. It was the House that voted to trigger article 50—a clear majority of Members voted that we should send the article 50 letter. On her point about agents of uncertainty, the agents of uncertainty are those Members who are opposing the deal—the deal that will give us an

implementation period and give businesses and citizens the certainty they need—while at the same time not coming forward with a proposal that can command the confidence of the House. It is those opposing the Prime Minister's deal who are generating the uncertainty.

**Mrs Anne Main** (St Albans) (Con): The Secretary of State mentioned legally binding agreements. Will the Attorney General be coming to the House to be challenged on how legally binding some of the agreements will be? Those of us who are sceptical about having agreements rather than things written in law would like to have some of the legal advice we have already explored explained to us in the House.

**Stephen Barclay**: My hon. Friend is a very experienced Member, and she will know that it is the House that governs its business. As happened with the previous statement, the business is shaped by business motions and what the House does. It is not normal practice—this has been an issue for successive Governments—for legal advice to be published. There are very good reasons for that, which the Attorney General set out, but ultimately the House controls its own business.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Has the Secretary of State been out and about talking to people during the Christmas break? Is he aware that people are saying, "Here we are in the greatest crisis this country has had in any of our lifetimes, at a time when we can have a 10-year plan for the national health service but no 10-year plan for the future of this country"? The people of this country feel let down by politicians on both sides. We have no plan. We have no purpose. We need leadership, and we need it now.

**Stephen Barclay**: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for acknowledging that we have a genuine plan for the NHS, and I pay tribute to the work of the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care on that.

On what people say to me and other Members, I am always slightly wary of that, because it is somewhat subjective, and people have a tendency to select the conversations that suit their argument, but the majority of comments I have had from constituents demonstrate a desire for us to get on with it, back the deal, move forward and end this period of divisiveness. That said, I am sure the hon. Gentleman will have had different conversations with different constituents.

**Mr David Jones** (Clwyd West) (Con): My right hon. Friend has said that the withdrawal agreement, which we intend to recommence debating this week, represents the best deal and the only deal. Are we to infer from that that any legal assurances we may expect to receive from the European Union will stop short of a rewording of that agreement?

**Stephen Barclay**: My right hon. Friend, as an ex-Minister in this Department, will understand these issues extremely well. As I said in my opening remarks, we will update the House on the conversations the Prime Minister has had with European leaders in the debate starting later this week, and we will comment further on the nature of the assurances at that point.

**Kate Hoey** (Vauxhall) (Lab): Does the Secretary of State agree that the British public understand this whole debate about the EU much better than they are sometimes given credit for here? Does he also agree that some of the wording and scare stories put about on the possibility of going over to WTO rules are outrageous? Will he as Secretary of State make sure that his Department does everything it can to ensure that the full truth of what WTO would mean gets across to the public, who I think are already aware that this is a way forward?

**Stephen Barclay:** I agree with the hon. Lady that it is in no one's interest to cause false alarm, but at the same time we should not give false comfort. There are material issues to be addressed in terms of a no deal, and we are working actively in government to mitigate them—I pay tribute to the work of many officials during the festive period who maintained their work in the preparation of those no-deal plans. Indeed, we are stepping up our communication—there will be a big communication campaign of radio and social media ads tomorrow and in the days ahead—but people cannot suggest that not honouring our legal obligations and not paying the financial settlement would allow us to enter some sort of managed no deal that allows us to cherry-pick the bits we want and avoid the bits we do not.

**Greg Hands** (Chelsea and Fulham) (Con): Did my right hon. Friend see the interview in the *Augsburger Allgemeine* on 11 December given by Martin Selmayr, secretary-general of the European Commission, in which he said about the Commission:

“We have negotiated hard, and realised all our objectives”?

He says that the agreement

“shows that leaving the EU...doesn't work”.

Other Brussels officials have said that the UK is “locked in” and that

“losing Northern Ireland is the price Britain has to pay for Brexit”.

Is my right hon. Friend really as enthusiastic as Martin Selmayr and the Commission about this agreement?

**Stephen Barclay:** My right hon. Friend brings to the House his specialist interest, understanding and engagement in German politics, but the Prime Minister has been clear throughout—the political declaration itself makes this clear—about the sovereign position on Northern Ireland. Its constitutional status is unequivocally guaranteed and the integrity of the UK's internal market and Northern Ireland's place within it are preserved. She has made that extremely clear, and the political declaration also makes it clear, but of course politicians in Germany, like those in the UK, will make a range of statements.

**Mr Chris Leslie** (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): The public are sick and tired of Ministers spinning this out and prevaricating. It will have been noticed that the Secretary of State did not answer the question from the hon. Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach), who asked for a simple guarantee. Will he guarantee that the meaningful vote will definitely take place next week?

**Stephen Barclay:** Yes.

**Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): The change required is one that will enable us to walk away from negotiations if the deal on offer proves unacceptable to us. As currently drafted, the agreement does not allow that possibility, does it?

**Stephen Barclay:** The scope to exit from the backstop—which is really at the heart of my right hon. Friend's question—was explored in the House at length on, I think, 3 or 4 December, when the Attorney General spoke about that specific issue in great detail. The crux of what he said was that it involved a balance of risk, and that, ultimately, these were political decisions in relation to the ability of a sovereign state to be bound in the future. I know that my right hon. Friend is an assiduous follower of the Attorney General and his legal advice, and I commend that earlier debate to him.

**Luciana Berger** (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): There will have been a 35-day abyss between the date on which we expected to have the meaningful vote and next week, when we have been told that we will have it. There is no prospect of a different outcome from the one that we were told about before Christmas. I think it is unforgivable for our businesses, our public services and the country that we are having to contend with such uncertainty. The Secretary of State wanted to hear from the House what we wanted to rule out. I can tell him that I am in favour of ruling out uncertainty and a no-deal Brexit. Why is he not in favour of ruling out that uncertainty?

**Stephen Barclay:** The best way to avoid the uncertainty is to vote for this deal, but I do not accept the premise of the hon. Lady's question. She said that there had been no progress, but the European Council's conclusions in December showed progress in terms of its commitment—it's “firm determination to work speedily on a subsequent agreement”.

It stated that it

“stands ready to embark on preparations immediately”,

and so forth. Moreover, as I said in my opening remarks, the Prime Minister has been having ongoing discussions with European leaders.

The reality that Members in all parts of the House must confront is that unless the House is for an option, no deal then becomes the alternative. It is not a unilateral decision of the UK Government to extend, and the Court, in announcing its position on revocation, made clear that that would require a breach of the manifesto commitment on which the hon. Lady stood, and on which the vast majority of Members stood.

**Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): According to that excellent website TheyWorkForYou, the Prime Minister has assured the House on no fewer than 74 occasions that we will be leaving the EU on 29 March. Will the Secretary of State confirm that in no circumstances will that date be postponed?

**Stephen Barclay:** As my right hon. Friend says, the Prime Minister has made that commitment crystal clear—and how can one ever dispute what is said on TheyWorkForYou?



**Angus Brendan MacNeil** (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Tapadh leat agus Bliadhna mhath ùr, Mr Speaker. Thank you, and a happy new year.

Even the most deluded have conceded that Brexit is not going terribly well. Can the Secretary of State tell us whether the Prime Minister regrets having made the United Kingdom an international laughing stock? When might the delusions that she shares with the Tory party and the Labour leadership come to an end? Might it be when we have the meaningful vote on Tuesday week? It has to happen some time.

**Stephen Barclay:** What is deluded is on the one hand to say, “We want more control in Scotland”, and on the other hand, when we reach a point at which the UK Government are gaining greater control over fisheries policy, to say, “Actually, no, we want to give it back to Brussels.” It is that sort of incoherent policy making by the Opposition that has created this constantly revolving door. They call for referendums, then lose them, and then say that they want another one.

**Rachel Maclean** (Redditch) (Con): While it is of course right for us to debate the manner of our leaving the EU, and right for us to have those negotiations, does my right hon. Friend agree that the fact that we are leaving the EU was set beyond any doubt by the British people in the 2016 referendum?

**Stephen Barclay:** I very much agree with my hon. Friend. We were given a clear instruction to leave by the British people in the biggest vote in our democratic history. As the Prime Minister has said, now is the time for the country to come together after what has been a very divisive period in our public life, and to move forward from the referendum debate. That requires us to honour the referendum result, rather than replaying the division on a much more intense scale.

**Stephen Kinnoch** (Aberavon) (Lab): The Secretary of State continually says that there is no alternative plan, but in fact my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell) and his colleague the right hon. Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon) have produced “Common Market 2.0”, which sets out how we can leave the EU and join the European Economic Area. It is a Brexit that deals with concerns about free movement and the backstop and has a real chance of reuniting our deeply divided country. Will the Secretary of State take the time to read this document and perhaps come back to us with his views?

**Stephen Barclay:** I know the hon. Gentleman looks at these issues in detail and very seriously and I very much respect that. I have looked at the report to which he refers and the work of my right hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon) on this, but the reality is that there is an inherent contradiction in respecting the referendum result and suggesting that we can cherry pick from the four freedoms that the EU has always been clear cannot be divided. The reality is that the Norway option does not give us what is needed. There is Norway or Norway plus, but the reality is that Norway has a population of 5 million and much of what is done in terms of rule taking for Norway is not suitable for the UK in areas including financial services. There is also

an inherent contradiction in what was committed to in the manifestos of the hon. Gentleman’s party and my own, and delivering on the referendum result.

**Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown** (The Cotswolds) (Con): Mr Speaker, may I wish you and the House a constructive new year?

Given that neither the EU nor the UK wish to be in the backstop for any length of time, can my right hon. Friend explain to the House why it is so difficult to agree with our 27 EU partners a short protocol to the withdrawal agreement that would allow the UK to have a unilateral right to withdraw from the backstop in a relatively short period of time?

**Stephen Barclay:** As my hon. Friend knows, there has been some progress in this area, in terms of the commitments around best endeavours and the backstop being temporary. Indeed, article 50 requires that the backstop would be temporary. These issues have been raised across the House. The Prime Minister is discussing them with EU leaders and we will have more to say on this in the forthcoming days.

**Alison McGovern** (Wirral South) (Lab): This is pathetic. We should have had all of this dealt with by now; we should have voted before Christmas, and we should be moving on to a plan B. I ask the Secretary of State this quite seriously: we do not know when these legal reassurances from the Prime Minister are coming, so will he tell us if they are going to be given to us today, on Wednesday—when?

**Stephen Barclay:** I know the hon. Lady feels extremely strongly about this issue, but what is damaging to our public life is to stand on a manifesto that commits to respecting the result and then to spend time campaigning for a second referendum to undermine that result. We in this party are committed to honouring the referendum result and ensuring we deliver on it.

**Andrew Bridgen** (North West Leicestershire) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that this Government will never support the betrayal of democracy that would be a second referendum?

**Stephen Barclay:** The Prime Minister has set out the Government’s position on that, and I refer my hon. Friend to the many statements the Prime Minister has made on that point.

**Wera Hobhouse** (Bath) (LD): I wish you, Mr Speaker, and all Members of the House a happy new year.

One of our most distinguished ex-civil servants, Lord Macpherson, estimated this morning that the earliest time by which a comprehensive trade agreement with the EU could be reached would be 2025—that is, two years of transition and then five years of a backstop. If the Secretary of State does not agree with that estimate, why not?

**Stephen Barclay:** I do not think it will surprise the hon. Lady to learn that I do not agree with that estimate. That is because we start from a position of equivalence after 40-odd years of close co-operation, we are looking to put in place an agreement based on shared values, and we have a framework in the form of the political declaration that acts as an instruction for the next stage of the negotiation.

**Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): As the Secretary of State will know, much of the debate in this House has focused on the Northern Ireland backstop and not on the principle of guaranteeing that there will be no return to the hard border of the past. Will he confirm that an essential part of the next week will involve the Government giving us a reassurance that the backstop will relate to keeping the border open and that the UK will not be held in that arrangement by extraneous matters such as fishing?

**Stephen Barclay:** I agree with my hon. Friend; there is a very good reason why the backstop is there. It is a reflection of two things. First, it is a reflection of our firm commitments under the Belfast agreement, reflecting the difficult history of Northern Ireland and the violence that the people of Northern Ireland have suffered. Also, Northern Ireland is the one part of the United Kingdom that has a shared geography with Ireland. That is why there are special circumstances and it is why the backstop is required. The reality is that whatever deal is put forward—including any put forward by Labour, if the Leader of the Opposition were to work one out—it would still require a backstop.

**Stephen Doughty** (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): Mr Speaker, before I ask my question I should like to draw your attention some further serious events going on outside Parliament today. They include intimidation, threats and potentially unlawful actions targeting Members of this House, members of the press, members of the public and peaceful activists. May I urge you to use your offices to communicate with the Metropolitan police at the highest level to ensure that proper action is taken, as this issue has been repeatedly raised?

I would say to the Secretary of State that there has clearly been no progress in the negotiations or on the Government's position. There has, however, been progress on spending taxpayers' money. Will he tell us how much the delay has cost the taxpayer on a daily basis and in total since the Prime Minister decided to delay the meaningful vote?

**Stephen Barclay:** On the hon. Gentleman's first point, I have obviously not seen the incidents outside, but anyone who stands at this Dispatch Box is mindful of the plaque commemorating Jo Cox, which I know is so dear to many Members, not only on the Opposition Benches but across the House. I am sure that we would all unite in believing that, wherever we stand in the Brexit debate, all of us in this House should be able to air our views with respect and proportion.

On the hon. Gentleman's question on spending, the reality is that we do not want to spend money on no deal—[*Interruption.*] The amount of money for no deal has been set out by the Treasury—that is a matter of public record—but the fact is that those who criticise that spending, which any responsible Government need to allow for, need to explain why they are not backing the deal. It is the fact that people are not backing the deal that is requiring the Government to divert spending to no deal. The best way to avoid spending on no deal is to back the deal and give businesses and citizens the certainty that they need.

**Jeremy Lefroy** (Stafford) (Con): As one of the signatories to the letter about the consequences of no deal, particularly around manufacturing and particularly in the west midlands

where my constituency is, I believe that the Secretary of State will appreciate my concerns. He has referred to the fact that 80% of our economy involves services. Will he please give us his assessment of the impact on services of no deal on 29 March?

**Stephen Barclay:** I very much recognise the point that my hon. Friend is making. I shall pick out one example from among many. It relates to data, which is extremely important within the service economy. Those who say that in the event of no deal we will go to WTO rules and that that will be completely benign have not, from what I have seen, addressed the question of what that would mean to service businesses in terms of data adequacy and how data would flow. There are many other examples, but that is one that would apply specifically to the service economy. I know from my discussions with my hon. Friend that he is well aware of what the impact would be on manufacturing in his own constituency as well.

**Stella Creasy** (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): I have to confess to the Secretary of State that I am sad to see that he is answering this urgent question rather than the Prime Minister, because it would have been helpful to understand how, in the light of the NHS 10-year plan, our becoming the largest purchaser of fridges in the world fits into those effective, value-for-money spending plans. He can redeem himself to the House today, however, by answering the question that was clearly put to him by my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral South (Alison McGovern) about the legal reassurances that we have been told will change all our minds on this deal. When will Parliament have an opportunity to read them? Will it be before the debate starts on Wednesday? Yes or no?

**Stephen Barclay:** I did try to address that in my opening remarks. I said that we would update the House as part of the upcoming debate, and we have set aside a significant number of parliamentary hours in which to do that. I know the hon. Lady well from our time on the Public Accounts Committee, and I am not sure that any legal assurances secured by the Prime Minister would be enough divert her from her desire for a second referendum. I have made it clear that we will update the House this week on the further discussions that the Prime Minister has had.

**Chris Philp** (Croydon South) (Con): The Secretary of State has already referred to the letter calling on the Government to rule out no deal. Does he agree that if we foolishly ruled out no deal, we would be left with one of two invidious choices: remaining in the European Union or accepting whatever deal the European Union saw fit to grant us? Were the Government to agree with the letter, that would fatally undermine our negotiating position, so they should categorically not do so.

**Stephen Barclay:** As my hon. Friend says, if the Government ruled out no deal, the only other option in the event of the Prime Minister's deal being rejected would be to revoke article 50, which would be contrary to the manifesto commitments of both main parties and hugely damaging to democracy.

**Helen Goodman** (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): When a permanent secretary is not happy about being asked to spend money, they seek a written ministerial instruction

[Helen Goodman]

to make it proper. I have today had written confirmation from the Department for Transport that the permanent secretary sought such a direction. Does that not prove that no deal is a bluff?

**Stephen Barclay:** Given the hon. Lady's Treasury experience, she will be familiar with chapter 3 of "Managing Public Money" and the requirements on civil servants during their appearances at the Public Accounts Committee relating to value for money. She will also know that letters of direction are not new and have been sought under successive Governments, including during her time as a Minister. They form part of the checks and balances within Government and are a perfectly proper process.

**Simon Hoare** (North Dorset) (Con): If we want to leave with a deal—the Leader of the Opposition is right that that is the majority view in the House—and if we want to end uncertainty for our farmers, businesses and citizens, is it not time to stop playing party politics and the ideological games, and vote for the deal? As national politicians, all of us should mean it when we say that we are here to act in the national interest.

**Stephen Barclay:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The business community and citizens are clear that they want the certainty that the deal offers. They want the implementation period to allow investment to be made and planning to proceed. Given the risk of uncertainty that will result from the uncharted waters we will enter if the deal does not go ahead, it is time for Members to look again at the deal and at the complex set of terms within the withdrawal agreement and not let the perfect be the enemy of the good.

**Caroline Lucas** (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): Once again, a representative of the Government has come here to make a nebulous statement that can be summed up in three words: nothing has changed. It is groundhog day again. We have heard nothing new, and the only difference is that there are now only 81 days before we risk crashing out of the EU. Will the Secretary of State stop playing chicken? Will he show a bit of leadership and hold the meaningful vote this week so that we can get on without delay?

**Stephen Barclay:** I am slightly perplexed at being accused of playing chicken when I am at the Dispatch Box answering the hon. Lady's question. As I touched on in reply to the Westminster leader of the Scottish National party, no one can suggest that the Prime Minister has not been incredibly diligent in her willingness to come to the House and to answer questions, which she done assiduously on many an occasion.

As for "nothing has changed", perhaps the hon. Lady prepared her question before hearing my previous answers because I have referred to that. The fact is that there have been discussions and the Council statement was made in December, and we will explore such points in much more detail in the coming days.

**Stephen Metcalfe** (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): Whatever happens next, my right hon. Friend will agree that a second referendum would do nothing

to move the debate forward and would create further division and confusion. We have had a people's vote, so let us get on and prepare either to implement a heavily amended deal or no deal and to deliver Brexit on 29 March this year.

**Stephen Barclay:** My hon. Friend is right that we have had a vote, and I think his constituents want that vote to be respected, just as mine do. That is what the Government are committed to doing, but we should do so in a way that gives businesses and citizens the certainty that they need. That is what the Prime Minister's deal offers, and I commend it to the House.

**Rachel Reeves** (Leeds West) (Lab): The no-deal planning is clearly a total shambles. It has included giving a contract to run ferries to a firm that does not have any ferries. When the Government lose the vote on their deal next week, as they surely will, will the Secretary of State really contemplate risking leaving the EU without a deal—knowing all the chaos that that would create—rather than extending article 50 or, indeed, going back to the people and asking them whether they would rather remain in the EU or accept the half-baked deal that the Government have agreed?

**Stephen Barclay:** The hon. Lady should be much more candid with the electorate about the fact that she is actually calling for revocation. Extending article 50 is not a unilateral decision for the UK Government; it requires the agreement of all 27 member states. She is, in essence, calling on us to revoke article 50. That goes against the commitment in the Labour party's manifesto, on which she stood, and goes against what people voted for. If that is her position, that is fine; she is entitled to it, but she should be clear with the electorate that that is what she is calling for. Members who voted to trigger article 50 also need to explain why they have changed their minds.

**Matt Warman** (Boston and Skegness) (Con): I am totally committed to delivering the Brexit that my constituents voted for, and I know that the Secretary of State is as well. In that context, does he agree that it is instructive to note that not a single one of the leave campaigns argued for a no-deal Brexit as their first choice? This deal is the way to avoid a no-deal Brexit.

**Stephen Barclay:** I agree with my hon. Friend. Part of the reason why I supported leaving the European Union is that I want us to be much more global in our approach. I want us to look to the growing economies in China, India and Brazil, develop the work of the economic and financial dialogues that the Treasury has had in place for a number of years, and look at how we can supercharge them and take a much more global approach. We recognise that the best way to trade with those growing economies is not on a WTO basis, but by putting in place more bespoke trading arrangements with them. I find it slightly illogical that we should have that global objective of closer trading relationships with the wider world, while saying that with our largest trading partner we can revert to something that we are trying to move away from elsewhere.

**Dr Lisa Cameron** (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): A happy new year to all across the House. Will the Prime Minister bring further



clarifications and any legal assurances that she has to the House on Wednesday to allow MPs sufficient time to debate them before any meaningful vote?

**Stephen Barclay:** As I set out in my earlier remarks, there will be a business motion on Wednesday, when these issues will be discussed—as they are being discussed, prior to that, through the usual channels—and the House will have an opportunity to debate them in much more detail.

**Paul Masterton** (East Renfrewshire) (Con): The Secretary of State was kind enough to meet me before Christmas to discuss some of my concerns about the withdrawal agreement, and particularly about the fact that the role for the Northern Irish institutions set out in the December joint report was not carried across into the withdrawal agreement. Can he confirm that in the discussions that took place over the Christmas break, the role of the Northern Irish institutions and the question of future regulatory divergence were on the agenda?

**Stephen Barclay:** My hon. Friend raises a very important point, and it is one that we have been looking at. I think it is part of a wider question: as we move into phase 2, how do we give a greater role to Parliament and the devolved Assemblies? We are actively looking at those issues, and I pay tribute to my hon. Friend's work in bringing them to the fore.

**Mr Pat McFadden** (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): It is a new year, but it does feel like a groundhog statement, with exactly the same strategy as before: trying to force Parliament to choose between a bad deal for the UK and no deal at all, while talking up the even worse consequences of no deal. Further to the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman), will the Secretary of State set out today how much was spent on the farcical exercise of having 100 lorries drive around Kent? What does he think that that does to the UK's international reputation? Does he think that any other country is looking at that exercise and thinking that Brexit would be a great example to follow?

**Stephen Barclay:** The rest of the world will be looking at the fact that we have had a democratic vote and whether, as a Parliament, we respect and honour that vote. In respect of the deal, it is about not only what the UK Government say but what the EU has said. The EU Commission has been clear that this is the only deal. The idea that in the remaining days someone can go back to the Commission and negotiate a completely different deal is just not credible.

On the right hon. Gentleman's specific question about the precise cost of the contingency planning, he is an experienced Member and I am sure that a written parliamentary question, or another type, will be tabled in due course. I have answered many such questions from him and know that he is assiduous in posing them. I am sure that the Department for Transport will answer that question. The substance of the matter is that we do not want to be spending money on no-deal preparations, which is why we should support the deal and bring the certainty that it offers. Nevertheless, it is responsible for the Government to prepare for no deal if there is uncertainty about the vote.

**Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): When the Government's deal is voted down in this place, there will be just 73 days until 29 March, so will the Secretary of State tell the House what discussions he, the Prime Minister or their officials have had with the EU about extending article 50?

**Stephen Barclay:** Let me unpick that question. There have been extensive discussions with EU leaders, but not on the issue of extending article 50. The extensive discussions have been about the concerns that the House has expressed about the backstop. The Prime Minister has had conversations with the German Chancellor Merkel, Prime Minister Rutte, Donald Tusk, President Jean-Claude Juncker, President Macron and of course, as I said in my statement, with the Taoiseach. There have been extensive discussions with European leaders, but they have been about getting assurances in line with the House's concerns.

**Carol Monaghan** (Glasgow North West) (SNP): A broken economy is an opportunity for those with money and connections to exploit, to their own advantage. Will the Secretary of State tell us how many more furtive contracts, such as the one with Seaborne Freight, we should expect over the next 81 days?

**Stephen Barclay:** It is not a broken economy that is putting £20.5 billion a year extra into the NHS and investing in a long-term plan. It is not a broken economy that is seeing the lowest unemployment rate for more than 40 years. That is a sign of the Government's having taken the difficult decisions on the economy. We now have an industrial strategy that is ensuring that we start to drive the productivity that the economy needs.

**Thangam Debbonaire** (Bristol West) (Lab): The Secretary of State has repeatedly asked the House to say what it wants. I think the House has said many times lots of different versions of what it wants, but I shall give him an example he can toy with: why will the Government not give us a vote on staying in the customs union?

**Stephen Barclay:** I am pleased that the hon. Lady is clear about what she wants, but the point I was making was about what would find consensus in the House. It is easy for the House to talk about and unite behind positions that it is against, but the point I was making was about the extent to which there are positions that the House will unite behind—

**Dan Carden** (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): A customs union. It is Labour policy.

**Stephen Barclay:** It is always nice to know what the Labour policy is, because it keeps changing. One minute Labour cannot stop Brexit, and the next minute it can. *[Interruption.]* I was just answering the heckle from the Labour Front Bencher, but I shall come back to the hon. Lady's question—*[Interruption.]* If her colleagues will stop heckling, I will happily come back to her question. She asked about the customs union. The fact is that we want to have an international trade policy. We cannot have it both ways. We cannot say that we will be part of a customs union yet at the same time expect the EU Commission to give us unilateral control of our trade policy.

**Peter Grant** (Glenrothes) (SNP): The Prime Minister changed her policy on whether we should leave the European Union. She changed her policy on no deal being better than a bad deal. She changed her policy on this being the best possible deal when she went off to try to get a better one. Is the Secretary of State here instead of the Prime Minister because the Prime Minister has finally realised what we all realised a long time ago, which is that she has lost the plot, that she is no longer in control of these negotiations and that she should be packing her bags and going?

**Stephen Barclay:** The reality is that the Prime Minister was committed to respecting the referendum result, and that is what she has done. She set out a manifesto commitment to honour the referendum result, and that is what she has done. She has been consistent in both.

**Mr Paul Sweeney** (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): As a birthday present next week, I am looking forward to voting down this terrible deal, which will lead the country into a much worse position than it is in currently. Will the Minister confirm that it is not the case that, by default, this country will then drop out under a no-deal situation? It is in the gift of the Government to use their powers to withdraw article 50. Will he confirm that it will be at the Government's discretion to allow a no-deal Brexit to happen?

**Stephen Barclay:** Well, the hon. Gentleman cannot have it both ways. He cannot, on the one hand, say that he is voting against the deal and then, on the other, pray against the uncertainty that will result from voting against it. We have already covered this point on a number of occasions: the UK Government cannot unilaterally extend article 50. That requires the consent of the other 27 member states. Even if they wanted to grant such consent, there are practical issues to consider, as I have set out, such as the timing of the European parliamentary elections. Let me be very clear: it is not the Government's policy to extend or to revoke article 50. I thought, as I am sure many other Members did, that that was also Labour's policy—I am sure many Labour voters also thought so, based on its manifesto. He needs to be clear, if he is voting against the deal: is he, or is he not, going back on the manifesto on which he stood?

**Mr Clive Betts** (Sheffield South East) (Lab): Before Christmas, this House had a great deal of problems getting hold of a copy of the Attorney General's advice. If there is now to be any change to the deal itself, or to the agreed explanatory wording that sits alongside the deal, may I suggest to the Secretary of State that the Government would run the risk of once again being held in contempt if they withheld any changes in the Attorney General's advice? Will the Secretary of State avoid the Government once again being held in contempt by giving an assurance to the House here and now that, if there is any change to the advice, that change will be given to the House, or that confirmation will be given that the advice has not changed at all?

**Stephen Barclay:** It will not surprise the hon. Gentleman to hear that no Minister wants to be found in contempt of the House. Obviously, any possibility of our being

found in such contempt will be taken extremely seriously, and the Government would look at that and respond accordingly.

**Lucy Powell** (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op): I am pleased that the Secretary of State has read the proposal that I and the right hon. Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon) put forward for a Common Market 2.0. Given that plan A is all but doomed now, and that the Secretary of State says he wants to know what the House is for, will he ensure that, after the vote next week, he and his team bring forward to the House a series of votes on plan B, including our proposal for a Common Market 2.0, so that he can have a very clear view of what the House is for?

**Stephen Barclay:** I respect the work that the hon. Lady has done and the seriousness with which she and my right hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon) have looked at this issue and tried to engage with it in a material way. I have set out my concerns with the substance of their proposal, but that does not negate the work that has been done.

On whether there will be indicative votes, the reality is that, if the deal does not go ahead, we will be in uncharted water and we as a Government will need to look at that. None the less, it is our policy to win the vote. That is what the entire Government are focused on, and we will continue to make that case to colleagues from all parts of the House.

**Chris Stephens** (Glasgow South West) (SNP): A guid new year tae yin and a', and mony may ye see!

Will the Secretary of State confirm that the emergency services contract, and any other contracts to deal with a no-deal Brexit, will not be part of the EU procurement process or under EU procurement rules? What does he believe it means when the UK Government can produce worse procurement than the European Union?

**Stephen Barclay:** I am not sighted on emergency services contracts, but I am happy to have a discussion with the hon. Gentleman about any specific concern he has about procurement. As hon. Members know, I share the desire of many others for value for money and ensuring that we procure effectively.

**Meg Hillier** (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State has repeatedly told us that the Government have been preparing for no deal, yet it was under legislation that allows for the awarding of contracts outside the normal rules that the Department for Transport spent nearly £14 million on a ferry company with no ferries. We have also seen the issues around Operation Brock in Kent. Given that his Department's job is to assure itself and Parliament that the Government are prepared for Brexit, what does he say about the Department for Transport? Is it really up to the job?

**Stephen Barclay:** I know that the hon. Lady looks at these issues in detail through her chairmanship of the Public Accounts Committee, and I suspect that she will be looking at those contracts in due course. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport has answered a series of questions on this matter over the festive break to address the concerns to which the hon.



Lady refers. The reality is that a responsible Government need to put in place contingency arrangements and ensure that we have additional capacity at our borders. That is the responsible thing to do. The individual mechanics are issues that I am sure the hon. Lady will explore through her Committee.

**Ian Murray** (Edinburgh South) (Lab): It is nearly a month since the Government pulled the original meaningful vote, so can the Secretary of State tell the House and the country what percentage of the EU withdrawal agreement or the political declaration will have changed by the time we recommence that debate on Wednesday?

**Stephen Barclay:** With respect, it is a fairly specious argument to look at the percentage, because surely it is about the quality of the change, rather than counting words in the texts; it is not about going through the texts and asking what percentage has changed. The Prime Minister has been very clear that she is seeking further legal and political assurances. We have already covered the fact that we will explore these points in the coming days, and I look forward to having further debates with the hon. Gentleman on the matter.

**Joanna Cherry:** Today's written statement from the Transport Secretary on the Government's no-deal Brexit contract with the self-styled ferry operator Seaborne Freight says that the

"negotiated procurement procedure without prior publication was concluded as allowed for by Regulation 32 of The Public Contracts Regulations".

I have been studying those regulations fairly closely, and they seem to envisage an emergency situation brought about by events unforeseeable by the contracting authority. It seems to me that it has been foreseeable by the Government and everyone in this country for some time that there might be a no-deal situation, so will the Government publish the legal advice that enabled them to proceed under regulation 32? If so, when can we expect to see it?

**Stephen Barclay:** I respect the hon. and learned Lady's point, but the reality is that she is critical of the Government when we do not prepare for no deal and then she is critical of the Government when we do prepare for no deal. The responsible thing for a Government to do is to ensure that we have additional capacity. Given the short timescales, it was necessary to follow a specific procurement route, as the Transport Secretary has set out.

**Paula Sherriff** (Dewsbury) (Lab): The Secretary of State has alluded to various contingency arrangements that his Government are making in the event of no deal. Further to the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier), will he tell us exactly why a ferry company that does not own any ships and that appears to have some very spurious terms and conditions on its website has been awarded a contract worth over £13 million? Can we assume that the same level of due diligence will be completed if any further contracts are issued?

**Stephen Barclay:** The reason is quite straightforward—that, against a finite deadline for when we leave the European Union, we need to put in place contingency plans. We were hoping to have secured the deal, which would have meant that we would not have needed the

no-deal contingency arrangements, but given the level of uncertainty those arrangements have been necessary. Preparing for all eventualities is the responsible thing for a Government to do.

**Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): My constituent Joanna Adams from Strathbungo emailed me yesterday deeply concerned about this whole situation, saying:

"I can't believe with only a couple of months to go we still don't know what's happening. To have the options of the PM's terrible deal or a no deal seems incomprehensible to me."

It is incomprehensible to most of us, including 880 people who emailed me from the "Exit Brexit" website. The reality is that there are 81 days before we have to get out of the EU—we are running out of time. Is it not the case that running out of time is inevitable and extending article 50 is essential?

**Stephen Barclay:** I respect the 800-odd people who emailed the hon. Lady on this, but the reality is that 17.4 million voted in the referendum, and it is on their mandate that this Government are acting. Unlike some Members of the House, I do not think that no deal is a no-risk option and I am not supremely relaxed about it—I think there are risks to no deal. We are planning and preparing to mitigate those risks. The reality is that the best way to avoid the uncertainty and mitigate the risks of no deal is to vote for the Prime Minister's deal.

**Richard Burden** (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab): May I put it to the Secretary of State that for a company that has no idea how long the delays due to a no-deal Brexit will be to trucks vital for its export and import business, it is not a lot of comfort to be told that the Government have issued a multi-million-pound contract to a ferry company with no ships, or to be told that it will have an airport to park its trucks in when they cannot get where they are meant to go? Will he not recognise that the growing demand from business and from Members of this House is that a no-deal scenario is not possible—that it has to be not mitigated but avoided and rejected? There are different ways of doing that, some multilateral and some unilateral, but why will he not join that growing chorus and say that he rules out no deal because that is in the interests of this country?

**Stephen Barclay:** The hon. Gentleman really goes to the heart of the issue, which is that I am seeking to rule out no deal by backing the Prime Minister's deal, but the difference is that he is not. He stands on a manifesto that says he will honour the referendum result, then says that he does not want to support the Prime Minister's deal, but then wants to complain about the consequences of no deal. I agree with him that there will be disruption from no deal; that is why he should be supporting the Prime Minister's deal.

**Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): The Secretary of State will be aware that as things stand with the proposed withdrawal agreement, there is no legal guarantee that means that the common fisheries policy will end in December 2020. There is no legal separation of fishing negotiations from general trade negotiations, but if the backstop is invoked, tariffs will, by law, apply to Scottish exports but not Northern Ireland exports. Does he therefore agree that any Scottish Tory voting for this so-called deal does so in the knowledge that those are the facts that platitudes will not change?

**Stephen Barclay:** I think that we really have a misrepresentation of the reality of what the political declaration says. The political declaration is absolutely clear that we will be taking control of our coastal waters. We will be in a position to negotiate in the same way as other states such as Iceland. The real betrayal is the hon. Gentleman's party wanting to sell out Scottish fishermen by selling off the policy back into the EU.

**Patricia Gibson** (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): Since article 50 was triggered two years ago, a full nine months after the EU referendum result, we have seen staggering incompetence from the Tory Government, and dangerous and deliberate constructive ambiguity from the main Opposition party, on the biggest issue facing the UK since the second world war. Regardless of how people voted in the EU referendum, does the Secretary of State think that this shambolic spectacle has enhanced or diminished faith in politics?

**Stephen Barclay:** I think that what we have seen is the Prime Minister working day and night in the national interest to fight for a deal for the entire United Kingdom, securing through a two-year negotiation a withdrawal agreement that allows us, after 40-odd years, to wind down our deeply ingrained relationship with the EU. The political declaration allows us to set a course for a future relationship that respects our trading relationship with our largest trading partner but also allows an independent trade policy with the rest of the world and gives us control of our immigration system and our fishing and agriculture. I think that corresponds to the work that the Prime Minister has put in.

**Neil Gray** (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): It seems that very little has changed in the month since the meaningful vote was postponed in either the legal changes secured from the EU or the opinion of this House. Given that it seems inevitable that the Government will lose the meaningful vote next week, what is the Secretary of State's plan B?

**Stephen Barclay:** We have already covered that on a number of occasions. It is the Government's intention to win that vote, and that is what all Ministers are focused on.

## Points of Order

4.55 pm

**Nick Boles** (Grantham and Stamford) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

**Mr Speaker:** Exceptionally, I will take the hon. Gentleman's point of order now because it relates to Brexit protests, and therefore there seems an apposite quality about hearing what he has to say at this point.

**Nick Boles:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. If this place stands for anything, it is freedom of expression, and you are the greatest defender of that freedom, but that freedom must be accompanied by personal safety, in particular for right hon. and hon. Members. We have heard reports from the hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty) of the threatening behaviour of certain protesters towards my right hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry). Will you consult the Serjeant at Arms to see whether the Metropolitan police are doing everything they can to protect the public's right to protest but also to ensure that Members are able to go about their business in total safety?

**Mr Speaker:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his point of order, with which I entirely identify. I am happy to take other colleagues' points of order in due course, but there is nothing that the hon. Gentleman has said to which I object in any way. I share both the sentiment he has expressed and his strength of feeling on behalf of colleagues about this matter. Naturally, I am grateful to him for giving me advance notice of his point of order.

I have indeed been made aware of recent incidents involving aggressive and threatening behaviour towards Members and others by assorted protesters who have donned the yellow vests used in France. When I refer to "recent incidents", I am more specifically referring to reports I have had of incidents that have taken place today, in all likelihood when many of us, myself included, have been in this Chamber. The House authorities are not technically responsible for the safety of Members off the estate—that is and remains a matter for the Metropolitan police—but naturally, I take this issue very seriously and so, I am sure, do the police, who have been made well aware of our concerns.

Reflecting and reinforcing what the hon. Gentleman said about peaceful protest, let me say this. Peaceful protest is a vital democratic freedom, but so is the right of elected Members to go about their business without being threatened or abused, and that includes access to and from the media stands in Abingdon Green. I say no more than that I am concerned at this stage about what seems to be a pattern of protests targeted in particular—I do not say exclusively—at women. Female Members and, I am advised, in a number of cases, female journalists, have been subjected to aggressive protest and what many would regard as harassment.

I assure the House that I am keeping a close eye on events and will speak to those who advise me about these matters. I would like to thank the hon. Gentleman for doing a public service in raising the issue. I do not want to dwell on it for long, because we have other important business to which we must proceed, but if colleagues with relevant experiences want to come in at this point, they can.

**Mr Pat McFadden** (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. I am grateful to you for the statement that you have just made. I was at Abingdon Green earlier this afternoon and witnessed what happened. A completely unacceptable level of abuse was directed at the right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry) and at the Sky News journalist Kay Burley. I completely agree with the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Nick Boles) that peaceful protest in the vicinity of Parliament is a hugely important and valuable part of our democratic traditions, but intimidation and abuse are not peaceful protest. I therefore ask you to use your good offices to do everything possible to ensure that journalists and broadcasters can do their job and that Members of this House are free to speak their minds.

**Mr Speaker:** I happily give the right hon. Gentleman that undertaking.

**Mary Creagh** (Wakefield) (Lab): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. This is not the first such incident that has taken place. There was an incident shortly before Christmas, after which a number of us wrote to the Chairman of Ways and Means. As a result, police officers are now stationed outside the Abingdon Green area, but they are not necessarily on the way in and out, which I think is where the latest incident took place. People do have the right to protest freely, but they also have a responsibility to conduct themselves appropriately. What we have seen once again, most regrettably directed at the right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry), has been really vile and misogynistic thuggery, abuse and harassment.

We in this place remember that our friend Jo Cox was murdered by a far-right neo-Nazi in 2016, that people have gone to prison for plotting to murder another Labour MP, and that many people have been jailed for the abuse that they have directed at other colleagues. As you have said, Mr Speaker, this abuse seems to be directed specifically at women and has a strong streak of misogyny, and it is now being streamed on Facebook Live in order to raise revenue for these far-right people so that they can fund their trolling activities online and in the real world. I therefore also ask that you write to Twitter and Facebook so that these individual sites, wherever they pop up and under whoever's name they appear, can be shut down and these individuals do not profit from filming their abuse of MPs, who are rightly speaking out on the important national issues of the day. I offer all solidarity with the right hon. Member for Broxtowe.

**Mr Speaker:** The last point that the hon. Lady raised—on live streaming—is new to me; I have heard it from her now for the first time. I will carefully reflect on it. I am perfectly open to taking the course of action that she has recommended, but I hope that she will forgive me if I say that I will want to consult on the best way to proceed. But I have no hesitation in saying that I share 100% the concerns that have been expressed, and it is necessary to state very publicly the difference between peaceful protest on the one hand and aggressive, intimidatory and threatening protest on the other. The idea that one cannot make a distinction between the two is not right; it is not always straightforward, but it can be made, and it must be.

## Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe

5.3 pm

**Tulip Siddiq** (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the case of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe following punitive actions taken against her in Iran.

**The Minister for the Middle East (Alistair Burt):** I thank the hon. Lady for raising her question.

The House will appreciate that, in dealing with Mrs Zaghari-Ratcliffe, a detained person in Iran, some matters are confidential, so I hope the House will appreciate that I may be sparing in some of my responses.

The treatment of all British-Iranians detained in Iran, including Mrs Zaghari-Ratcliffe, is a priority for the UK Government. We are committed to doing everything we can for each of them, and I have met Mrs Zaghari-Ratcliffe's family a number of times, as has the Foreign Secretary. We have repeatedly asked the Iranians to release Mrs Zaghari-Ratcliffe on humanitarian grounds, and I do so again today.

During his recent visit to Tehran, the Foreign Secretary raised Mrs Zaghari-Ratcliffe's case and those of our other dual nationals detained in Iran. The welfare of British nationals in detention is a priority for us, and we are also seeking clarification from the Iranian authorities about how they propose to deal with any reported hunger strike situation if it progresses. We have made it clear that Mrs Zaghari-Ratcliffe must be treated humanely and in line with international standards, and we are urgently seeking clarification of reports that her calls to her family in the UK are being restricted.

**Tulip Siddiq:** Most hon. Members will be aware of my constituent, Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, who has now been imprisoned in Iran for nearly three years, separated from her family, her husband and her daughter. She was on holiday in Tehran visiting her parents with her young daughter when she was imprisoned. The United Nations has declared her imprisonment to be illegal and arbitrary, yet her treatment in Iran has become considerably worse in the past two weeks.

In the past two weeks, Nazanin's ration of food has been slowly decreased. She has been told that the phone calls she is allowed to make to her family and husband in London are now restricted and will be further restricted. She has also been told that she will be denied medical access, even though she has discovered lumps on her breasts. In the light of this, Nazanin has said that she will go on hunger strike from next week. I would therefore like to ask the Minister a few questions.

First, do the Government believe the ill treatment and imprisonment of a British citizen to be worthy of more than just tough rhetoric? Namely, at what point will the treatment of Nazanin and other British nationals detained in Iran warrant a diplomatic summons for the Iranian ambassador?

Secondly, does the Minister believe that the Government have used all diplomatic means at their disposal to protect Nazanin's welfare? If so, have the Government formally requested a private meeting with Nazanin in prison?



[*Tulip Siddiq*]

Thirdly, in the wake of the specific recent abuses, will the Foreign Secretary finally make a decision on whether to grant Nazanin diplomatic protection, for which we have been asking for a long time?

Finally, the UN Security Council is mandated to safeguard international peace and security. Does the Foreign Secretary agree that Iran's practice of detaining British nationals has become sufficiently widespread that it now constitutes a crime worth discussing at the Security Council meeting in April? If so, will he sponsor a meeting and do just that?

I think the Minister and the Foreign Secretary are determined to solve this case, and I believe their resolve is genuine. From my conversations with them, I have found them to be very insistent on demanding that Nazanin is released, but the truth is that this is now a matter of life and death. Tough rhetoric will not do anything. What we need is decisive action from our Government to make sure that my constituent, Nazanin, comes home alive to West Hampstead. What action will the Minister take to save this woman's life?

**Alistair Burt:** Again, I am grateful to the hon. Lady for what she has said and the way in which she has said it. A number of things that she has raised on behalf of her constituent must remain hers, as she puts her case for her, and I am sure those words will have been heard very carefully not only in this House but in Tehran. Let me respond to some of the issues that she has raised.

The circumstances of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe's detention are well known. I have met the family a number of times, and I have met the little girl in Tehran. On humanitarian grounds, we have consistently pressed Iran to recognise that reuniting a mother with her child in these circumstances must be absolutely paramount.

In addition, we note that Iran does not of course recognise dual nationality. That is why it has not been possible to have this case treated as a normal consular case in which we would expect access. It is not treated in that way by Iran. We have noticed that if she is to be treated as an Iranian national, as those in Iran wish, she is now at a stage where she should be eligible for parole. We hope and believe that that might be the course of action taken—again, I stress on humanitarian grounds.

Without commenting on all the matters raised by the hon. Lady, we consider action in terms of what we think is in the best interests of any particular dual national. There are one or two others in Iran, and there are others around the world, and each individual action that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office takes is judged by us to be in their best interests. There is no standard template, because all circumstances are different.

There is constant communication between the FCO and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I think the House is aware of the number of times the Foreign Secretary has raised the matter. I have also raised it through personal contact in Tehran, and it is raised regularly through the embassy there as well. The request for diplomatic protection is still being considered in relation to whether it would add anything to the circumstances. As I say, the request for a meeting has been made, but it is not possible because of the attitude towards dual nationals.

As the Foreign Secretary has stated, we remain of the view that Iran is a state looking for recognition around the world—it is a state with a strong and proud history—and we feel that this case might be handled in a different way. I know that that view has been expressed many times in the House before, but we will continue to raise the case, and to do so in the way that we think is in Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe's best interests. I note everything the hon. Lady has to say. The matter is always—always—under consideration.

**Mrs Pauline Latham** (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): The hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (*Tulip Siddiq*) is assiduous in bringing this case before the House, and Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe's husband continues to bring it before the public. I know the Secretary of State has worked very hard to do what he can, and he has certainly been raising it over the festive period. However, Nazanin is now in a much more dangerous situation, and I would like to know what more can be done beyond keeping this case in the public eye. What more practically can be done?

**Alistair Burt:** It is very good to see my hon. Friend in her place.

This is not simply a question of keeping the case in the public eye, which, understandably, Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe's husband has sought to do, as have other colleagues. It is very much about the communication that goes on more on diplomatic channels, and that is constant. I can assure my hon. Friend that the case is raised on every possible occasion, as with other dual nationals, and we will continue to do so. Her access to medical care at present, bearing in mind her condition, is a matter of supreme importance to the United Kingdom. We would hope, on purely compassionate grounds, that medical access, which has been assured in the past, will continue.

**Emily Thornberry** (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for granting this urgent question. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (*Tulip Siddiq*) on securing it, and I thank her on behalf of the whole House for her tireless campaigning to bring Nazanin home.

I can only echo what my hon. Friend has said regarding the latest terrible turn of events: the denial of medical treatment to Nazanin and Narges Mohammadi, with their announcement of a planned hunger strike in protest; and the cruel, vengeful response of the Iranian authorities in stopping Nazanin's weekly phone calls with her husband, Richard, and in cutting food rations. This would be inhuman treatment of any prisoner, but to pile this torment on an innocent woman, whose mental and physical health is already suffering, is nothing but barbaric. I join my hon. Friend in calling on the Iranian authorities not just to restore Nazanin's basic rights, but to restore her freedom without any further delay.

We must remember that, as we know, the Iranians face a twin threat this year from crippling US sanctions, affecting their trade and investment prospects worldwide, and from dangerous military escalation, as the US, Israel and Saudi Arabia gear up for a more direct conflict. Those of us who look at those dual prospects with horror, and despair that the path of progress of progress and peace that the Iran nuclear deal opened up is growing increasingly narrow, know that Iran will need

us to fight on its behalf to preserve that deal, preserve trade and stop the descent into war. However, Tehran needs to hear this: every day that Nazanin's inhumane treatment continues and every time we see fresh human rights abuses in Iran, it makes it more and more difficult to summon the stomach for that fight.

Does the Minister of State agree with me that when the Foreign Office says Iran is holding Nazanin for diplomatic advantage, Tehran needs to realise that in fact the opposite is true? Every day it continues her unjust detention, it is simply digging its own diplomatic grave.

**Alistair Burt:** I am extremely grateful for the way in which the shadow Foreign Secretary puts the case. She is right to say that in Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe's situation, access to medical treatment as requested is absolutely essential. The United Kingdom will continue to make that point very clearly. Indeed, the work through the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tehran to try to clarify the situation on calls is continuing with urgency.

On the wider issues that the right hon. Lady mentions, she makes a very fair point which we have stressed in our contact with Iran. We have sought to understand Iran's concerns about the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, an agreement which it signed and which we abide by. We do indeed seek to make a case to others about the importance of abiding by agreements and international norms. It is not easy in this context, but it is made that bit more difficult if we see a situation where there is an obvious humanitarian response, quite outside any other considerations. People would notice and no doubt approve if there was a swift return of Nazanin to her daughter. I can only hope that those remarks are well noted. The United Kingdom will continue to press along the same lines.

**Tom Tugendhat** (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): This is an extremely important and sensitive issue that has been running on for far too long. I pay tribute to Ms Zaghari-Ratcliffe's representation in this House, which has been conducted with huge capability for many, many months—far too long, as the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) and I agree. I also pay tribute to the Minister for his work with his Iranian opposite numbers. May I urge him also to work with our European partners and others around the world? Over many years, we have seen Iran take hostages from many countries, not just the United Kingdom, and hold them for the extraction of influence or ransom. This is not a new action by the Iranian Government. Although this particular case is more egregious than most, it is not just us who suffer. Could the Minister perhaps organise, with United Nations partners, a debated motion through the Security Council, which would expose some of the evil done by this evil regime?

**Alistair Burt:** I am grateful for my hon. Friend's comments and contributions as Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee. I can only repeat that we will continue to do what we can in the best interests of any detained national. We recognise the wider issues he raises. We will continue to handle the matter on a humanitarian basis, but his wider point is not ignored.

**Stephen Gethins** (North East Fife) (SNP): May I first of all, like the Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee, pay tribute to the hon. Member for Hampstead and

Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) for her continued efforts and for securing this urgent question today? I thank the officials who continue to work on this case and groups such as Amnesty International, which continue to work hard to keep it in the public eye. We also need to pay tribute to Nazanin's family for the courage they have shown, not least over the past few weeks.

We condemn, absolutely wholeheartedly, the actions of the Iranian regime not only in this case, but in the cases, as others have pointed out, of other nationals who have been taken. This will have a deep impact on how it is portrayed across the international community. More importantly, we all must remember the human impact of depriving Nazanin's family and small child of a wife and a mother. Nazanin has now spent more than 1,000 days in prison. Her freedom must be restored.

I know there were particular concerns about Nazanin's health. What discussions has the Minister had about medical assistance that might be brought to her? As others have asked, what further action can be taken, either at the Security Council or with our European Union partners, who have similar concerns about the actions of the Iranian regime?

**Alistair Burt:** Certainly, we very much echo the appreciation that the hon. Gentleman expresses for Nazanin's husband and family for the way they have tried to deal with these very difficult circumstances over a long period, and for the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn for the way she raises them.

With the understanding of the House, I will not go into detail about the medical treatment or assistance sought—I am not sure that would be appropriate—but, in the circumstances we have been made aware of, we are doing what is appropriate in that regard. We stress the humanitarian aspect of the case and the fact that if Nazanin, who is a dual national, were treated as an Iranian national, there would now be an appropriate opportunity under the Iranian legal system to take account of the circumstances and reunite this family, as is so desperately needed.

**Priti Patel** (Witham) (Con): The astounding inhumanity displayed by the Iranian regime continues to horrify many people around the world, including all Members of this House. In the light of how traumatic this case is for the family of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, will my right hon. Friend say what ongoing support is being provided to them at this incredibly difficult time?

**Alistair Burt:** My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has been in contact with the family some 11 times since August, and I believe further contact is imminent. That support is offered here; I think Richard Ratcliffe is aware that he can have contact with the Department at any time. Our officials—I am grateful for Members' recognition of their work—are also in contact with the family. I will not go into too much detail in relation to Tehran, but the family there have also been seen and have contact. I have met them a couple of times. Their circumstances are quite remarkable, and they are doing everything they can to understand the system and to try to ensure that what they do is in the best interests of Nazanin.

**Ann Clwyd** (Cynon Valley) (Lab): I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) for the fight she has put up for her

[Ann Chwyd]

constituent. I, too, have met the family several times. I have had a good relationship with Iranian officials in the past. I chair a committee of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, and the last time I met Iranian MPs, when I raised the case of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, they said to me, “We promise that if you come to Iran, you can visit her in prison.” Obviously, I have not rushed to do so, but that offer was made and I am willing to go if circumstances permit. However, our immediate concern must be her own safety and health. We are all very concerned about that.

I pay tribute also to the Foreign Office, latterly, for the efforts it has made on Nazanin’s behalf. However, the Secretary of State said on the “Today” programme:

“Nazanin isn’t the only person who is being detained, despite being totally innocent, as a pawn of diplomatic leverage.”

What did he mean by that? Are press reports that our Government owe the Iranian Government money true? If it is a matter of money, why do we not pay?

**Alistair Burt:** I thank the right hon. Lady. I know her work with the IPU and her compassion in this case. Let me disentangle a couple of things. I am grateful for what she has said about a potential meeting. I am not sure necessarily that the parliamentarians she met had the authority to make such an offer—it has not proved possible for us to see Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe up to now—but I appreciate the good faith in which it was made. Any such contact, through any contacts and friends she may have in the Iranian Parliament, has to be helpful, as I think many people see the circumstances in the same way. The issue of an outstanding financial payment is entirely separate—it goes back many years and is being handled through a completely different channel—and there is no linkage between the two that is accepted either by the UK Government or the Iranian Government. It is a matter that is well known to us.

**James Duddridge** (Rochford and Southend East) (Con): The Foreign and Commonwealth Office does an amazing job with about 20,000 foreign national consular cases every year—to put that into context, that is about 30 per Member of Parliament per year. Notwithstanding the complexity of this case and of dealing with Iran, this does highlight some fundamental issues around how we treat dual nationals. Is it not time to review the policy on dual nationals and the advice we give them when they are travelling to their other country?

**Alistair Burt:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who knows the situation extremely well from his own diligent work in the Department some years ago. Travel advice recognises the situation of dual nationals and gives appropriate advice when necessary. On Iran, there is specific advice about the situation of dual nationals, and, where they might be at particular risk, that is made very clear. On whether there is a case over time for considering this on a wider international basis, there may be a call for that. I understand the point he makes very clearly.

**Jo Swinson** (East Dunbartonshire) (LD): The case of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe is heartbreaking: the separation of a mother from her young child and now this dreadful escalation in the reduction of food rations and the denial of medical treatment. Sadly, Iran has form when

it comes to the cruel practice of preventing medical attention. In 2017, one political prisoner died and another lost part of his face because of untreated cancers. What discussions has the Minister had with his counterparts in other countries, including those with slightly warmer relations with Iran, about how we can present a united front in raising this case and others like it?

**Alistair Burt:** I am grateful to the hon. Lady, who makes her own points very strongly. I have touched on this matter with one or two neighbours in the general context of perceptions of Iran, but each case is separate and individual. We do what we can in the best interests of all our dual nationals. Some are known and some are unknown to the general public. We always have to bear that in mind.

**Mr Philip Dunne** (Ludlow) (Con): In the light of the role played by British diplomats, and my right hon. Friend and his colleagues in the Foreign Office, in engaging with the Iranians successfully before Christmas to persuade them to persuade the Houthis to go to the Stockholm peace talks on Yemen, while not conflating that issue with this, may I ask whether there are any pointers from that recent diplomatic engagement with Iran that could help to bring some satisfaction in this case?

**Alistair Burt:** I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the recent announcement and thank him for his question. Iran is a complex country. The way in which there was indeed help and assistance at a vital stage to ensure that the talks in Stockholm went ahead was an example of what Iran can do to move its position as far as many outside Iran are concerned. As one would expect, in all our dealings with Iran, while never being blind to issues that we consider to be very difficult, in terms of its conduct and what it might be doing, the UK constantly looks for opportunities to change the nature of relationships in a confrontational region. As the shadow Foreign Secretary said, in the region as a whole there is too much confrontation, too many opportunities for conflict and too many situations in which people feel threatened and act in a way that increases that threat rather than decreases it. One would expect the UK to play its part in trying to decrease that threat, and Iran is part of the process whereby those threats might be decreased. We will continue to work on that basis.

**Ian Murray** (Edinburgh South) (Lab): There have been several questions in the House about this case, and the Minister and the Foreign Secretary have talked about it to the Foreign Affairs Committee on a number of occasions. If reports are true, it appears that the situation of this prisoner is deteriorating rather than improving, and that she requires additional support. What has made the situation deteriorate, and what can we do through our partners—either in the P5 at the United Nations, or in the UN General Assembly more broadly—to try to improve the situation, not just for Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe but for all prisoners throughout the world who are held illegally?

**Alistair Burt:** I do not think that it is really possible to answer the hon. Gentleman’s question. It is not always possible to gain access to those who are making the decisions relating to people who are held in detention in a variety of countries, and that is certainly true in this



particular case. I think that the best the United Kingdom can do is make very clear how we see the situation, keep up our constant contact and requests for assistance, and continue to raise the matter as it has been raised here, but we are not always aware of what may have triggered one development or what might trigger a release. All I can say is that, as the House would expect, constant efforts are made to bring about the latter.

**Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): The Iranian regime has employed the taking and tormenting of hostages right from the outset. Surely, at some point, one reaches a stage at which one has to say that sweet reason and appeals to compassion are not working and severe sanctions must be considered. What sanctions are at our disposal, and what consideration has been given to imposing them?

**Alistair Burt**: Sanctions are in place in relation to a number of figures in Iran—the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps in its entirety, and others—on human rights grounds. That course of action has already been taken by the United Kingdom.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) on bringing this matter to the House and giving us a chance to participate. I also thank the Minister for his endeavours on behalf of everyone involved, but Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe in particular.

Nazanin had threatened to go on hunger strike. She was then informed that her weekly phone calls to her child and her family would be withdrawn. That is undoubtedly the final straw, which demands that we do more to help her. Does the Minister not agree that it is the latest low blow against this British mother, and is completely unacceptable?

What more can be done to help Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe? Can the UN help, for instance, or could other countries with which we have contact use their influence?

**Alistair Burt**: No one understands compassion better than the hon. Gentleman, who articulates it so clearly in the House on so many occasions.

We still think it best to handle this issue in a bilateral way, which is how we deal with a number of dual nationality cases. We do have contact with the system in Iran, and we are continuing to pursue that. We are very disappointed by the present circumstances, and we are deeply concerned about the humanitarian aspects—both Nazanin's separation from her child and the current restrictions on medical care, which must be lifted as soon as possible. We will continue to press for that, using all our contacts bilaterally.

**Bob Stewart** (Beckenham) (Con): My right hon. Friend has implied that we may not be speaking to the people who make the decisions on Nazanin. Is he suggesting that other power brokers, such as the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, may well be the decision makers, and have we any contacts with them?

**Alistair Burt**: The authority structure in Iran is complex, as any study of it will show. I am absolutely certain that the messages that the British Government send, and our work through the Foreign and Commonwealth Office

and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tehran, get through to people, but it is not always possible for us to have contact with every part of that complex power system.

**Steve McCabe** (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): Is Iran not a signatory to the international covenant on economic, social and cultural rights, and is it not in breach of that covenant by denying Nazanin access to medical treatment? Are states like Iran free to disregard treaties and covenants as they see fit, or should there be consequences?

**Alistair Burt**: The hon. Gentleman asks me a question to which I do not know the answer, but the point he makes is fair. The adherence to international agreements is very important, and they should stay in place. The Iranians point this out in relation to JCPOA—the joint comprehensive plan of action—of course on their own part. Whatever the signing of agreements may be, the circumstances of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe stand on their own account, and that is why we press for the humanitarian reunification of a mother with her child and the granting of freedom to this lady.

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the actions he and his colleagues are taking on this terrible case, but will he elucidate the following issue? The case of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe is very much in the public eye, and so it should be, but there are other British nationals or dual nationals imprisoned in Iran. Is she being treated any differently from those other individuals, and if those individuals are being discriminated against as well, what action is my right hon. Friend taking to ensure that those cases are looked at so they can be freed too?

**Alistair Burt**: To answer my hon. Friend may I go back to something I said right at the beginning? The very nature of these cases means we are dealing with individuals, some known only to their own families, and the details and circumstances of those cases are rightly and appropriately confidential. Again, the best thing I can say to the House is that, as all colleagues will know from their own dealings with our consular offices—those staff who work both in London and at post—every effort is made to ensure all actions are handled in the best interests of the individual detained. That remains the case, and that is certainly the case for all dual nationals in Iran.

**Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): May I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) for her work for her constituent? I am sure the Minister shares my concerns about dual nationals who find themselves in the situation where the basics of food and access to healthcare are being denied. Surely the Government need to look at this and see what more can be done to help people who find themselves in these situations.

**Alistair Burt**: Whether someone is a dual national or mono-national should make no difference: the humanitarian care of those who have been detained under a system through its own processes should be universal, and in these circumstances the situation of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe calls out for appropriate access to medical care and appropriate and humane treatment, and that is what the United Kingdom demands.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): May I congratulate the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) on tabling this urgent question, you, Mr Speaker, on granting it, and the Minister on his response to it? Will he share with the House his thinking as to why the Iranian regime seems to be willing to use up scarce diplomatic capital and to incur further reputational damage by not only the continued detention of this particular woman but her worsening circumstances?

**Alistair Burt:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend. If I was to offer some thoughts on that they would take us the best part of the next half-hour, because again I go back to the point about the complexities in relation to Iran. This is a 40-year-old regime with different power structures and a concern about a world that it views rather differently from us in terms of the threat it feels is posed to it, and that plays into an equally complex situation in the region, where many see threats against them and take actions that only increase threats, rather than decrease them. It is not possible to offer a snap, cod view of thinking except to say Iran pays proper understanding, but equally, in doing so, there can be no turning away from those areas where we think the conduct of Iran has not been right and has not been correct, and we certainly make that case, as well as seeking, where we can, to understand the position it puts to us and the rest of the world.

**Mr Paul Sweeney** (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): The United Kingdom's primary interaction with the Iranian regime has been through its Prime Minister, but we know that the real powerbroker behind Nazanin's detention has been the supreme leader, Ayatollah Khamenei. What efforts have been made to reach direct interaction and influence with the real powerbroker behind this situation?

**Alistair Burt:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his question. As I indicated before, it is a complex authority structure. I am absolutely confident that our representations go through to the right quarters, even if indirectly. We will continue to seek to do that, but we will look for any new avenues that might be effective.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds** (Torfaen) (Lab): These events have been very traumatic for Nazanin's family, and not least for her sister-in-law, who lives in my constituency. Can the Minister confirm that the ongoing inhuman treatment of Nazanin is doing great damage to Iran's reputation on the international stage, and that that point will be made directly to Iran's supreme leader and to the Iranian Prime Minister?

**Alistair Burt:** The hon. Gentleman makes his own point very well. Anyone looking at these situations objectively, regardless of the politics of the situation and the complexities of what is happening in the middle east, will see a mother and her child and wonder how on earth this can be going on, particularly in a situation where, under Iranian law and recognising Iran's role and its legal system, there is an opportunity to take a course of action that could change this perception of Iran. That is something that we hope might now strike Iran.

**Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): I thank the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) for her diligence in bringing her constituent's case to the

House again. I would like to pass on the solidarity of my constituents who have been in touch with me to Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe and her family; they often share their concerns. I know that the Minister will be aware of the situation in Iran, so may I ask him to speak to his colleagues in the Home Office? I have many Iranian constituents who are seeking some form of leave to be in the United Kingdom and they often find that it is very much delayed. Given the significance of the FCO's advice to people travelling to Iran, will he ensure that his colleagues in the Home Office are aware of this and take it into account in their decision making?

**Alistair Burt:** I am grateful to the hon. Lady and her constituents, and indeed to the constituents of the many hon. Members who have written to their MPs and, through them, to me about the circumstances of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe to ensure that she is never forgotten by anyone. I will certainly bring the hon. Lady's points about the Home Office directly to my colleagues.

**Martin Docherty-Hughes** (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): I congratulate the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) on gaining this urgent question. I should also like to pass on to the Zaghari-Ratcliffe family my thanks and those of the family of my constituent Jagtar Singh Johal for the support that they have offered his family during his detention in the Republic of India.

The theocracy of Iran cites diplomatic support and consular services, but there is a litany of inconsistency, whether in relation to the Republic of India in relation to Jagtar Singh Johal or to the Islamic Republic of Iran in relation to the Zaghari-Ratcliffe case. In order to get over some of those inconsistencies, will a Minister from the Foreign Office agree to attend the all-party parliamentary group on deaths abroad and consular services and assistance, to listen to the lived experiences of families who are undergoing this situation here in the UK while their family members are being held abroad, whether in Iran or anywhere else? It is that lived experience that will inform best practice in the Ministry.

**Alistair Burt:** On and off, I have been dealing with consular cases in the middle east region since 2010. I have met a number of families in very difficult situations following a variety of crises, as well as those who have been held. In each particular case, we have tried to engage the consular service, which tries to look at each case individually and to apply its sense of what is in the best interests of each individual being held abroad. The contact has to be very good between them and the families, but I know that there is not always agreement about what might be in the person's best interest. My right hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Sir Alan Duncan) is the Minister with responsibility for consular matters within the Department—*[Interruption.]* One of my ministerial colleagues has principal responsibility for all consular matters, and I will certainly ensure that the hon. Gentleman's request is passed on—*[Interruption.]* The Minister responsible is my hon. Friend the Member for West Worcestershire (Harriett Baldwin). We have heard the hon. Gentleman's request, and I am sure that a colleague will attend that APPG meeting if a request comes through.

**Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): I wish to make a brief point of order about the progress of business, if possible.

**Mr Speaker:** Not in relation to the progress of business. We have statements next, and points of order come after statements.

**Kevin Foster:** It is just a brief point.

**Mr Speaker:** No, I have just told the hon. Gentleman what the position is. If he has a point of order, he can raise it after the statements.

## NHS Long-term Plan

5.45 pm

**The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Matt Hancock):** With permission, I would like to make a statement about the NHS long-term plan. The plan sets out how we will guarantee the NHS for the future. It describes how we will use the largest and longest funding settlement in the history of the NHS to strengthen it over the next decade, rising to the challenges of today and seizing the opportunities of the future.

It is worth taking a moment to reflect on the time when the NHS was first proposed from this Dispatch Box, under the Churchill Government in 1944. Even after the perils of war, infant mortality was nearly 10 times what it is now, two thirds of men smoked and life expectancy was just 66. It came 10 years before we knew the structure of DNA and four decades before the first MRI. The NHS has led the world throughout its history, but one constant has been the core principle set out by the Conservatives in that national Government: the NHS should be available to all and free at the point of use according to need, not ability to pay.

As last year's 70th anniversary celebrations proved, the NHS is one of our proudest achievements as a nation. We all have an emotional connection to it—our own family story—and we all owe an enormous debt of gratitude to the people who make the NHS what it is and work so hard, especially during the winter months when the pressures are greatest.

Because we value the NHS so much, the new £20.5 billion funding settlement announced by the Prime Minister in June provides the NHS with funding growth of 3.4% a year in real terms over the next five years. That means that the NHS's budget will increase in cash terms by £33.9 billion, rising from £115 billion this year to £121 billion next year, £127 billion in 2020-21, £133 billion in 2021-22, £140 billion in 2022-23 and then £148 billion in 2023-24.

That rise of £33.9 billion, which is actually over £1 billion more in cash terms than was proposed in June, delivers on our commitment to the NHS and will safeguard the NHS for the long term and help to address today's challenges. The NHS is facing unprecedented levels of demand. Every day, it treats over 1 million people. Compared with 2010, the NHS carried out 2 million more operations and saw 11.5 million more out-patients last year. Despite record demand, performance was better this December than last December. So we will address today's challenges, not least with the £6 billion extra coming on stream in under three months.

As well as addressing current challenges, the NHS long-term plan sets up the NHS to seize the opportunities of the future. At the heart of the plan is the principle that prevention is better than cure. In the future, the NHS will do much more to support people to stay healthy, rather than just treating them when they are ill, so the biggest increase to any part of the NHS—at least £4.5 billion—will go to primary and community care, because GPs are the bedrock of the NHS. That means that patients will have improved access to their GPs and greater flexibility about how they contact them, as well as better use of community pharmacists and better access to physiotherapists. Improving the availability of fast and appropriate care will help communities to keep people out of hospital altogether.



[*Matt Hancock*]

The next principle is that organisations across the NHS, local councils, innovators and the voluntary sector will all work more closely together so that they can focus on what patients need. There will also be a renewed clampdown on waste so that we can ensure that every penny of the extra money goes towards improving services and giving taxpayers the best possible return.

Ultimately, staff—the people who work in the NHS—are at the heart of the NHS. The long-term plan commits to major reforms to improve working conditions for NHS staff, because morale matters. Staff will receive better training and more help with career progression. They will have greater flexibility in their work, be supported by the latest technology that works for them and be helped more with their own mental health and wellbeing. That already happens in the best parts of the NHS, and there has been a huge amount of work to support the people who work in the NHS, but I want to see it happen everywhere. We will bring in better training, mentoring and support to develop better leadership in the NHS at all levels. We will build on the work that is already going on to recruit, train and retain more staff so that we can address critical staff shortages.

The plan published today is the next step in our mission to make the NHS a world-class employer and deliver the workforce it needs. To deliver on the workforce commitments, I have asked Baroness Dido Harding to chair a rapid programme of work, which will engage with staff, employers, professional organisations, trade unions, think-tanks and others to build a workforce implementation plan that puts NHS people at the heart of NHS policy and delivery. Baroness Harding will provide interim recommendations to me by the end of March on how the challenges of supply, culture and leadership can be met. She will make her final recommendations later in the year as part of the broader implementation plan that will be developed at all levels to make the NHS long-term plan a reality.

That is the approach that we will be taking to support the NHS over the next decade, but what does it mean for patients and the wider public? It means patients receiving high-quality care closer to home. It means supporting our growing elderly population to stay healthy and independent for longer. It means more personalised care and more social prescribing. It means empowering people to take greater control of, and responsibility for, their own health through prevention and personal health budgets. It means accessing new digital services to bring the NHS into the 21st century. It means more support for mothers by improving maternity services. It means providing more support for parents and carers in the early years of a child's life so that this country can be the best place in the world in which to be born, in every sense.

We will improve how the NHS cares for children and young people with learning disabilities and autism by ending inappropriate hospitalisation, reducing over-medicalisation and providing high-quality care in the community. The NHS will tackle unacceptable health inequalities by targeting support towards the most vulnerable in areas of high deprivation. To help to make a reality of the goal of parity between mental and physical health, we are going to increase mental health service budgets not by £2 billion, but by £2.3 billion

a year. For the first time ever, we will introduce waiting time targets for community mental health so people get the treatment they need when they need it. We will also expand services for young people to include those up to the age of 25—something that never happened under the previous Labour Government.

The long-term plan focuses on the most common causes of mortality, including cancer, heart disease, stroke and lung disease. The health service will take a more active role in helping people to cut their risk factors by stopping smoking, losing weight and reducing alcohol intake. The NHS will improve the quality and speed of diagnosis and improve treatment and recovery, so that we can help people to live well and manage their conditions. We will upgrade urgent care so people can get the right care more quickly.

All in all, the NHS long-term plan has been drawn up by the NHS—by more than 2,500 doctors, clinicians, staff and patients. It will continue to be shaped and refined by staff and patients as it is implemented, with events and activities across the country to help people to understand what it means for them and their local NHS services. The experts who wrote the plan say that it will lead to the prevention of 150,000 heart attacks, strokes and dementia cases, and to 55,000 more people surviving cancer each year—in all, half a million lives saved over the next 10 years. It is funded by taxpayers, designed by doctors and delivered by this Government.

This is an important moment in the history of the NHS. Our long-term plan will ensure that the NHS continues to be there, free at the point of use, based on clinical need, not ability to pay, but better resourced with more staff, newer technology and new priorities. It will be fit for the future, so that it is always there for us in our hour of need. I am proud to commend this statement to the House.

5.55 pm

**Jonathan Ashworth** (Leicester South) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome the advance copy of the Secretary of State's statement, but may I quickly say at the outset that Churchill's Tory party voted against Labour's NHS 22 times?

We welcome many of the ambitions outlined today by NHS England. We welcome the greater use of genomics in developing care pathways. We welcome the commitment to early cancer diagnosis; after all, it was a Labour policy announced at the general election. We welcome the commitment to new CT and MRI scanners; it is a Labour policy. We welcome the greater focus on child and maternal health, including the expansion of perinatal mental health services; again, it is a Labour policy. We welcome the roll-out of alcohol teams in hospitals, because, yes, it is another Labour policy.

The Secretary of State did not mention this, but we will study carefully the details of any new proposed legislation, because we welcome the recognition that the Health and Social Care Act 2012 has created a wasteful, fragmented mess, hindering the delivery of quality healthcare. Healthcare should never be left to market forces, which is why scrapping the competition regime and scrapping the Act's section 75 procurement regulations, as proposed today by NHS England, are long-standing Labour policies. The Government should be apologising for the Health and Social Care Act. But why stop

halfway? Why not commit to fully ending the purchaser-provider split? Why not commit to democratic accountability when planning care? Why not commit to consigning the whole Lansley Act to the dustbin of history?

What about the other holes in today's announcement? Waiting lists are at 4.3 million, with 540,000 waiting beyond 18 weeks for treatment. A&Es are in crisis, with 618,000 trolley waits and 2.5 million waiting beyond four hours in A&E. So why is there no credible road map today to restoring the statutory standards of care that patients are entitled to, as outlined in the NHS constitution? They were routinely delivered under a Labour Government. Is it not a damning indictment of nearly nine years of desperate underfunding, cuts and failure to recruit the staff we need that those constitutional standards will not be met as part of this 10-year plan?

The Secretary of State boasts of the new budget for the NHS. Will he confirm that once inflation is taken into account, once the pay rise is factored in and once the standard NHS England assumption about activity is applied, there is actually a £1 billion shortfall in the NHS England revenue budget for this coming financial year? When he answers, will he tell the House—I will be listening carefully to what he says—whether he has seen or is aware of any internal analysis from the Department, NHS England or NHS Improvement that confirms that £1 billion shortfall figure?

Can the Secretary of State also confirm that despite his rhetoric about prevention, the public health budget is set to be cut again in the next financial year as part of a wider £1 billion of cuts to broader health spending, and that when those cuts are taken into account, spending will rise not by 3.4%, as he says, but by 2.7%? That will mean deeper cuts again to smoking cessation services, deeper cuts again to drug and alcohol addiction services and deeper cuts again to sexual health services when infections such as gonorrhoea and syphilis are on the rise. By the way, why is HIV/AIDS not even mentioned in the long-term plan? What was the Secretary of State's answer when asked about public health cuts in his weekend interviews? Targeted Facebook advertising. Given that life expectancy is going backwards, health inequalities are widening and infant mortality is increasing, the public health cuts should have been reversed today, not endorsed.

The NHS long-term plan admits that

“the extra costs to the NHS of socioeconomic inequality have been calculated as £4.8 billion a year in greater hospitalisations alone.”

Does that not confirm that, for all the rhetoric on prevention, the reality is that the Government's austerity and cuts are making people sicker and increasing the burden on the NHS? Nowhere have we seen greater austerity than in the deep cuts to social care, but where are the Government's proposals today? They still do not have any.

With respect to social care, surely the Secretary of State agrees that:

“It is not possible to have a plan for one sector without having a plan for the other.”—[*Official Report*, 18 June 2018; Vol. 643, c. 53.]

Those are not my words, but the words of the Foreign Secretary when he stood at the Dispatch Box last June as the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care. I agree with him; it is a shame that the current Secretary of State does not.

By the way, the Foreign Secretary also promised that:

“Alongside the 10-year plan, we will also publish a long-term workforce plan”.—[*Official Report*, 18 June 2018; Vol. 643, c. 52.]

Where is it? The Secretary of State has not done it. We all want to know where the staff are coming from to deliver the ambitions that have been outlined today. We are short of 100,000 staff. We are short of 40,000 nurses. The Secretary of State talks of doing more for mental health services; we are down 5,000 nurses in mental health. He talks of doing more for primary and community care; GP numbers are down by 1,000 and district nursing numbers are down by 50%. Now, the Home Secretary wants to impose a £30,000 salary cap on those coming from abroad to work in our NHS, ruling out nurses, care assistants and paramedics. The Secretary of State should do his job and tell the Home Secretary to put the future sustainability of the NHS first, instead of his Tory leadership ambitions, and ditch that salary cap for the NHS.

There are certainly many welcome ambitions from NHS England today, but the reality is that those ambitions will be hindered by a Government who have no plan to recruit the staff we need, who have no plan for social care and who are pushing forward with deep cuts to public health services. Patients have been let down as the Government have run down the NHS for nearly nine years. We do not need 10 more years of the Tories. The NHS needs a Labour Government.

**Matt Hancock:** Well, I think we discovered from that that Labour has absolutely nothing to say about the future health of the nation. The hon. Gentleman did not even deign to thank the people who work in the NHS for their incredible work. Did we hear any acknowledgement of the million more people who are seen by the NHS, of the record levels of activity going on in the NHS and of the fact that we have more nurses and doctors in the NHS than we had in 2010? He had nothing to say. He talked about the workforce. Chapter 4 of the document is all about the workforce plan. He gives me the impression that, like his leader on Brexit, he has not even read the document he is talking about.

The hon. Gentleman asked about targets and legislation. On legislation, when clinicians make proposals on what legislation needs to change to improve the NHS, we listen. We do not then come forward with further ideological ideas. We listen. So we will listen to what they have said. The clinicians have come forward with legislative proposals and we will listen and study them closely.

On the money that the hon. Gentleman talked about, it was a bit like a broken record. He asked about a £1 billion shortfall in the NHS budget. I will tell him what we are doing with NHS budgets: we are putting them up by £20.5 billion. There is an error in the analysis by the Nuffield Trust, because it does not take into account an improvement in the efficiency of the NHS. Is it true that every year we can improve the way the NHS delivers value for taxpayers' money? Absolutely. We can and we must, because we on the Government Benches care about the NHS and about getting the right amount of money into the NHS, but we also care about making sure that that money is spent wisely. The hon. Gentleman would do well to heed the views of the NHS itself, which says that yes, the NHS is probably the most efficient health service in the world, but there is always more to do.

[*Matt Hancock*]

The hon. Gentleman argued about various budgets. The budgets in the NHS are going up because we care about the future of the NHS. The Labour party called for an increase of 2.2% a year; we are delivering an increase of 3.4% a year. Labour has nothing to say on health, as it has nothing to say on any other area of domestic business. We will make sure that we are the party of the NHS for the long term.

**Mr Kenneth Clarke** (Rushcliffe) (Con): First, I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his paying tribute to the work of the late Sir Henry Willink, who served in Churchill's Conservative Government. I met him once or twice when he became master of a Cambridge college. The Conservatives have shown respect for the NHS ever since, as he foreshadowed.

I also congratulate my right hon. Friend on the large increases in funding that are almost as big as some of the funding increases that I received when I was a Health Minister and then Secretary of State. Ever since it was founded, all Governments have increased spending on the NHS—they are bound to—and whichever party is in opposition we always have these knockabout exchanges about whether it is enough. As my right hon. Friend rightly says, what matters is how effectively the money is spent to produce the right patient outcomes. The plan appears to reflect that very well.

Does my right hon. Friend agree that the biggest pressure facing the health service is the extraordinary growth in demand, and the change in the nature of that demand, which is being caused by the ageing population, with chronic conditions playing such a large part? Does he also accept that his most urgent priority is to build further links between the hospital service, the GPs, the community services and local authority social services, so that we have people working no longer in silos, but together to produce the best package for the patient? We have achieved something, but not very much. I hope that when we produce our adult social care policy, which I hope is soon, my right hon. Friend will begin to think about some reforms to make sure that all elements of the service work together properly to produce the proper and most cost-effective personalised treatment for each individual patient.

**Matt Hancock:** I pay tribute to my right hon. and learned Friend, who of course did so much to set in train the modern health service that we know and whose reforms were kept and, indeed, enhanced during the period when Labour was in government. He is right about the need to run the NHS so that it can be the best that it possibly can be. Yes, we need the money, but we also need to run it well. It is no good just to argue about the money. On that he may have a surprising ally, because the shadow Secretary of State, who is currently looking at his mobile phone—well, he is not any more—said a couple of months ago:

“we need to augment the debate beyond the current mantra of ‘we can spend the most’”.

However, it appears that the Labour party only has a mantra of “We can spend the most.” We care about the money, but we care about the NHS being the best that it possibly can be, too.

**Dr Philippa Whitford** (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): I note that the Secretary of State referred to the Churchill Government in 1944, but had he looked at *Hansard* he might have seen that Churchill cited the Highlands and Islands Medical Service, which was the first national health service in 1913.

I welcome the long-term plan, but the integration to which it aspires is going to be frustrated if there is no reform of the internal market and the fragmentation continues. The Secretary of State cites the funding, which he describes as 3.4% per year. That is actually just back to what the NHS received prior to 2010. He talks about a million extra patients. With this enormous increased demand, does he not think that it would be more honest to describe funding per head, rather than just a total? Scotland spends £163 more per head. Perhaps he should aspire to spend the money on the patients and then perhaps the NHS would keep up.

Again, like the previous funding agreement, the funding is focused only on the NHS, with cuts to public health, no extra money for health education and still no Green Paper on social care. I totally agree that prevention is better than cure, so will the Secretary of State reverse the cuts to public health? In his own letter, which was circulated, he emphasised reducing cancer deaths, yet there was no mention of prevention at all. That is the best way to reduce cancer deaths. Public health is crucial, smoking cessation is crucial and tackling childhood obesity is crucial, so will he liaise with his colleagues in the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and set a nine o'clock watershed on advertising rubbish foods?

I agree with the aim of improving screening. Last year, the Government agreed that they would reduce the bowel cancer screening age from 60 to 50. Can the Secretary of State tell us when that will actually happen? Does he recognise that it will mean a bigger need for endoscopists and radiologists? So will he fund Health Education England to provide them and to provide the other doctors, nurses and staff that the NHS will need to deliver this long-term plan?

**Matt Hancock:** My response is yes on the cancer screening—it is in paragraph 3.53. I want to return to the point that was made by the hon. Lady and by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) about the link to social care. Of course that is critical. The plan has a section on the link to social care and the social care Green Paper will then tie into the plan. Of course, the two come together and the Green Paper on social care will be provided soon.

**Dr Sarah Wollaston** (Totnes) (Con): I warmly welcome this ambitious and wide-ranging long-term plan for the NHS. I agree with the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford) that so much is dependent on social care, on public health and on the workforce through Health Education England budgets, but may I add to that the situation for capital budgets within the forthcoming spending review? So much of the success of transforming services depends on the upfront funding to get things going and sometimes double running so that we can get a new service up and running before an existing service closes down. Will the Secretary of State go further in talking about the role and importance of capital budgets?



I also really welcome the triple integration—not only between health and social care, but between mental and physical health and between primary and hospital services. Could the Secretary of State confirm and support the proposal in the long-term plan that the legislative tweaks that will support that much needed integration will come from the NHS itself? I confirm that the Health and Social Care Committee remains committed to subjecting those proposals to pre-legislative scrutiny. Will he meet me to see how we can take that forward?

**Matt Hancock:** Yes, I would be very happy to meet my hon. Friend to discuss the legislative changes. These changes have been proposed by the NHS. The NHS wants the changes set out at a high level in the plan. Of course there is a lot of consequential work to do to turn them into a full legislative proposal. The NHS is working on that. If it does that alongside and working with the Select Committee, I would be very happy to meet with her to discuss how that might happen. This is very much the NHS's proposed legislation and I look forward to discussing it with her.

**Liz Kendall** (Leicester West) (Lab): I am glad that the Secretary of State says that he will listen to clinicians if they want to change primary legislation. I just think that many of those clinicians and many Labour Members wish that he and his colleagues had listened to us when we warned about the problems with the Lansley legislation six years ago. But let us put that to one side. The biggest challenge facing the NHS is indeed the increase in the number of older people with two, three or more long-term chronic conditions. They need more joined-up services in the community and at home. The local NHS has been asked to put forward its plans for these new services by April. It cannot do so without proper long-term funding for social care. So will we hear about that in the Green Paper before April—yes or no?

**Matt Hancock:** When I answered a previous question on the timing of the social care Green Paper, I said it would be provided “soon.” I certainly intend that to happen before April. My previous commitment was to do it before Christmas, so it is well advanced. But the hon. Lady is right on the legislative proposals. There is a broad consensus on the need for more integration, as my hon. Friend the Chair of the Select Committee said. The proposals that are made by the NHS in the paper are what it thinks is needed in order to deliver this integration, which I very strongly support.

**Sir Nicholas Soames** (Mid Sussex) (Con): No doubt my right hon. Friend is gratified, as would be the Churchill-led National Government of 1944, by how truly remarkable and amazing the national health service, the baby of that Government, has turned out to be. Will he assure me that this money does not come without strings and that he will enforce a much better system of lessons learned and, in particular, of disseminating best practice more widely through the NHS? Finally, will he please kick the work of the sustainability and transformation partnerships into some form of prompt result?

**Matt Hancock:** When I referenced Churchill, I did not realise that it would be in front of his family. My right hon. Friend is quite right about the need for a just culture—a need for understanding the lessons that are

learned when things go wrong—in what is a high-risk business of providing medicine and medical care. Those lessons should be properly learned and there should be transparency and openness and a culture of constantly improving the way that things are done, whether that is medically, logistically or organisationally in hospitals. That is a critical part of the review that Baroness Dido Harding will take forward. It is something that she cares deeply about, making sure that we get the culture right within the workforce not only to tackle the high levels of bullying and harassment, which are completely unacceptable in the national health service, but to make sure that there is a spirit and a culture of continuous improvement and of learning from errors that everyone makes. All of us make errors, and we should learn from them and that culture should be inculcated right across the NHS.

**Norman Lamb** (North Norfolk) (LD): The Secretary of State was absolutely right to commit in his statement to ending the inappropriate hospitalisation of people with learning disability and autism, but the long-term plan itself postpones for five years the ambition of reducing by 50% the number of people who are in institutions. Mencap has described that as disgraceful. It amounts to abandoning the current plan to reduce the number by 50% by this March and it effectively tells the system to take its foot off the brake and will result in people continuing to be treated as second-class citizens, and continuing to have their human rights abused. I urge him to rethink this outrageous long postponement of an absolute imperative to get people out of institutions and to give them a better life.

**Matt Hancock:** I have a lot of sympathy with the right hon. Gentleman's argument. The target for this March, which I inherited, was for a reduction of a third to a half. We are at a reduction of over 20%. The challenge has been that, while the number of people who are being moved into community settings has proceeded as per the plan, more people have been put into secure settings. This is an area that I care deeply about getting right, and I very much take on board the response of Mencap and the right hon. Gentleman to the proposals.

**Anna Soubry** (Broxtowe) (Con): I congratulate the Secretary of State on his plan. As a former Minister of public health, let me say how delighted I am and how much I agree with him that prevention is better than cure. As Governments of all shades have said for a long time, the reality is that people must take more responsibility for their own health—notably to keep their weight down and to take more exercise. This is all good messaging, but the problem is that obesity and being over-weight is an increasing problem, especially among the young. What new messages—what new approach—will we have to public health if he is really going to make the sort of progress that we need to make?

**Matt Hancock:** My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. Throughout this statement, Opposition Members have been murmuring from a sedentary position about the public health budget. Let me address that directly. The public health budget, which was devolved five years ago with widespread acclamation across the House, has been set and will be set in the spending review. We are putting an extra £20 billion into the NHS—the scale far

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dwarfs individual budgets—and the whole long-term plan is about prevention being better than cure. The public health budget is important, and it is being delivered well because it is being delivered by councils in concert and tied to other subjects. The truth is that we are having the whole NHS focus on the prevention strategy, not just one individual budget; those who concentrate on just one budget are missing the point.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** A very large number of right hon. and hon. Members are seeking to catch my eye. The Secretary of State is attending to the questions put to him in his usual courteous fashion, and I think that is respected. However, I gently point out to the House that this is the first of three ministerial statements today and that there is then further substantive business with which we want to make progress, so I gently encourage colleagues to be economical.

**Meg Hillier** (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): I am heartened that Baroness Harding is looking at the staffing side of things, but she does have a mountain to climb. Let me remind the Secretary of State that the last time the NHS went out to recruit GPs, it ended up with fewer GPs at the end of the year than it had had before. That is not to mention the pension cap put in place by his former mentor—or maybe his current mentor—the former Chancellor, which now means that there is a problem with the retention of senior clinical staff. We can add to that list the immigration rules and pay ceiling. Is the Secretary of State lobbying the Home Office and the Treasury, particularly to deal with the £30,000 cap and the pension cap?

**Matt Hancock:** I welcome much of the tone of the hon. Lady's remarks. The truth is that it is critical to ensure that we have the workforce and the people to deliver the plan. There is a whole section of this plan, as well as ongoing work, to deliver that. I want to clear up this point: in the immigration White Paper published by the Home Secretary before Christmas, as now, there is no cap on recruitment numbers for nurses and doctors. The proposal is that the cap will not necessarily apply within a shortage occupation. We will be recruiting people from around the world to work in our NHS.

**Dr Andrew Murrison** (South West Wiltshire) (Con): I very much congratulate my right hon. Friend on the 10-year plan and on his announcement of the Harding review. Will Baroness Harding look particularly at the way in which pay and pensions are structured for general practitioners and pinch-point specialists within the NHS, since they are retiring or going part time at the moment—a full 10 years before the time they had anticipated when they went to medical school?

**Matt Hancock:** We are already looking at that subject. It is very complicated because of the nature of assets owned by GPs—their value having risen sharply over the last generation. However, we have record numbers of GPs in training. Although we need to ensure that we retain more GPs and encourage as many as possible to be full time, we have successfully breached our target; we are training more GPs than we had planned to, and that is a good thing.

**Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): I welcome the focus in the long-term plan on the most common causes of mortality—cancer, heart disease, stroke and lung disease—and on cutting the risk factors. However, will the Secretary of State just explain to me how cuts to public health budgets and the fact that the comprehensive spending review is much later in determining the money that will be made available for public health can be part of a joined-up plan to start dealing with some of these diseases?

**Matt Hancock:** There is £16 billion ring-fenced for public health in this spending review. Crucially, we want the whole NHS to be focused on keeping people healthy as well as curing them when they are ill. Yes, of course it is a matter for that one budget in the spending review process, but it is also a matter of the whole £148 billion a year that will be going into the NHS.

**Martin Vickers** (Cleethorpes) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State's plan. He will be aware that our constituents value receiving treatment as locally as possible. Will he give an assurance that he will do all he can to ensure that district general hospitals are there to provide most of these crucial services?

**Matt Hancock:** Yes. I am a strong supporter of district general hospitals and community hospitals. So often, local matters because it matters to patients and their families. If someone is having a highly complicated procedure, they will want to be in the very best place in the country—or, indeed, in the world—but often they will want to be close to home as well. That matters for small hospitals and district general hospitals such as the one on which my hon. Friend's constituents rely so much.

**Ms Angela Eagle** (Wallasey) (Lab): The Secretary of State has waxed lyrical today about the NHS becoming a learning organisation, being transparent and admitting its mistakes. Will he therefore set the trend and lead by getting up at the Dispatch Box and apologising to this House for the fragmentation and chaos caused by the Lansley Act?

**Matt Hancock:** We will listen to and learn from what clinicians say about what legislative changes are needed now. This document is all about concentrating on what is the right thing for the future, rather than the blame culture that we are trying to get rid of in the NHS.

**Sir Patrick McLoughlin** (Derbyshire Dales) (Con): I very much welcome my right hon. Friend's statement and the fact that he has been able to announce future spending so that hopefully the planning for how those resources are spent can be done properly. Will he also bear in mind that, during the period of the national health service, some 60% of the time there has been a Conservative Secretary of State, which shows very much the support and commitment of the Conservative party to the health service? Regarding the money that he is talking about, what will he do to ensure that people see and understand what is being spent locally?

**Matt Hancock:** As my right hon. Friend says, from its inception and the first White Paper throughout most of its history, the NHS has been supported and nurtured by a Conservative Secretary of State, and long may that continue.

**Grahame Morris** (Easington) (Lab): I want to concentrate on cancer services. I have tried to be very positive and to engage with Ministers through the all-party parliamentary group on cancer, but I must express my disappointment at chapter 3. The Secretary of State referred to paragraph 3.51 on cancer, particularly in relation to some of the new investments. Practicalities and resources must be linked to the ambition to improve outcomes, so we need early diagnosis and cost-effective treatment. For example, this country has the second worst survival rate in Europe for lung cancer; only Bulgaria is any worse. The “Manifesto for Radiography” by professionals, oncologists and so on set out some specific asks, including a one-off investment of £250 million in advanced radiotherapy and an additional £100 million a year to support that investment with trained staff. I am afraid that the Government’s plans set out in the 10-year plan fall far short of that, so I do hope that the Secretary of State will look at that again.

**Matt Hancock:** We very much agree with the thrust and purpose of the hon. Gentleman’s remarks. In fact, paragraph 3.56 sets out how we are learning from what has happened in Liverpool and elsewhere in the country to make sure that we get early diagnosis right because, as he says, early diagnosis is absolutely critical. I will take away his specific points, but the whole thrust of the plan with regards to cancer is about increasing early diagnosis.

**Justine Greening** (Putney) (Con): In a local community survey that I am doing right now, mental health is particularly flagged up by people as a priority for them, as well, so I very much welcome the Secretary of State’s continued focus on that in this 10-year plan. I also very much welcome the fact that as part of the work with the Department for Education, the trailblazer area in south-west London will enable us to really see some of the more joined-up working that he talked about. Will he set out what the additional services available for young people up to the age of 25 will mean practically? I represent a very young constituency, and that will be a key change that could benefit us.

**Matt Hancock:** At the moment, as somebody transitions from children’s mental health services to adult mental health services, there is often a gap in provision as they register for the adult services. The purpose of having the new care plans up to the age of 25—similar to those, for instance, for care leavers that we have brought in in other legislation—is to make sure that there is a seamless transition from children’s mental health services to adult mental health services and not a gap that many, many people fall through.

**Mr Clive Betts** (Sheffield South East) (Lab): Let me bring the Secretary of State back to the issue of public health. He seems to be saying that this is only a small grant and therefore not really very important compared with spending on the NHS as a whole. May I draw his attention to the wording in the long-term plan where it says that action by the NHS

“is a complement to, but cannot be a substitute for, the important role of local government”?

That role has been undermined by £700 million of cuts to public health grants in the past five years. Will he now recognise that if we are going to get a proper

joined-up approach to ill-health prevention, he needs to give a commitment that in future the public health grant will increase, in real terms, at least by the same amount as NHS funding as a whole?

**Matt Hancock:** I certainly did not say that the public health grant was small—I said that it was £16 billion over the last spending review period. But NHS spending as a whole, by the end of this five-year funding settlement, will be £148 billion every year. Therefore, turning the firepower of the whole NHS to keeping people healthy in the first place will play a huge role in this. Of course, the public health grant has to be settled as part of the spending review, but the idea that that is the whole of everything with regard to preventing ill-health is missing the point.

**Vicky Ford** (Chelmsford) (Con): In the week before Christmas, when we mere mortals were just looking forward to a holiday, the Secretary of State did an all-night shift in Milton Keynes University Hospital and then travelled to Chelmsford, where he visited my brand new medical school and did a “Dragons’ Den” with medical entrepreneurs who are finding new ways to use technology to treat their patients. May I thank him for his super-energy, and does he agree that supporting staff and embracing innovation is also key to our NHS?

**Matt Hancock:** Yes, it was a joy to make that visit. We found ourselves in a new medical school in a room where the students were enjoying a dissection—my goodness, after a night without sleep it was quite a thing. It was a joy to go there with my hon. Friend and I agree with both the points she made.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I, too, congratulate the Secretary of State on the NHS 10-year long-term plan. There are between 6,000 and 8,000 rare diseases. One in 17 people, or 6% of the population, will be affected by a rare disease in their lifetime—that is 3.5 million people in the United Kingdom. Will he confirm a commitment to assisting those with rare diseases, and can the NICE process for new life-saving drugs be urgently speeded up so that more lives can be lightened and saved?

**Matt Hancock:** I strongly agree with the hon. Gentleman. For those who have rare diseases, diagnosis takes seven years, on average, and genomics can bring that down to a matter of seven days, in the best cases. We are the world leaders in genomics and we are going to stay that way. We have reached the 100,000 genome sequence and we are going to take it to 1 million, with 500,000 from the NHS and 500,000 from the UK Biobank. He is absolutely right. This is one of the bright shining stars of the future of healthcare, and Britain is going to lead the way.

**George Freeman** (Mid Norfolk) (Con): As a former Health Minister, I congratulate the Secretary of State and the Government on this statement. I particularly pay tribute to his work on mental health—I am proud that under this Government it looks as though we are finally beginning to close the gap and stop mental health being the Cinderella service—and on early diagnosis of cancer. I also welcome his espousal of the work on genomics, which I, as a former Minister for life sciences



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and health technology, and others were involved in setting up. Does he agree that if we are really going to drive the revolution of accountability, productivity and local engagement, the accountable care pilots offer us the chance to really measure and drive digital communities of healthcare where we reward communities that promote health and wellbeing?

**Matt Hancock:** Yes, I do. I pay tribute to the work that my hon. Friend did in putting together the areas of the NHS where this is already working. We want to spread that success more broadly across the NHS to make sure that we seize these very exciting opportunities as well as deal with the important day-to-day challenges that the NHS faces.

**Emma Hardy** (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): On 29 December, two young people, one of them aged only 24, committed suicide by jumping from the Humber bridge in my constituency. Since I first commented on this, I have been inundated with comments from local residents detailing the inadequate mental health support that they have. Unfortunately, the Humber bridge is becoming a place that people choose to visit when they are feeling desperate and as though there are no other options. Partly for this reason, can I ask the Secretary of State to commit—not in 10 years, or even in one year or six months, but right now—to providing more money for the Humber NHS Foundation Trust so that we can help to support people when they are feeling so very desperate?

**Matt Hancock:** I will absolutely look into the request that the hon. Lady makes. The example that she gives locally in Hull is actually reflected across the country in terms of the need for greater access. For the first time, we are going to have access targets for community mental health, because it is critical to make sure that we have accountability and understand what is happening in mental health trusts in terms of access so that we can then drive policy to meet it. But I appreciate that that is a medium-term goal: in the short term, she has made a specific request for a specific organisation, and I will absolutely look into it and write to her.

**Mr Marcus Jones** (Nuneaton) (Con): Mental health issues are often part of the very complex causes of rough sleeping. They are also a barrier to getting rough sleepers off the streets. Will my right hon. Friend say more about how his plan fits in with the Government's plan to eradicate rough sleeping?

**Matt Hancock:** Yes, my hon. Friend is absolutely right about this. I pay tribute to the work that he did as a Minister in this area. We have put forward £30 million to support mental health services for rough sleepers. It is about so much more than just the money, though—it is about co-ordinating care and co-ordinating different agencies. There is a lot of work going on on this inside Government that he was very much involved with.

**Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): My clinical commissioning group has to make more than £40 million of cuts in the next 15 months and is proposing to cut GP and urgent care centre opening hours. It also has an

£11 million risk thanks to the predatory private “GP at hand” scheme, of which the Secretary of State is a member. We have had GP practices suspended, palliative care beds closed, and our major hospital under threat of demolition for seven years. Will he accept that the self-regarding statement he has just made will be unrecognisable to people who work in and use the NHS, which is reeling from the crisis that his Government have caused?

**Matt Hancock:** I will take advice and consideration from many people, but not from the hon. Gentleman, who for seven years has run a frankly outrageous campaign based on scare stories about hospital closures that are totally unreasonable, unrealistic and wrong. He will never be somebody I listen to, because I care about improving the future, not political point-scoring.

**Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): Last Friday, it was a pleasure to meet the chief executive and chair of my local hospital trust to discuss the new A&E department and the new mental health ward that will be built on the site of Torbay Hospital over the next year. Does the Secretary of State agree that it is also vital that we have the local services around mental health, in particular, because in the past we have seen far too many people from Devon being sent elsewhere, across the country, and that this investment will now bring that to an end?

**Matt Hancock:** Yes, absolutely. My hon. Friend is a brilliant advocate for Torbay and for the English Riviera, and has made the case so strongly for his local hospital. I was delighted that we could recently find the funding to support the case that he and local clinicians have made, and I look forward to working with him to make it a reality.

**Karin Smyth** (Bristol South) (Lab): Before coming to this place, I was a senior manager in Bristol's primary care trust and then the CCG. I want to pay tribute to the NHS managers who have kept the ship afloat since the Lansley reforms. Today's plan is clear in its commitment to triple integration and seeking to free commissioners from the barriers to integration in the 2012 procurement rules, but tomorrow the CCG in Bristol will embark on a huge re-procurement process for some community services for the next 10 years based on those old rules. In the light of his plan, will the Secretary of State intervene locally and support my call to pause that divisive community services re-procurement?

**Matt Hancock:** I will raise the hon. Lady's point with NHS Improvement, which considers these things. Local provision of services should, rightly, be decided by local clinical priorities, but she makes a cogent point that I will raise with NHSI, and I will ask its chief executive, Ian Dalton, to write to her.

**Henry Smith** (Crawley) (Con): I declare an interest, as chair of the all-party parliamentary group on blood cancer and the APPG on heart and circulatory diseases. I very much welcome this plan's focus on those areas. In tribute to my caseworker, Susan Lester, who sadly passed away last week from pancreatic cancer, can I have an assurance from the Secretary of State that he will continue to work with voluntary sector organisations such as Bloodwise, the British Heart Foundation and Pancreatic Cancer UK?



**Matt Hancock:** Yes, of course. I am sure the whole House will join me in passing on our condolences to the family, friends and colleagues of my hon. Friend's caseworker. He is doing right by her in raising that issue in the House. Of course we will keep working with those organisations, which do brilliant work. In fact, there is an event in the Commons tomorrow with Bloodwise, which the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Steve Brine), will attend.

**Seema Malhotra** (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): Before Christmas, I attended the inaugural event of the Addie Brady Foundation, in memory of 16-year-old Addie, who died a year ago from a brain tumour—her second primary cancer. She was affected by a rare genetic condition called Li-Fraumeni syndrome, a feature of which is a high risk of cancer and repeat cancers. Her family, other families and an international panel of experts have been campaigning for a national screening programme for people suffering from Li-Fraumeni syndrome. Can the Secretary of State confirm whether his announcement today includes much needed Li-Fraumeni syndrome screening on the NHS, particularly for children, which would extend and save lives?

**Matt Hancock:** I will certainly take up the hon. Lady's suggestion with Mike Richards, who is running a review of our screening programmes to ensure that they are all fit for purpose, run as effectively as possible and targeted at the right people.

**Tom Pursglove** (Corby) (Con): I am delighted to hear my right hon. Friend talk at length about prevention. In that vein, what role does he see for initiatives such as the daily mile in schools, which allows young people to get into the thrust of getting involved in sporting activity and sets them up for life?

**Matt Hancock:** My hon. Friend makes an important point. Things like the daily mile, which I have participated in, are an incredibly important part of this. Prevention is about public health and the whole NHS, but it is also about more than that. We talk a lot in the House about the rights that the NHS gives us—the right to care that is free at the point of use, according to need—but we also need to talk about the responsibilities that we have, including the responsibility to use the service wisely and the responsibility to ourselves and our communities to keep ourselves healthy. That part of the debate needs to continue and be strengthened, at the same time as ensuring that the NHS is always there for us.

**Mr Kevan Jones** (North Durham) (Lab): Under the Government's public health proposals, County Durham will lose 38% of its budget—or £19 million. The Secretary of State said that we should be listening to clinicians. Clinicians in County Durham are clear that they want that budget protected. Can he tell me what those clinicians are missing? Is it not a fact that this Government are quite clearly going to remove money from deprived areas such as County Durham, while more leafy areas, including Surrey, have an increase in their budgets?

**Matt Hancock:** That is obviously not right. Indeed, there is a whole section of the plan on reducing health inequalities, which is extremely important.

**Rebecca Pow** (Taunton Deane) (Con): I very much welcome this plan, its ambitions and the Government's commitment to it. Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the biggest obstacles to a fully functioning health service is the fact that information cannot be easily shared between many centres? There are myriad systems, which means that data cannot be accessed from one centre to another. When it comes to care, the professionals are brilliant and must be praised, but this situation is causing distress, and it slows diagnosis and wastes patients' time. I speak from a great deal of personal experience, unfortunately, having spent too long in the NHS with family members. Can he give an assurance that that will be addressed by the plan?

**Matt Hancock:** Yes. I feel strongly about this. Chapter 5 of the plan is all about digitally enabled care. The interoperability of data between systems in different parts of the NHS is mission-critical. Over Christmas we published proposals for the interoperability of primary care systems, and we will roll that out in the hospital sector as well, so that people can access their own patient record and the clinicians who need to see it can access the whole record. Instead of having to phone each other up to find out what is going on with a patient they once had, they should be able to look at the record.

**Nic Dakin** (Scunthorpe) (Lab): I welcome the Secretary of State's recognition that the staff are at the heart of the NHS and join him in thanking them for their excellent work, but there are 40,000 nursing vacancies today. How many nursing vacancies will there be at the end of 2019, and how many will there be at the end of 2020?

**Matt Hancock:** I know that the hon. Gentleman takes a close interest in that, as chair of the all-party group. Obviously we need more nurses. The vacancies are, in many cases, filled by temporary staff, but that is not the best way to manage things. We need more nurses and more doctors. I am glad that we have a record number of GPs in training. In the plan, we have made provision for a 50% increase in the number of clinical placements. We have a whole programme, including the Harding review, to take this forward and ensure that it happens, because the NHS is, at its heart, delivered by its people.

**James Morris** (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State's statement and in particular the continued commitment to increase funding for mental health and build on the work already done through the five year forward view. Does he agree that one of the challenges in implementing those changes is ensuring that funding gets to the frontline through commissioning decisions? That has been one of the obstacles to generating real change on the ground and achieving the goal of parity of esteem between mental and physical health.

**Matt Hancock:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We need not only more funding for mental health, which is in the plan, but more joined-up delivery of mental health services. Since the birth of the NHS, mental health services have been separate from physical health services, but treatment needs to be for the whole person—their physical, mental and social health. We need

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not only the money but the join-up, and my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Jackie Doyle-Price), the Mental Health, Inequalities and Suicide Prevention Minister, is working closely on that.

**Laura Smith** (Crewe and Nantwich) (Lab): I agree with the shadow Secretary of State completely. I do not feel satisfied that the Secretary of State recognises the urgent need to reverse cuts to social care budgets alongside this plan. Does he see that savings made by reducing avoidable admissions and delayed transfers of care could go towards delivering a more ambitious 10-year plan for our NHS?

**Matt Hancock:** As I have said, after I became Secretary of State, we put £240 million extra into social care, and there will be £650 million next year.

**Dr Matthew Offord** (Hendon) (Con): I congratulate the Secretary of State on this announcement and particularly on the increase in spending, which is more than the Labour party promised at the last general election. The vital point of today's announcement is the publication of the plan, which has been decided by clinicians, so that they can tell politicians what is right for the NHS. Will he thank the clinicians for that work? We want to take party politics out of the NHS.

**Matt Hancock:** My hon. Friend is quite right: we must focus on the substance of what is needed to deliver an NHS that will be there for us all in our hour of greatest need. That is what we should be concentrating on. I have heard some Members say, "Whatever the Government promise, we will just promise more." That is no way to have a discussion about the future of the country and our most valued institution. Instead, we should back the NHS's plan, deliver on it and keep the economy strong so that we can keep putting in the money that the NHS needs.

**Liz McInnes** (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): Paragraph 4.17 of the plan states:

"Mature students are more likely to have family and other commitments that make it harder to retrain without financial support."

Will the Secretary of State therefore now admit that his Government made a huge mistake when they abolished bursaries for nurses and allied health professionals?

**Matt Hancock:** No; we are proposing to have more targeted support for those who need it, to ensure that we get support to the areas of nursing with the most acute shortages, such as community nursing and mental health services. That is where support is best targeted.

**Bim Afolami** (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): My constituency is one of the 25 trailblazer areas that will have new mental health support teams working in and around schools. Will the Secretary of State give further details on what this plan will do to deliver improved mental health services on the ground, particularly for young people in schools?

**Matt Hancock:** Supporting children with mental ill health is an incredibly important part of the plan, from early intervention on anxiety and depression through to support for those with more serious mental health

conditions. It means that there will be dedicated support that can link with schools' mental health services and help signpost in what is often a complicated system. The Mental Health Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock, has already agreed to meet my hon. Friend to discuss this further. It is an important and welcome intervention.

**Paul Farrelly** (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Lab): When our local sustainability and transformation plan was submitted in October 2017, it projected an annual deficit in health and social care in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent of £542 million by 2020-21, which is more than double the £250 million projected at the time of the 2015 general election. That shows the scale of the problem, because there are more than 40 STPs across England. Will the Secretary of State write to me with some numbers to show how this long-term plan will help our local STP with the extra revenue and investment needed to transform services so that we do not face a litany of unsustainable cuts, notwithstanding those in the years immediately to come?

**Matt Hancock:** Of course we are putting more money in, and in the coming days we will announce the local provision increases for the first year—there is a £6 billion cash uplift in year 1. We will be working with local areas in the months ahead on the plans for years 2 to 5.

**Robert Courts** (Witney) (Con): In the past few weeks I have visited Witney Community Hospital, the Windrush surgery, the Nuffield health centre and the associated nearby pharmacies, and I have seen not only their brilliant winter preparedness but how they form a hub for care close to home. Does my right hon. Friend agree that ensuring that people are treated in the community and improving public health is the way to ensure that we have free, high-quality care for everybody?

**Matt Hancock:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The community hubs being developed in many different parts of the country are critical in bringing together support and enabling early intervention. The adage that a stitch in time saves nine is almost as old as "prevention is better than cure," but both are equal in their wisdom.

**Ms Karen Buck** (Westminster North) (Lab): Money might not be everything, but transforming a service against a background of real-terms cuts is almost impossible. The Central London clinical commissioning group is in the middle of a 13% real-terms cut, the West London clinical commissioning group is having an 8% real-terms cut, real-terms cuts are being made in mental health services, and Westminster City Council has cut 31% of its funding for social care. Can the Secretary of State indicate whether inner-London residents will see any benefit as a result of this plan?

**Matt Hancock:** As I said a moment ago, local allocations will be published in the coming days.

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): One of the most effective ways of reducing avoidable deaths is to stop people smoking in the first place, and to encourage those who do smoke to give up as fast as possible. How will this plan encourage pregnant mothers, 11% of whom still smoke, to give up smoking and get their partners to give up, and how will it encourage young people not to start in the first place?

**Matt Hancock:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. When people are in hospital, there will now be much more aggressive provision of counselling and support to stop them smoking. It is also about targeting support, rather than treating everyone the same and giving them the same messages. It is absolutely right to include micro-targeting and to use social media to communicate with people. There are luddites who say that we should not use these modern approaches, but we on the Government Benches believe in the future.

**Debbie Abrahams** (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): I am pleased that the Secretary of State is keen to improve public health and reduce health inequalities, and I assume that he will therefore support my new clause 5 to the Finance (No. 3) Bill, which is specifically about ensuring that the Government's economic policies reduce health inequalities. On social care, is he aware that in 2017 alone 50,000 people with dementia had an emergency hospital admission because there was not adequate social care? What will he do to ensure that his plan, which we are still waiting for, will avoid such emergency admissions in 2019? Please do not say that more has been given in the Budget, because that is a sticking plaster compared with all the cuts that the Government have made in social care.

**Matt Hancock:** Page 32 of the document sets out details on the integration with social care that the hon. Lady rightly calls for. Clearly, ensuring better integration in cases of dementia is absolutely vital. Some parts of the country are doing that brilliantly with integrated commissioning, but we need to ensure that is spread across the whole country.

**Matt Warman** (Boston and Skegness) (Con): I welcome this plan and the Secretary of State's energy. When he visited Pilgrim Hospital in my constituency, he saw that this is not solely about money, because a huge chunk of the challenge that the NHS faces is about the workforce. Within the workforce plans in this 10-year plan, will he pay particular attention to under-doctored areas such as Lincolnshire, where it is a huge challenge to produce the same outcomes that we see in other parts of the country?

**Matt Hancock:** My hon. Friend is dead right. It was a real pleasure to visit Pilgrim Hospital in Boston, where my grandmother worked as a nurse for 30 years, and to meet the staff. He is absolutely right about the recruitment challenges that they face, which is why a whole chapter of the report, and ongoing work, is dedicated to improving recruitment. When we put £20 billion into a public service, of course we will need more people to deliver it.

**Luke Pollard** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): At this very moment, Derriford Hospital in Plymouth is on OPEL 4 alert—the new name for black alert. The real shame is that that is now so commonplace that it no longer always makes the news. Will the Secretary of State, who I know visited the hospital recently, explain whether the new NHS plan will address the structural inequalities in funding for the regions, especially the far south-west? Those inequalities often contribute to the underfunding of services, which is why our hospital is on OPEL 4.

**Matt Hancock:** I enjoyed my visit to Derriford Hospital's night shift and learned an awful lot from it. One of the consequences of seeing what is happening on the ground is that we are providing it with a new A&E facility. We are putting tens of millions of pounds into the hospital, so it would be a bit better if the hon. Gentleman mentioned that as well as rightly raising concerns about performance. That funding was the result of the campaigning of the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport, who is an absolutely brilliant campaigner for his local community—[*Interruption.*] Yes, the Members for Devonport and for Moor View. I am a big supporter of Derriford Hospital and think it does a brilliant job, and in challenging conditions, but it is going to get a better A&E because we have provided the funding to allow it to do that.

**Helen Whately** (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): I welcome the commitment to mental health in the NHS long-term plan, particularly the badly needed new care model for young adults, the commitment to more care for people with severe mental illnesses and the further expansion of mental health liaison services in A&E. I also welcome the commitment to more performance standards for adults with mental illnesses. Will my right hon. Friend make sure that those mental health standards are introduced sooner rather than later, so that we do not have to wait too long for the waiting time standards? Transparency is so important for the parity of esteem between mental health and physical health.

**Matt Hancock:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Those standards are being trialled at the moment. Of course we want to get them right, but we will look at the results of those trials as soon as we can.

**Mohammad Yasin** (Bedford) (Lab): The Bedfordshire mental health trust told me today that the need for in-patient beds for men has increased. Will the Secretary of State urgently reinstate the in-patient mental health facilities in Bedford, which his Government removed, so that my constituents no longer have to travel at least 20 miles to access care?

**Matt Hancock:** Of course the provision of services locally is a matter for local clinicians, and it must be led by local clinicians. I am always happy to look at individual cases and, as with the other example, I will ask the NHS to write back to the hon. Gentleman with an explanation.

**Alan Mak** (Havant) (Con): Upgrading the NHS's technology is key to its productivity and its future, and it should include rolling out a new NHS app; phasing out outdated technologies such as fax machines; and adopting new fourth industrial revolution technologies. What progress has the Department made in those areas?

**Matt Hancock:** My hon. Friend is dead right. There is a whole chapter in the plan on using new technologies not only to improve care but to make care more convenient. He has been a doughty campaigner for the use of technology in health services. His trip to my local hospital to understand these issues went down incredibly well locally, and I hope he keeps pushing us to do the best we can.

**Lilian Greenwood** (Nottingham South) (Lab): How can it possibly make sense that, when the Health Secretary is targeting much needed support towards areas of



[Lilian Greenwood]

high deprivation, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government is cutting funding for social care and public health, and cutting deepest in cities such as Nottingham with high levels of poverty? Is that not actively undermining the Health Secretary's stated ambition to improve health and reduce inequality?

**Matt Hancock:** In debates on the future of our nation's healthcare, we should always start with the facts, and the fact is that social care funding is going up. It went up by £240 million this year, and it is going up next year, too.

**Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con):** Adult social care is not working properly in Northamptonshire, with far too many delayed transfers of care for elderly people. With the root-and-branch reform of local government in Northamptonshire, there is a wonderful, unique opportunity to create successful integrated health and social care pilots. Will the Secretary of State seize this opportunity and get the 10-year NHS long-term plan off to a wonderful start in Northamptonshire?

**Matt Hancock:** Yes. I have discussed the proposals made by my hon. Friend and his Northamptonshire colleagues with the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government. We are both enthusiastic to see what can be done, and I invite my hon. Friend into the Department to speak to my officials about how this could be done. His proposals are, by design, entirely consistent with the proposals in paragraph 1.58 of the long-term plan, and I very much look forward to working with him and his Northamptonshire colleagues on making it happen.

**Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op):** Health visitors are vital to delivering early intervention and prevention, yet their numbers are in freefall—falling by 23.5%, or 2,425 health visitors, since October 2015. Health visitors are now working with dangerous caseloads, so when will the Secretary of State ensure that we have safe delivery of health visiting services?

**Matt Hancock:** The hon. Lady is dead right. Of course, health visitor numbers went up very sharply between 2010 and 2015. In fact there is a proposal in the plan, and the NHS will be discussing with Government the best way to commission health visitors. Health visitors are clearly a health service but, at the moment, they are commissioned by local authorities. We look forward to working with the NHS and with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government on how best we can commission health visitors in future, because they are a critical part of maternity services.

**Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab):** Over the holiday period, another young woman tragically died of cervical cancer, which she contracted before the age of 25; therefore, she was not able to have a smear test. Will the Secretary of State, as part of this review, remove that ridiculous and utterly arbitrary age limit so that, where a GP believes a female patient needs a cervical smear, they can have one irrespective of their age?

**Matt Hancock:** I entirely understand the hon. Gentleman's argument. He is a reasonable man who makes reasonable arguments, and I will take it up with Mike Richards, who is running the screening review. I will ask Mike to write to him specifically on that point and to take it into account.

**Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP):** As the chair of the all-party parliamentary group on infant feeding and inequalities, I am glad that the long-term plan has a commitment to improving maternity services in England. The announcement on 30 December said that the UK Government are

“asking all maternity services to deliver an accredited, evidence-based infant feeding programme in 2019 to 2020, such as the UNICEF Baby Friendly initiative”.

What does the Secretary of State mean by “such as”? UNICEF Baby Friendly is the gold standard, as recognised by Scotland and Northern Ireland, which have 100% accreditation, but England has only 60% accreditation. Does he also acknowledge the need for community-based infant feeding support, such as peer supporters and health visitors, because it cannot just stop at the hospital door?

**Matt Hancock:** I pay tribute to the hon. Lady's work as chair of the all-party parliamentary group on infant feeding and inequalities. She makes a strong and passionate case for breast feeding. I do not want to let the best be the enemy of the good. The proposal she cites is a proposal from the NHS. Of course, if other such services come forward, why should we be against it? I want to be clinically led in this area, but I very much support the thrust of her argument.

**Mike Hill (Hartlepool) (Lab):** The people of Hartlepool lost their A&E several years ago, and there is a powerful argument for the return of those services. On the subject of urgent care, what measures does the Secretary of State intend to take to help our overstretched ambulance services?

**Matt Hancock:** There is extra support for ambulance services in the plan, which is incredibly important. The targets and accountability measures for ambulances were reviewed this time last year, and we now need to make sure that the whole ambulance service gets the support it needs.

**Matthew Pennycook (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab):** Will the Secretary of State update the House on the review of the tariff process in relation to his statement? Specifically, what will be the impact on NHS trusts in London of changes to the market forces factor? I am concerned that those changes will mean that London loses out when it comes to the funding to be allocated in his plan.

**Matt Hancock:** Of course we want to make sure that the funding is allocated fairly, and we want to make sure that all the different factors that count towards and cause different costs in different parts of the country are properly taken into account, whether it is rurality or the market forces factor, so called because of the differences in relative costs. I will write to the hon. Gentleman with the full details in the coming days, but what matters here is to make sure that we are clearly led by the evidence.



## Migrant Crossings

7.8 pm

**The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Sajid Javid):** With permission, Mr. Speaker, I will make a statement on the number of migrants trying to cross the English channel in small boats and what the Government are doing in response.

Before that, I know the whole House will want to join me in sending our thoughts and prayers to those injured in the attack at Manchester Victoria station on new year's eve and to all those affected by that cruel and senseless act. I also thank the emergency services for their courageous response. Thankfully there were no fatalities, and I am pleased to say that all three victims have now been discharged from hospital.

Let me turn to the issue of the English channel migrant crossings. Over recent weeks, we saw a sharp increase in the number of migrants attempting to cross the channel to the UK in small boats. Over 500 migrants, mostly Iranian, attempted to travel to the UK on small vessels in 2018; 80% of them attempted this in the last three months of the year. About 40% of those involved in these attempts were either disrupted by French law enforcement or returned to France via French agencies. Since 1 January, a further 25 have attempted to cross the channel, but they were disrupted. In addition, just this morning, a dinghy was discovered along the Kent coast. A number of individuals are now going through UK immigration procedures and one person has been arrested.

I am sure the House will want to join me in thanking all the law enforcement agencies and all those involved in the response for their tireless efforts over Christmas and the new year. This includes those from the Border Force, immigration enforcement, the coastguard, the National Crime Agency and the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, many of whom I met in Dover last week. I would also like to thank our French law enforcement partners for their efforts to date, which have been collaborative, swift and thorough.

The English channel contains some of the busiest shipping lanes in the world, the weather conditions are often treacherous and the inflatable boats being used are woefully ill-equipped to make such dangerous journeys. The migrants who choose to make the trip are putting their lives in grave danger, and they can at times also create dangerous situations for our rescue services.

The reasons behind the increased crossings are diverse, and in many cases are outside our control. First, instability in regions such as the middle east and north Africa is driving people out of their homes in search of better lives in Europe. Secondly, organised crime groups are preying on and profiting from these vulnerable and often desperate people. They are falsely promising them safe crossings to the UK, even though the journey is one of the most hazardous and most dangerous possible. Thirdly, strengthened security at the French-UK border has meant that it has become increasingly difficult for stowaways illegally to enter the UK in trucks and cars, leading to more reckless attempts by boat.

I have been very clear that robust action is needed to protect people and our borders and to deter illegal migration. Over the festive period, I took the decision

to declare the situation a major incident. I appointed a dedicated gold command, and I stepped up the UK's response.

As part of joint action agreed with the French, I have ordered two UK Border Force boats to be redeployed from overseas to patrol the channel. That is in addition to the two already undertaking enhanced patrols in these waters. That will mean four Border Force cutters in total. That is in addition to the two coastal patrol vessels currently operating and the aerial surveillance of the area. Last week, I also requested additional help from the Ministry of Defence while we await the return of the two boats currently overseas. I am grateful that the Royal Navy has kindly offered the use of HMS Mersey, which started patrols on Friday.

I am continuing to discuss with the French what more they can do to stop people from attempting to make these crossings from France in the first place. I welcome the action plan that the French outlined just this Friday, which includes a commitment to increase surveillance and security in maritime areas, prevention campaigns in French coastal areas to stop people from setting off in a boat in the first place and a reinforced fight against smuggling gangs. I am pleased to say that the National Crime Agency has also redoubled its efforts. Just last week, two men were arrested on suspicion of the illegal movement of migrants.

In addition, we are doing important work in the home countries of would be migrants to reduce the factors that compel them to make these dangerous journeys in the first place. For example, we are helping to create jobs and build infrastructure, tackling modern slavery, providing education and delivering life-saving humanitarian assistance in response to conflicts and natural disasters. We are also doing important work to undermine organised crime groups, and we have committed £2.7 billion to the humanitarian response in Syria, making us the second biggest bilateral donor to the region. We are on track to resettle 20,000 refugees fleeing the conflict in Syria by 2020, as well as up to 3,000 of the most vulnerable people from the middle east and north Africa, including children at risk of exploitation and abuse. In 2017, the UK resettled more refugees under national resettlement schemes than any other EU state.

Let me reassure the House that I am continuing to monitor the issue of channel crossings daily. Right hon. and hon. Members will know that these crossings have provoked a debate, but I am not afraid to say that I think that some legitimate questions need to be asked. Why, for instance, are so many people choosing to cross the channel from France to the UK when France itself is a safe country? The widely accepted international principle is that those seeking asylum should claim it in the first safe country that they reach, be that France or elsewhere. Indeed, many asylum seekers do just that. Domestic legislation from 2004 clearly states that, if an individual travels through a safe third country and fails to claim asylum, it will be taken into account in assessing the credibility of their claim. Following these recent events, I have instructed my officials to look at how we can tighten this still further and ensure that these provisions are working effectively.

Britain has a proud tradition of welcoming and protecting asylum seekers and we have a long history of accepting economic migrants too—people like my very

[Sajid Javid]

own parents—but all these routes need to be safe and they need to be controlled, which getting in a rubber dinghy is not. That is why I will not accept these channel crossings as just a fact of life. Safeguarding lives and protecting the UK border are crucial Home Office priorities. While we have obligations to genuine asylum seekers, and we will uphold them, we will not stand by and allow reckless criminals to take advantage of vulnerable people. Encouraging people to cross the channel dangerously to come here is not an act of compassion, so I will continue to do all I can to stop these dangerous crossings. I commend this statement to the House.

7.16 pm

**Ms Diane Abbott** (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): I thank the Home Secretary for prior sight of his statement. Opposition Members join him in sending our thoughts and prayers to those injured in the attack at Manchester Victoria station, and we thank the emergency services for their courage.

Does the Home Secretary share my concern that we should be careful not to heighten a potentially toxic atmosphere on migration as the Brexit debate reaches its climax? However, the whole House agrees that the public deserve the assurance that our borders are secure. Nobody in this House believes that these crossings should be just a fact of life, not least because these desperate people are putting their lives in terrible danger. However, is he aware that his predecessor—the then Home Secretary, the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May)—took the decision in 2012 to scrap an aerial surveillance programme of the entire coastline, presumably because of the dictates of austerity? Does he accept that this decision, in the words of the then Security Minister, Dame Pauline Neville-Jones, left us “more naked than we would otherwise have been”, and that we are now scrambling to catch up by using the armed forces?

The Home Secretary knows that a little over 200 people arrived here crossing the channel in the entire final three months of last year. One migrant making that dangerous crossing is one too many, but does he appreciate that some people might think that describing this as a major incident is an overstatement, when we consider that, at the height of the Mediterranean crisis, Greece was seeing hundreds of people a day landing on its beaches?

The Home Secretary is correct to make the point about the risk to human life. We know that ruthless people smugglers put desperate people in unseaworthy craft, with no one on board who is any type of seaman, and they distribute fake lifejackets—and all this in the busiest shipping lanes in the world. These people smugglers are putting people's lives at risk for mere financial gain. However, does the Home Secretary accept that there can be no question of turning back asylum seekers who have reached British waters? That would be to put this country outside international law.

May I also remind the Home Secretary that in this country we operate under the rule of law? In this case, we are bound by the 1951 convention relating to the status of refugees. Does he accept that under the convention, to which we are a signatory, refugees have a right to seek asylum here? Taking the failure to claim in the first safe

country into account is one thing; claiming that it entirely nullifies the asylum claim is quite wrong. Refugees may have cultural, family or language reasons to claim in this country. Does he understand that it is not for him as Home Secretary, or anyone else, to claim that someone is not a genuine refugee without examining their case?

I welcome the increased co-operation with the French and the French action plan outlined on Friday. The important thing is not bellicose statements, but to stop people making dangerous crossings in the first place.

On the deployment of the Royal Navy, it seems to some that the Home Secretary was in some type of competition with the Defence Secretary as to who can appear more bellicose towards groups of Iranian refugees in their rubber dinghies. Serious questions arise, however. What will be the total cost to the Home Office of this deployment and how will it be funded? What will be the cost per person rescued? How many of the people smugglers have been prevented and detained? What of the operations that were taking place in the Mediterranean which have apparently now been suspended? Can the Home Secretary explain what contingency measures will be put in place, so as not to leave a gaping hole in existing co-ordinated rescue and interdiction efforts? I ask the Home Secretary please to tell the House that all of those issues have been considered and addressed or are in hand, otherwise unkind people might be forced to conclude that this major incident had little to do with a national crisis but more to do with positioning for the forthcoming Tory leadership battle.

**Sajid Javid:** I thank the right hon. Lady for her comments. Let me take this opportunity to wish her and her team a happy new year. She raised a number of points. Let me try to tackle them in order.

This has nothing to do with the Brexit debate or the legitimate debate taking place around Brexit on future immigration and related issues. This is all about protecting our borders and protecting human life: dealing with a situation here and now. That is all it should be about.

The right hon. Lady mentioned the previous Home Secretary, now the Prime Minister. In fact, when she was Home Secretary she did a great deal to deal with illegal migration, especially from France. For example, the work on the Sandhurst agreement was initiated by her as Home Secretary and then continued by her as Prime Minister. As I mentioned in my statement, there is some evidence that as it has become harder on some other routes for people to enter the UK by clandestine means—by ferry, train or car—they are turning to more dangerous routes. We need to address them as well.

The right hon. Lady questioned whether this should have been designated a major incident. Let me make two brief points. First, there has been a significant increase in the number of crossings using small boats across the English channel. As I said, there were 543 attempts in 2018. Not all were successful, with roughly 40% being disrupted. Some 80% took place in the past three months, particularly in December. There is a definite increasing trend. It needs to be dealt with as quickly as possible, so that it does not get completely out of control.

The right hon. Lady may think—maybe it is suggested through her question—that 543 attempted crossings is not very much relative to the total number of asylum

claims every year. The problem—this is the real issue—is that this is a very dangerous way to try to enter the UK. It is incredibly dangerous. This is one of the busiest sea lanes in the world. Often these people will travel at night with no lights and no lifejackets. They are taking an incredibly dangerous journey that puts at risk not just their lives but the lives of those who rescue them, such as the RNLI and others. It is the danger that that represents which requires us to take more action. It is one of the reasons, alongside protecting the border, why this is a major incident. I do not think anyone in this House would want to be in a position knowing that the Government have not done everything they reasonably can to protect human life as well as our borders.

I gently ask the right hon. Lady—I know she means well and that she values human life as much as anyone else in this House—please not to use this issue as some kind of political football. This is about protecting human life and protecting our borders.

Let me turn to the other questions the right hon. Lady raised. On the first safe country principle, she mentioned the 1951 refugee convention. The first safe country principle is well established and widely accepted in international law. The Prime Minister herself referred to it in her speech at the UN General Assembly last year. It is a principle indirectly supported through the new global compact for migration and the global compact for refugees. It is a principle legally accepted by the UNHCR when it explicitly recognised the concept in its paper that set out the legal precedent on the agreement between the EU and Turkey. Very importantly, it is a principle at the heart of the EU's own common European asylum system. In the 2005 procedures directive, it is explicitly stated that an asylum seeker should claim asylum in their first safe country, otherwise it can be declared inadmissible if it is claimed in another country. That is repeated in the 2004 qualification directive. It is also a principle that underpins the Dublin regulation. The whole point of the Dublin regulation is that if someone has passed through another EU safe country, it is expected that they claim asylum first there. It is a principle that I hope she would support, notwithstanding that it was also embedded in domestic legislation passed in 2004 by a Labour Government. I understand that she did not vote against that Act.

Lastly, the right hon. Lady asked me about the other activities in which the boats that I have asked to come back to the UK are involved. Those activities are very important. We will still be involved in international activities and humanitarian support. I believe we can balance both requirements domestically and internationally in the way we have set our plans. The Royal Navy is supporting while we fill the gap until those boats return.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle):** This is a very important statement, but can we please show some brevity? It was an important question and we wanted a very full answer, but it was much longer than I would have expected. So please, can we have brevity in both questions and answers?

**Mr Iain Duncan Smith** (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): My right hon. Friend is absolutely right to stress the safety and security of the people who try this most dangerous crossing. Given that, he is also

right to say that people should claim asylum in the first safe country they come to—France is clearly that country—and for one very good reason: if they do not do so they will live in squalor while they seek to get across the channel, putting their own lives at risk. Has the Home Secretary checked how long the people trying to cross the channel have spent in France without declaring themselves as asylum seekers?

**Sajid Javid:** I agree very much with my right hon. Friend. It is not always possible to get a definitive answer. Many people are using France as a transit country: in many cases, they have entered through another EU country. The principle is very important. Those who encourage people not to claim asylum in the first safe country are encouraging them to take this dangerous journey and they should reflect on that.

**Stuart C. McDonald** (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): I thank the Home Secretary for advance sight of the statement. I concur wholeheartedly with what both he and the shadow Home Secretary said in relation to the attack at Manchester's Victoria station.

Some 500 individuals have been so desperate as to risk an incredibly dangerous journey across the channel last year in what is probably better described as a human tragedy than a major incident. In response to the statement, let me say first that we must of course stop the organised crime gangs that encourage these perilous journeys. The Home Secretary mentioned two arrests, but how many people does he estimate are involved in facilitating these crossings, and does he anticipate further arrests and charges in the days ahead?

Secondly, we must above all protect lives. Will the Home Secretary confirm that that is the clear and unambiguous duty of all the ships being deployed to the channel? I share the shadow Home Secretary's concerns about the implications of withdrawing two ships from operations in the Mediterranean. Will the Home Secretary say a little more about what that means for what we are able to achieve there?

Thirdly, we must properly, fairly and independently consider each asylum claim made on arrival and treat everyone with dignity and respect. It is here, unfortunately, that the Home Secretary has caused most concern in recent days. Despite the more moderate language in his statement, he reportedly said that “real, genuine” asylum seekers would not make such crossings and spoke of a need

“to send a very strong message that you won't succeed”

in making it to UK shores. That approach is factually, legally and morally wrong. It is actually pretty insulting to the many refugees who have contributed to this country who, for a whole host of legitimate reasons, made their way here through other safe countries. As he knows, the success rate of asylum applications from Iranians is particularly high.

Will the Home Secretary retract those remarks and confirm that all asylum applications will be considered solely on the basis of the refugee convention and of whether the applicant is a refugee, without any thought of sending messages? Will he take a humane and compassionate approach to possible third-country removals instead of tightening laws? If he does not, he will simply prolong the misery.



**Sajid Javid:** Like the right hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott), the hon. Gentleman challenges me to explain why this is a major incident. Declaring something a major incident allows us to bring more focus, more control and more resources. It is a well-established procedure in government, and I hope the whole House can support it. Bringing in more resources allows us to protect more human life as well as to protect our borders. I am sure he agrees that if one life were lost in this situation, that would be one life too many.

Of course, if the vessels that are currently there, which have been joined by the Royal Navy vessel and are to be joined by other vessels, come across any situation in which any life is in danger in any way, their first duty is to protect life. However, that is not their sole duty; they also have a duty to protect the border. In this case, they are working with the technology and equipment they have, with the support of aerial surveillance and the co-operation of the French navy and French vessels, to protect the border. That includes returning people, in many cases to the French coast, with the help of the French authorities.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned my comments last week about genuine asylum seekers. I absolutely stand by those comments. Our job is to protect and help genuine asylum seekers. It should not be a shock to him that, sometimes, people who claim asylum are not genuine asylum seekers. If we are to do more to protect those who really deserve it, we should absolutely focus our resources on them. Those who could claim asylum in another safe country and have every opportunity to do so should be encouraged to do so.

**Sir Nicholas Soames** (Mid Sussex) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the calm and assured way in which he has dealt with this difficult matter. Is he satisfied that, throughout the camps and assembly areas they use in France, these poor people are made aware that if they come here by making this terrible crossing and they are not entitled to be here, they will be returned? That is very important.

My right hon. Friend has prised an offshore patrol vessel from the Royal Navy. The Navy has a lot of very underused assets called URNUs—university royal naval units—which have grossly underused Archer-class patrol vessels. May I suggest that if he needed more boats, he could easily have those vessels equipped with regular naval staff and used to great effect?

**Sajid Javid:** I thank my right hon. Friend for his suggestions. We are working closely with the Ministry of Defence. On his first point, we are sending, including via this statement, a very clear message: “If you have passed through a safe country”—that of course includes France—“we will seek to make your claim inadmissible, and you should think twice about taking that journey. Do not give your money to these people smugglers—these vile criminals—and do not take this dangerous journey. If you are seeking protection, seek protection in the first safe country that you can.”

**Yvette Cooper** (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): I would like the Home Secretary to clarify what he just said. Is he seriously saying that he wants to make all first claims of asylum in this country inadmissible if people travelled through another country first? He will

know that people often travel because they have family in this country and existing family reunion provisions do not work effectively, and that we are bound by international law. Is he seriously saying he wants to rip up our obligations under the refugee convention and international law? Does he realise the shame that his doing so would bring on our country?

**Sajid Javid:** Let me be clear with the right hon. Lady. I am not saying that at all. What I am saying is—[*Interruption.*] I am not saying that, and I will clarify. Every claim of course will be assessed on its own merits, but the point I am making is about the first safe country principle, which is well established. I mentioned in response to the shadow Home Secretary a number of international agreements. The concept has now been accepted by the UNHCR, and it is even in European rules, which apply to us through the common European asylum system. The principle is well established in the qualification directive and the asylum procedures directive, which are backed up by the Dublin regulation.

For example, articles 25 and 26 of the 2005 asylum procedures directive cover the principles of first safe country and inadmissibility of claims where people have travelled through safe countries. Indeed, the Asylum and Immigration (Treatment of Claimants, etc.) Act 2004, which is domestic legislation, clearly sets out that failure “to take advantage of a reasonable opportunity”

to claim asylum in a safe country shall be taken into account in assessing an individual’s credibility. That is an Act that the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) voted for.

**Mr Andrew Mitchell** (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): The heart-rending plight of those caught out in the channel, often having placed themselves in the hands of the modern-day equivalent of the slave trader, rightly worries us all, but surely the Home Secretary is right that, inevitably, nearly all of them will not be correctly classified as asylum seekers under the Dublin convention. Is it not clear that the closest possible co-operation with the French is required to ensure that these poor people do not end up on the high seas?

**Sajid Javid:** My right hon. Friend makes a number of good points, particularly on co-operation with the French. Thankfully, during the course of the last year in particular, we have had very good co-operation with the French, much of which was codified in the Sandhurst treaty. We are seeing good co-operation on this situation, including the announcement the French made on Friday. However, he is absolutely right that the more we can work with the French to stop these crossings in the first place, the better protection these people will have from the dangerous journey.

**Kate Green** (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): Taking something into account is not the same as seeking to make it inadmissible. Will the Home Secretary confirm which he means?

**Sajid Javid:** The two are consistent. They do not cancel each other out. One can take something into account because one seeks to make it inadmissible.

**Rehman Chishti** (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): The Home Secretary knows that I raised the issue of illegal migrants coming to Kent in November, when he



came before the Select Committee on Home Affairs. Then, there were around 100 individuals and 13 boats; in December, there were more than 95 individuals. He said there was a joint co-ordination centre with France that would resolve issues to a certain extent. Is he saying that joint co-ordination centre did not work, or were additional resources required?

I very much welcome the two additional cutters, which are coming from Gibraltar and Greece. When will they arrive and do what they need to do? Will their place be taken by our international counterparts? They, too, have a responsibility to ensure that those who would come in from north Africa and the Gulf are deterred from doing so in the first place.

**Sajid Javid:** My hon. Friend mentions the UK-France joint co-ordination centre now opened in Calais. It is not that it does not work—it makes an important contribution—but it is not enough on its own, and its work needed to be supplemented, which is why we have taken further action in recent weeks, including working much more closely with the French on disruptions. As I mentioned earlier, of all the crossings we know about, the French have successfully disrupted just over 40%. We need to step up law enforcement co-ordination—the French have recently made several arrests—and ensure better co-ordination of maritime patrols and shared intelligence, and that is exactly what we are doing.

**David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab):** Will the Home Secretary tell the House how many convictions of people traffickers there have been in the past 12 months and, given that intelligence-led policing is key to those convictions, what use the authorities have made of SIS II, Europol and—ultimately for bringing people to justice—Eurojust and the European arrest warrant?

**Sajid Javid:** Law enforcement work is an important part of this operation. Since April 2018, UK law enforcement authorities have disrupted 46 organised criminal gangs involved in people smuggling. In November 2018, two men were jailed for eight years each; in September 2018, seven members of an OCG were jailed with sentences totalling 48 years; and last February, two men were jailed for over nine years.

**Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con):** The Home Secretary was previously cautious about increasing the number of patrols because perversely it might have led to an increase in the number of attempts. Why has he changed his mind?

**Sajid Javid:** That is a very good question. It is important to keep this under constant review. Border Force has a limited number of vessels and a great deal of work to do, not just in the UK but as part of international operations. I asked for advice on redeployment, and once I had received it and was comfortable that it could meet both its international obligations and prioritise the UK border, I made a decision, and that is what was implemented.

**Sir Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD):** Rather than denigrating refugees fleeing the despicable Iranian regime for not claiming asylum elsewhere, will the Home Secretary tell the House how many asylum seekers we have been able to return to other EU countries

under the EU Dublin regulation in the last three years? Is he concerned that in the Brexit deal before the House there is no guarantee that the UK will retain that power?

**Sajid Javid:** The right hon. Gentleman should stop treating this as a political game; we are talking about people's lives. This Government, as much as any other before them, care about those people's lives. I have mentioned the aid we are providing in region, including the more than £2.7 billion—more than any other country—to help Syrian refugees, and our refugee resettlement programmes, which I know he supports. Under those, we resettled more refugees in 2017 than any other EU state. Rather than trying to score cheap political points, he should join us in trying to help these people.

**Damian Collins (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con):** I welcome the Home Secretary's statement and agree, as does the whole House, that our priority should be preventing these crossings in the first place. I welcome what he has said about the increase in surveillance, by air, on sea and on land in France. Nevertheless, this morning a vessel left France and landed in Dungeness, in my constituency, which, as he knows, is often a particularly treacherous part of the coast. What more needs to be done to prevent boats from slipping through the net? In this case, the vessel was detected by a local fishing craft, which alerted the authorities, and was not first spotted by the authorities themselves.

**Sajid Javid:** My hon. Friend refers to the events this morning in his constituency, and while I cannot say too much about that—it is an ongoing operation—he might know that an arrest has been made. He is absolutely right about doing more on detection, and that involves work with Border Force and the coastguard—now with the help of the Royal Navy—but also, very importantly, with the French authorities. Despite the news he has shared with us, we have seen a significant fall in the overall number of crossings in the last seven days. We cannot take too much from that, but we hope that the law enforcement and detection work being done is contributing to a reduction in the overall number of crossings.

**Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab):** I want to be clear that I agree about the need for clear border security, but what was lacking in the Secretary of State's statement was actual figures. He talked about attempts, but how many people have actually arrived here and claimed asylum in the three-month period? If he does not have those figures to hand, will he put them in the Library of the House, along with the numbers of people who came by other routes in the same period?

**Sajid Javid:** I am happy to share some figures with the right hon. Gentleman. In 2018, 543 people made the attempt to cross the channel, and 42% of them—227 people—were intercepted, meaning that 316 arrived in the UK, most of them in the last three months of the year.

**Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con):** Most of my constituents would welcome a clampdown on illegal asylum seeking and would regard it as outrageous that somebody can come to this country and claim asylum having travelled through one, two, three or many more

[Mr Philip Hollobone]

safe countries on the way. I for one, speaking on behalf of my constituents, would welcome the Government getting tough on this. Let us enforce the Dublin conventions and conduct joint maritime patrols with the French so that, when these people are caught mid-channel, they can be returned to French ports.

**Sajid Javid:** My hon. Friend makes an important point. I think most of our constituents across the country would agree with him. He mentioned joint patrols. We are working with the French—that work has been stepped up in recent weeks—to see what more we can do together, and the new co-ordination centre is certainly helping.

**Liz Saville Roberts** (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): Over Christmas, my colleague Assembly Member Leanne Wood was contacted by Robin Jenkins, a Welsh RNLI lifeboatman and a crew member on Sea Watch 3, which rescued 32 people, including women, children and a baby, off the coast of Malta on 22 December. The 15-metre vessel has now been in limbo at sea for 17 days, denied safe harbour throughout Mediterranean Europe. The British Government have so far refused direct support, despite requests and even though these people cannot claim asylum in any country because they are not allowed to land. Will the Home Secretary outline what he is doing to encourage EU member states, and of course UK territories and resources in the Mediterranean, to show common humanity to these people?

**Sajid Javid:** First, may I take this opportunity to thank all the members of the RNLI for their work, especially in recent weeks, in response to the increase in the number of crossings? As we all know, they are incredibly courageous volunteers who put their lives at risk, and I want to put on the record our gratitude for all their work.

The hon. Lady has raised a specific case. From what she has said, I am not sure whether it is a Home Office or Foreign Office case, but we are happy to take a further look.

**Jeremy Lefroy** (Stafford) (Con): I welcome the Home Secretary's announcement, but will he explain what co-operation the UK is giving to our European partners, not just in France, but in Italy, Greece, Spain and Malta, which have borne a heavy responsibility for rescuing and providing safe haven to refugees? Can we hear more about that, please?

**Sajid Javid:** I am happy to share further details with my hon. Friend. We are helping our European friends in several ways with the huge increase in the number of refugees and asylum seekers since 2015. As part of Operation Poseidon in the Aegean, our Border Force vessels and crew have been called out on more than 700 missions and saved more than 15,000 lives. We are also working closely with our friends in Greece, having provided personnel, advice and funding, and we will continue to work with our friends in Europe to see what more we can do.

**Stella Creasy** (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): I want to say that the most terrible thing about the Home Secretary's English channel photoshoot is his wilful misreading of decades of asylum legislation—legislation we were proud

of in this country—but actually the most terrible thing is that nothing he has said today will stop the traffickers, which is what we all want. There are 1,500 people sleeping rough tonight around Dunkirk and Calais, 250 of them children and unaccompanied minors. Between them, they speak 28 different languages. They are not just from Iran, but fleeing persecution in Yemen, Ethiopia and other countries around the world. There have been 972 human rights abuses reported in Calais, 244 of them involving police violence. The Home Secretary says that he is there with the French police when they take disruptive measures, but they are pouring bleach into the tents of the refugees. If the Home Secretary cares about these people, as he says he does, he will spend less time on Twitter talking to the alt-right and more time in Calais, working out how we can deal with this humanitarian crisis now.

**Sajid Javid:** I am afraid I do not accept the picture of France that the hon. Lady has painted. France is a good partner and it is a perfectly safe country, as are many other European countries. The hon. Lady should think very carefully about the fact that she is indirectly encouraging people to get into small boats and cross the channel, which will put more lives at risk. She should think very carefully about what she is saying and what she is encouraging.

**Maggie Throup** (Erewash) (Con): My right hon. Friend rightly described how dangerous the crossing is. What more is he doing to work with the authorities, not just in France but in other appropriate nations, to tackle the root cause of the problem so that these vulnerable people do not have to attempt the crossing in the first place?

**Sajid Javid:** I can tell my hon. Friend that much cross-governmental action is being taken, especially by the Department for International Development, to tackle some of the root causes of the increase in migration that we have been seeing across Europe. Central to that is the help for Syria and, more broadly, the middle east and parts of north Africa. As I have said, the United Kingdom has provided nearly £3 billion of humanitarian funding, which makes it the largest single donor to the region. We are helping with infrastructure and education, and providing other types of humanitarian support to try to prevent people from undertaking these dangerous journeys and working with people smugglers in the first place.

**Martin Docherty-Hughes** (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): It is good to see you in the Chair, Mr Deputy Speaker. A happy new year to you.

The Home Secretary has not been shy in trying to make their mark over the Christmas recess. Before the announcement of this migration emergency, they made headlines by commenting on the Government's intention of protecting the rights of persecuted Christians abroad. Many of those who are now taking to the boats and are in peril on the sea appear to be Christians from Iran. Does the Home Secretary see no contradiction between a commitment to protect those persecuted Christians abroad and telling them that there is no room at the inn in the UK?

**Sajid Javid:** I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman has been listening to what I have said about the Government's policy. We will continue to assess each

application, but it is a widely accepted principle that those who are fleeing persecution should claim asylum in the first safe country in which they arrive.

**Matt Warman** (Boston and Skegness) (Con): Such is the desperation and commitment of some refugees that they are even crossing the North sea and landing in small boats in Lincolnshire, in both East Lindsey and Boston. I pay tribute to the work of Lincolnshire police and the Border Force in dealing with that difficult and largely unpopulated coast, but does the Home Secretary agree that we should look not only at the real hotspots that have arisen very recently, but at the east coast of England?

**Sajid Javid:** I very much agree with my hon. Friend. As he will know—no doubt this is one of the reasons why he has rightly raised the issue—there was a landing on the coast of Lincolnshire in, I believe, December. That is being looked into closely, but he is right to say that we should look more widely than just the south-east coast.

**Thangam Debonnaire** (Bristol West) (Lab): This is a time of unprecedented global refugee crisis, and the vast majority of refugees end up in countries adjacent to their country of origin. Only a small minority come to this country. I agree with the Home Secretary that we want to protect and save lives, but will he please tell us how many border officers he has sent to Calais to process people who have a claim to family reunion, what he is doing to increase the number taken under the schemes for family resettlement—a safe and legal route that allows people to leave an overburdened country next to a country at war and come to this country—and what else he is doing to enable us to take our fair share of the world's responsibility for this global refugee crisis?

**Sajid Javid:** As I am sure the hon. Lady will know, we do a great deal. This Government, and successive previous Governments, have done much to help refugees across the world. We have the vulnerable children's and the vulnerable persons resettlement schemes, and we will work actively with our European partners to reunite families, particularly children. One of my first acts as Home Secretary last summer was to ensure that a new right to stay would be established for unaccompanied refugee children brought into the UK from Calais, to make it easier for them to do that. We will continue to meet our obligations on family reunion under the Dublin regulation.

Just a couple of months ago, alongside Canada and unlike many other countries, we were the first to help the former White Helmets who were facing certain death under Assad in Syria. We took more than 25 of them, along with their families—nearly 100 people—and gave them our protection, because that is in accordance with our values and the kind of country that we are.

**Chris Philp** (Croydon South) (Con): I welcome the Home Secretary's decisive action. Under the European Union's Dublin regulation, asylum seekers should claim asylum in the first safe country that they reach. I think Members on both sides of the House agree that we want to deter people from making this dangerous journey. Is not the best way of doing that to ensure that people who are intercepted in the English channel return to the

French shoreline where they embarked? That would remove the incentive to attempt the crossing in the first place.

**Sajid Javid:** We are working closely with our French friends in disrupting more of the boats to prevent them from setting out in the first place. When they are detected in French waters, they are returned to France. We are also working with France—using our own detection systems, which reach out into French waters—to establish whether we can return more. However, the safest option is not just to return boats but to concentrate on the criminal gangs that are feeding on these vulnerable people, and to ensure that no one sets out on this journey in the first place.

**Mr Paul Sweeney** (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): Is the Home Secretary aware of the United Kingdom's obligations under the 1951 United Nations convention relating to the status of refugees? Is he aware that there is no legal obligation for asylum seekers to seek asylum in the first safe country in which they arrive? That does not exist in the body of international law.

Would it not be a much better use of the Government's resources to be engaged on the French mainland, looking after some of the terribly abandoned unaccompanied minors? We promised to take in 3,000. What resources are being devoted to disrupting the incentive to cross the channel in an unsafe way by processing those people on the French coast and understanding their needs?

**Sajid Javid:** We remain absolutely committed to the 1951 convention, and that will not change. The principle that I have set out today, which is widely established and accepted, is the “first safe country” principle. It is in the interests of those asylum seekers not to continue what might be a dangerous journey, and to seek asylum in the first safe country.

The hon. Gentleman asked me whether I was aware of the convention. I wonder whether he is aware of the UK's own domestic laws and regulations of 2004, which represent the will of the House and which clearly underline the importance of claiming asylum in the first safe country.

**Mr Simon Clarke** (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Con): My constituents would certainly want me to say that anyone coming to the UK illegally from a safe country such as France should be returned. Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the most compelling purposes of the “first safe country” principle is precisely to prevent people from being incentivised to undertake these dangerous crossings?

**Sajid Javid:** I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. That goes to the heart of the issue, which is about protecting lives and protecting vulnerable people. If such people feel, for whatever reason—perhaps because they have been sold a false prospectus by people smugglers—that they cannot claim asylum in a safe country that they are in, they are ultimately the ones who will be hurt, and we must all do what we can to prevent that.

**Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): Does the Home Secretary not understand that it is precisely because these people are so desperate that they will take these risks and undertake these dangers to travel in



[Alison Thewliss]

boats to come to the UK? They are doing that precisely because the safe routes they ought to have failed. Safety is relative, and I certainly feel safest when with my family; how many of the people picked up in these boats have family in the UK, and how quickly will the Home Secretary be able to process their applications?

**Sajid Javid:** The hon. Lady suggests that these people are not able to seek asylum in other safe countries. France, for example, is a perfectly safe country, and if these people are fleeing persecution it is to their advantage that they claim asylum in the first safe country they are in and are not encouraged to take dangerous journeys.

**Matt Rodda** (Reading East) (Lab): My right hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) made an important point that the Home Secretary has so far ignored. When will he admit the telling impact of the Government's austerity policies on this serious problem, and when will he report to the House on what further resources are being allocated to help?

**Sajid Javid:** If the hon. Gentleman is suggesting that these boat crossings are taking place because of UK Government spending, that is plainly ridiculous.

**Emma Hardy** (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): How successful did the Home Secretary find exploiting the acts of desperate and vulnerable refugees, misrepresenting conventions and stirring up hatred in pursuit of his own personal ambition to become the next leader of the Conservative party?

**Sajid Javid:** Only serious questions deserve an answer.

**Luke Pollard** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): I have been to Calais and spoken to unaccompanied child refugees, and I have spoken to child refugees in Plymouth. They all want a better life, but this major

incident has left many of them in fear. When refugee stories like this appear in the media, there is a real fear that will rise, and indeed hate does rise and violence towards refugees in our country rises. So will the Home Secretary make it absolutely clear that nobody, especially those on the right—the far right in particular—should use this incident to stir up hate and division in our communities and to seek to give even more fear and a tougher time to people who have suffered so much already?

**Sajid Javid:** Of course there is no room for hate in this country, whether of refugees or migrants or for any other reason. That is why it is even more important that we have the protection we offer. That is a very precious thing, and we must make the system as fair as possible and do all we can to discourage people, in this case, from taking these dangerous journeys and working with people smugglers. That is the whole intention of the policy the Government have set in place, and I hope the hon. Gentleman can support it.

**Drew Hendry** (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): Lang may yer lum reek, Mr Deputy Speaker.

The Home Secretary pointed out earlier that there are diverse reasons why people might be attempting this treacherous journey across the channel, yet he refuses to acknowledge that some of them might be trying to be reunited with their families. What progress has been made in supporting the family reunion Bill brought forward by my hon. Friend the Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Angus Brendan MacNeil)?

**Sajid Javid:** The Dublin regulation takes account of family reunion and the need for it to be considered in successful and pending asylum applications in European member states. We take part in that actively because we can see that need. That is another reason why someone in France who wants to come to the UK for family connections need not take that treacherous journey; there is a system within the Dublin regulation for family reunion.



## Drones: Consultation Response

8.4 pm

### **The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling):**

I should like to make a statement about the action the Government are taking on our future policy on drones.

The disruption caused by drones to flights at Gatwick airport last month was deliberate, irresponsible and calculated, as well as illegal. It meant days of chaos and uncertainty for over 100,000 passengers at Christmas, one of the busiest times of the year. Carefully planned holidays were disrupted, long-expected reunions between friends and relatives missed. Families were forced to spend hours at an airport, not knowing if or when they would reach their destinations—completely unacceptable and utterly illegal. I pay tribute to all at Gatwick and other airports who worked very hard to make sure people did get away, albeit belatedly, for their Christmas breaks, and I thank all those in the defence world and the police who worked hard to get the airport back together again, and of course Sussex police are now leading the investigation into this criminal activity.

I am clear that, when caught, those responsible should face the maximum possible custodial sentence for this hugely irresponsible criminal act, and I want to assure the House that my Department is working extremely closely with airports, the Home Office, the Ministry of Defence, the Civil Aviation Authority and the police to make sure our national airports are fully prepared to manage any repeat of what was an unprecedented incident. I spoke personally to the heads of the major UK airports before Christmas, and later this week the aviation Minister, Baroness Sugg, will meet them again for an update on progress. In the meantime the Ministry of Defence remains on standby to deal with any further problems at Gatwick or any other airport if required.

This incident was a stark example of why we must continue to ensure drones are used safely and securely in the UK. Today I am publishing the outcome of our recent consultation, “Taking flight: the future of drones in the UK.” We received over 5,000 responses to that consultation reflecting a broad range of views. Those responses underlined the importance of balancing the UK’s world-leading position in aviation safety and security with supporting the development of this emerging industry. The Government are taking action to ensure that passengers can have confidence that their journeys will not be disrupted in future, aircraft can safely use our key transport hubs, and criminals misusing drones can be brought to justice.

The UK is where technology companies want to build their businesses, invest in innovation and use science and engineering to bring immense benefits to this country. Drones are at the forefront of these technological advances and are already being used in the UK to great effect. Our emergency search and rescue services use drones on a regular basis. Drones can also reduce risks for workers in hazardous sectors such as the oil and gas industries, and this technology is also driving more efficient ways of working in many other sectors, from delivering medicines to assisting with building work.

However, the Gatwick incident has reinforced the fact that it is crucial that our regulatory and enforcement regime keeps pace with rapid technological change.

We have already taken some big steps towards building a regulatory system for this new sector. It is already an offence to endanger aircraft. Drones must not be flown near people or property and have to be kept within visual line of sight. Commercial users are able to operate drones outside of these rules, but only when granted CAA permission after meeting strict safety conditions.

Education is also vital to ensure everyone understands the rules about drone use. That is why the CAA has been running its long-standing Dronesafe campaign and Dronecode guide—work that is helping to highlight these rules to the public. And on 30 July last year we introduced new measures that barred drones from flying above 400 feet and within 1 km of protected airport boundaries. In addition, we have introduced and passed legislation that will mean that from November all drone operators must register and all drone pilots complete a competency test.

However, we now intend to go further. Today’s measures set out the next steps needed to ensure that drones are used in a safe and secure way and that the industry is accountable. At the same time these steps will ensure that we harness the benefits that drones can bring to the UK economy.

A common theme in those 5,000 consultation responses was the importance of the enforcement of safety regulations. The Government share that view. The majority of drone users fly safely and responsibly, but we must ensure that the police have the right powers to deal with illegal use. We will therefore shortly be introducing new police powers. These include allowing the police to request evidence from drone users where there is reasonable suspicion of an offence being committed, as well as enabling the police to issue fixed penalty notices for minor drone offences. Those new powers will help to ensure effective enforcement of the rules. They will provide an immediate deterrent to those who might misuse drones or attempt to break the law.

My Department has been working closely with the Home Office on the legislative clauses that will deliver these changes. It is of course crucial that our national infrastructure, including airports and other sites such as prisons and energy plants, are also adequately protected to prevent incidents such as that at Gatwick. We must also ensure that the most up-to-date technology is available to detect, track and potentially disrupt drones that are being used illegally, so we have also consulted on the further use of counter-drone technology. Those consultation responses will now be used by the Home Office to develop an appropriate means of using that technology in the UK.

Of course, aviation and passenger safety is at the heart of everything we do. While airlines and airports welcomed our recent airport drone restriction measures, they also asked for the current airport rules to be amended in order to better protect the landing and take-off paths of aircraft. We have listened to those concerns, and we have been working with the CAA and NATS to develop the optimum exclusion zone that will help to meet those requirements. It is important to stress that any restriction zone would not have prevented a deliberate incident such as that at Gatwick. However, it is right that proportionate measures should be in place at airports to protect aircraft and to avoid potential conflict with legitimate drone activity. We will therefore introduce additional protections around airports, with

[Chris Grayling]

a particular focus on protected exclusion zones from runway ends, alongside increasing the current aerodrome traffic zone restrictions around airports. Drone pilots wishing to fly within these zones must do so only with permission from the aerodrome air traffic control. We will amend the Air Navigation Order 2016 to implement these changes.

I want to address some of the rather ill-judged comments that have been made by Labour Members. Let me remind them of three things. First, the event at Gatwick airport was a deliberate criminal act that can carry a sentence of life imprisonment. We can pass new laws until the cows come home, but that does not stop people breaking them, and the law is as tough as is necessary to punish the perpetrators of an attack such as this. Secondly, this was an entirely new type of challenge. It is noteworthy that, since the events at Gatwick, we have been approached by airports around the world for our advice on how to handle something similar. Thirdly, the issue was solved only by the smart and innovative use of new technology. For security reasons, I am not going to give the House details of how this was achieved, but I want to extend my thanks to the Ministry of Defence for moving rapidly to put a new kind of response into the field.

There is no question but that lessons have to be learned from what happened at Gatwick. Passengers have to be able to travel without fear of their trips being disrupted by malicious drone use. Airports must be prepared to deal with incidents of this type, and the police need the proper powers to deal with drone offences. We must also be ready to harness the opportunities and benefits that the safe use of drones can bring. The measures I have announced today in response to the consultation will take us forward on that front, and I commend this statement to the House.

8.12 pm

**Andy McDonald** (Middlesbrough) (Lab): I should like to thank the Secretary of State for giving me advance sight of half of his statement—that is a new trick, just giving me some of the pages—but I have to say to him: is that it? Announcing the end of a consultation exercise does not constitute action; nor does it go any way towards restoring confidence in his capabilities; nor does it go any way towards addressing the justified anger of the hundreds of thousands of passengers who had their travel plans thrown into chaos ahead of the festive season after the malicious and sustained drone attack at Gatwick airport. In fact, his statement serves only to highlight the damage that his dithering and delaying have caused.

It is not only Labour Members who are critical. Colonel Richard Kemp, a former intelligence chairman of the Cabinet's emergency Cobra committee, said:

“It is amazing that this kit”—

the kit to defeat drones—

“was not in place and that we have had to wait two days for it to be installed. This drone incident is hardly a surprise. They've been known about for years.”

And Lord Dannatt, the former head of the Army, said:

“By any analysis, the fiasco at Gatwick over the last few days has been a national embarrassment of near-biblical proportions. With most of Europe already sniggering at the United Kingdom over our Government's inept handling of Brexit, we did not need to add more lines to the pantomime script.”

Of course, right hon. and hon. Members will vividly recall the Secretary of State describing the ennoblement of General Dannatt as a “political gimmick” by the Labour party, only for him then to realise that the former Army chief was in fact ennobled by—you've guessed it—the Conservative party.

It is good to learn that the Government might finally listen to the advice of industry on extending drone exclusion zones around airports to some 5 km, but it is unfortunate that this advice was not considered sooner. It is also unfortunate that the drone incursion at Gatwick airport in July 2017 did not serve as a warning to the Secretary of State. He clearly learned no lessons from that incident, and he was totally negligent in failing to bring forward measures to better protect national infrastructure. The Government's approach to drones has been chaotic, and the industry clearly has no faith in his ability to deal with serious incidents. It was no surprise to learn from the media that, during the Gatwick incident, the Secretary of State was stripped of his command by the security services due to his inaction. An effective Transport Secretary would have taken decisive action once the threat was known and understood. Earlier and clearer direction from him would have given airports the confidence to invest in anti-drone technology. His prevarication has delayed investment in detection and prevention measures. Why did he not ensure that proposals were brought forward to universally license such technology for use at airports?

Labour has repeatedly warned Department for Transport Ministers over the last several years that they needed to take action on drones, yet nowhere near enough has been done. The drone consultation closed five months ago, yet the Gatwick fiasco still happened, and it is abundantly clear that the Department is totally distracted by having to deal with this Government's chaotic Brexit, including extending the duties of departmental staff to handing out blankets, sandwiches and hot drinks to lorry drivers who find themselves trapped on the M20. Following the Vehicle Technology and Aviation Bill, which fell before the last election, the Government have found the time to legislate on space flight and air travel organisers licences, as well as vehicle technology and lasers during this Parliament, but their failure to bring forward detailed plans on drones has had disastrous consequences.

It is frankly astonishing that there were no plans in place across the Government Departments to deal with a drone attack. Why was there no urgent, clear and effective response? The drones Bill will seemingly include powers for the police to enforce any new laws or regulations relating to drones. Greater police powers are welcome, but they are meaningless without more resources. What arrangements does the Secretary of State intend to set out to enable airports to act urgently in the event of a hostile drone incursion? What steps will he take to give confidence to airports that their actions will be permitted and lawful? Drone licensing and registration are not due to come in until November 2019. Should not the Secretary of State accelerate the introduction of such provisions in all circumstances? Developing drone technology presents huge public policy challenges that demand a sweeping, cross-departmental response across Government. My fear is that the rhetoric we have heard from the Government today is many miles away from reality, and is it not stark-staringly obvious that this Secretary of State is not up to the job?

**Chris Grayling:** The hon. Gentleman is right to say that the rhetoric we have heard today is many miles away from reality: his rhetoric! Let me restate the point that this was a crime. It was an illegal act, and it had nothing to do with the laws that are in place. Somebody deliberately decided to disrupt Gatwick airport. It was a crime that will carry a sentence of up to life imprisonment when that person is caught, and I put it to the House that that maximum penalty is, in my view, appropriate to the crime. This is not a question of the laws not being in place; it is a question of catching the person who did this, and Sussex police, amply supported by the Met and our security agencies, are working very hard to achieve that.

The hon. Gentleman's second point was about technology. Let me gently explain that the technology that was deployed with the help of the Ministry of Defence, for which we are grateful, to tackle the problem is new and unavailable elsewhere in the world. This country is at the forefront of developing systems that can combat this kind of issue, and a huge amount of work is ongoing to find out what is on the market and to assemble new kinds of systems, but there simply is not an off-the-shelf solution available to airports that they could buy tomorrow to provide protection against such attacks. A huge amount of work will now take place to ensure that that can happen, but he is simply ill-informed if he believes that there is some magic solution that was not put in place.

The third point is that other airports are now placing a huge amount of focus on ensuring that such things cannot happen again. Above all, however, we have put in place a mechanism to redeploy the MOD capability should such an event occur again. I hope that it does not, but we know how to deal with it if it happens again, and other airports around the world are coming to us asking, "What do we need to do?" That is the reality of what is happening, not the nonsense we have just heard from the Opposition spokesman.

**Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con):** As the Member of Parliament for Gatwick airport, I extend my thanks to everybody who worked so hard on 19 and 20 December to mitigate the deliberate criminal act that the Secretary of State correctly identified. One of my concerns is that the Ministry of Defence was not brought in until some 18 hours after the incident started on the Wednesday evening, so will the Secretary of State assure me that the deployment of the military technology will be more rapid if further such attacks are forthcoming?

**Chris Grayling:** I am grateful for the opportunity to reiterate my thanks to all those in and around Gatwick who worked so hard at an extremely difficult time for the airport. As for the deployment of the technology, the first thing to say is that it was not immediately apparent that we were dealing with anything more than irresponsible drone usage close to an airport, which has happened many times over the past few years. By the time it became clear that this was a malicious attack, the Government machine and the Ministry of Defence moved as quickly as possible to deploy a new kind of response to deal with the issue. Clear protocols are now in place that would enable the system to be deployed quickly, but I hope that that will not have to happen again.

**Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP):** I thank the Secretary of State for sharing the parts of the statement he felt like sharing in advance. He was previously warned about the need for tougher legislation by my predecessor as Scottish National party spokesman, my hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry), the shadow Minister, by myself and by the British Airline Pilots' Association, so why did he ignore those warnings and delay legislating in this area? What new evidence has actually emerged from the consultation confirming the need for additional enforcement powers, other than the blatant reaction to the Gatwick incident? How many of the 5,000 responses to the consultation related to enforcement?

How much was spent on overtime over the holiday period to get the consultation response document ready for the first day back so that the Secretary of State could pretend that he is suddenly in charge? How did the Government come up with a 400 feet-high and 1 km-wide exclusion zone? Using two different methods of measurement is a complete recipe for confusion. What consultation was undertaken at that time? What was BALPA's view? What was the view of the Civil Aviation Authority and NATS when the previous exclusion zone was proposed? How has the Secretary of State now suddenly arrived at a 5 km exclusion zone? Why did the Government not meet the stated target of a draft Bill by summer 2018? What updates on that lack of progress did they ever give to Parliament?

Given that legislation regarding the use and deployment of drones is reserved to Westminster, what support will the UK Government offer to Scottish airports to allow them to comply with any changes? Will that include financial support? The Secretary of State mentioned that the Home Office is legislating for and developing the appropriate means of using the new technology, so which is the lead Department? Will all the legislation come in one new Bill? How do we know that the planned timetable will be met?

Under this Secretary of State's watch, we have had the east coast mainline bail-out, the Northern rail fiasco, the Thameslink rail fiasco, delays to High Speed 2, contracts awarded to Carillion, and a ferry contract awarded to a company with no ferries. Today, his Department could only muster 89 lorries out of a planned 150 for a pretend no-deal scenario planning exercise. When we factor in the drone legislation fiasco, when is he going to move aside?

**Chris Grayling:** Well, it is difficult to tell whether we got more nonsense today from the SNP or from Labour. The hon. Gentleman appears not to have noticed that we legislated last summer to tighten up the rules around drones. He asked whether we had been working overtime over the Christmas period. I have to say that the consultation response was finished before Christmas, work on draft clauses for the drones Bill is substantially completed, and we have now brought forward this, which was well prepared over many months, so that question was nonsense as well.

The hon. Gentleman talked about the approach to the exclusion zone around airports. We judge that it is necessary to provide as much protection as possible to the flight path into and out of an airport, which is why we end up with something that looks more like the Transport for London sign, with bits sticking out either



[Chris Grayling]

side to provide extra protection for the approach and landing areas, than a pure circle around the airport. As for Scottish airports, they have been a part of the discussions that I had over the Christmas period and will be a part of the discussions that Baroness Sugg will be having later this week.

**Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): I fully accept what the Secretary of State says about the adequacy of the laws and the deterrent effect of potential sentences. However, it is possible for anybody to go on the internet and buy a simple but substantial device that they could use not to try and close an airport, as in this case, but to fly into the engine intakes of a plane that was landing or taking off. What can he tell us about not only registration but, more importantly, the capability to prevent such an attack maliciously being mounted by someone who might well belong to a jihadist organisation and who will not be deterred by death, let alone by long prison sentences?

**Chris Grayling:** That is a serious point that we and the security services have been working on. We have been in conversation with airports about it for some considerable time, and two things are happening on that front. First, this country has moved to introduce a drone registration scheme, which will start later this year. Secondly, and more significantly, the European Aviation Safety Agency is moving towards a requirement, which I expect to be introduced within two to three years, for all drones to contain technology that allows them to be tracked and potentially to be stopped in critical areas.

**Lilian Greenwood** (Nottingham South) (Lab): I welcome the Secretary of State's statement, but I wonder whether it closes the gate after the horse has bolted. BALPA has been warning about the rise in irresponsible use of drones close to aircraft and airports for years. An incident of this sort was surely foreseeable, and I am unsure whether the Secretary of State was saying that he was satisfied that the airport had proper and adequate plans to respond to such a risk. However, changes to regulations will mean nothing if we are unable to stop, catch and prosecute offenders. If such a crime is perpetrated in the future, what assurances can he give the House that it could not lead to further such disruption to services?

**Chris Grayling:** On the hon. Lady's point about BALPA, we legislated last summer to make certain activities around airports illegal. That included the height at which a drone can be flown and the restricted area around an airport within which a drone could not be flown. She asked what would happen in a future incident. Right now, we have protocols in place to allow us to deploy the same equipment as was used at Gatwick if there were to be a repeat attack. The airline industry and the airport industry are working intensively to try to assemble mechanisms that could prevent such an attack from happening again. The reality is that there is not, and has not been, an off-the-shelf solution. That is now being worked on—the technology is being assembled and systems are being integrated—but there is no simple, off-the-peg solution available right now, beyond the capability that we have in place to protect UK airports.

**Justine Greening** (Putney) (Con): In my constituency, which is under the Heathrow flight path, there are significant concerns about aircraft safety. I have written to the Secretary of State in the past, prior to the incident, about my concerns over drones. Does he recognise that far less attention is paid to mitigating risk outside airports than inside them? Does he agree that it is sheer folly to get on with expanding Heathrow and increasing the threat to communities such as mine, which will have more flights going over them, while this clear risk continues? Should we not seriously consider whether that is a sensible approach to take over such a densely populated area, when, as he says, the technology to provide greater safety simply does not exist at scale?

**Chris Grayling:** I know how strongly my right hon. Friend feels about the matter. Of course, the same issue would arise whether expansion took place at Gatwick, Stansted or Heathrow. The reality is that Heathrow has been ahead of most other airports in providing protection against drones, but even Heathrow has not had the perfect solution. That is why the systems that we now have in place could be deployed at Heathrow at short notice to provide protection for the airport.

**John Spellar** (Warley) (Lab): I think it was Peel who said that the absence of crime, not the apprehension of criminals, was the test of a good force. What the hundreds of thousands of travellers wanted was for the disruption to be stopped. May I ask some very specific questions? Were there contingency plans already agreed with the MOD and the Home Office to protect our airports from drone incidents and others? If not, why not? If there were such plans, why did they not work? Were they not activated in time because of dithering, and was that the fault of the Secretary of State's Department, the Ministry of Defence or the Home Office—or, indeed, the Cabinet Office and the Cabinet Secretary in No. 10? Which is it?

**Chris Grayling:** As we are hearing from around the world, protections against such a deliberate and disruptive attack are few and far between. The reality is that the Government and different Departments, including the MOD, moved very quickly to assemble a response of a different kind from any previous one, and they did so in a way that is now being looked at very carefully around the world.

**Mrs Maria Miller** (Basingstoke) (Con): My right hon. Friend is absolutely right that what we saw at Gatwick was criminal activity, and I welcome the actions that he has taken. My constituents are surrounded by airports at Southampton, Farnborough, Lasham and the Odiham RAF base. What discussions has my right hon. Friend had with these smaller airports, which have real challenges when it comes to taking measures to protect themselves from such malicious attacks? As my right hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Justine Greening) has said, such attacks threaten not only safety in the air, but residents on the ground.

**Chris Grayling:** That is why the measures we introduced last summer—to make it illegal to fly a drone close to an airport and to put restrictions on the height above which one can fly a drone—were applicable to the situation in most of the drone incidents that have occurred, namely irresponsible usage close to an airport. There were 97 such incidents last year. We will be sharing the



experience of Gatwick, and indeed the technological developments, with airports such as Southampton. Such airports may want to take steps similar to those taken by bigger airports to protect themselves. As I say, this is an emerging technology.

**Jamie Stone** (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): What happened at Gatwick was, as the House knows, pretty damned scary. Wherever we travel in the world, passengers have an equal right to confidence and safe travel. Let us hope that we in the UK get the legislative framework right and work out how to take down such drones if they are hostile. I suggest that it would be in the best interests of travellers all over the world for us to share our knowledge, and perhaps to work towards some sort of international treaty governing the use, administration and stamping out of drones when they are in bad use.

**Chris Grayling:** I absolutely agree with that. We are already seeking to share our knowledge and experience, and I expect it is something that the International Civil Aviation Organisation will also want to pick up on. *[Interruption.]* Once again, the shadow Minister is rabbiting on from a sedentary position about EASA. It is Government policy to remain part of EASA, if we can, because in areas such as international aviation safety, we believe it is sensible to work internationally across borders.

**Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): The oldest commercial airport in the country is in Shoreham, in my constituency. This problem affects not just the large commercial airports, but the smaller ones too. Sussex police were greatly stretched when the incident happened, and I know that they greatly welcomed the offers of help from around the country, but there was concern about confusion over the lead Department. Was it Transport or the Home Office? Of course, later the Ministry of Defence was brought in as well. What assurances can the Secretary of State give that in future there will be a much better immediate, co-ordinated response?

The Secretary of State has spoken about the need to legislate, and about registering drones. The trouble is that most of them come in from China and, increasingly, a lot of them can be DIY built. The people who do that do not register, and they have no regard for regulations. Those drones will certainly not carry devices that make it possible to disable them, to ensure that they are not harmful near airports. What is he doing about that?

**Chris Grayling:** That is precisely why the technology becomes so important: for all the requirements that one puts into law, including around the technology that goes into drones, ultimately if people choose to act in a deliberate, disruptive and illegal way, the technology needs to be there to stop them. In respect of responsibility, the gold command was Sussex police, supported by the Metropolitan police and the security services. In Government, my Department took the lead.

**Drew Hendry** (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): The document to which the Secretary of State referred is called "Taking Flight", but is it not true that his Government have taken flight over this issue? This is not a new issue that has suddenly arrived: BALPA has been arguing for greater protection for years.

Indeed, almost three years ago I raised this issue with the then Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Mr Goodwill), when I said, "we have the current issue of drones near aircraft, which needs to be addressed in an air strategy. I hope that the Minister will do something about that before there is a critical problem."—*[Official Report, 20 April 2016; Vol. 608, c. 357WH.]*

The Minister of State said in that debate that he was "wise enough not to stray into"—*[Official Report, 20 April 2016; Vol. 608, c. 361WH.]* those issues. Is it still wise not to have not done anything for more than three years?

**Chris Grayling:** It might be if we had not, but of course we legislated last year.

**James Cartledge** (South Suffolk) (Con): Just prior to Christmas, I held a rural crime summit in Lavenham in my constituency. A key issue raised was hare coursing. I was pleased to learn that Suffolk constabulary had purchased a drone, which will be used to gather intelligence and will greatly enable us to fight back against this real menace in rural areas. Does the Secretary of State agree that although the incident with drones that we are discussing was criminal, the technology offers great potential for fighting back against criminality, and in particular those crimes with which we have historically struggled to deal?

**Chris Grayling:** I quite agree, which is why the strategy is about not only meeting the challenge of the careless, illegal or inappropriate use of drones but setting a direction to ensure that we allow the kind of usage that my hon. Friend talks about. As well as the inspection of infrastructure and policing, there are a whole variety of other ways in which drones can be a positive for our society.

**Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab): The Secretary of State is right that what we are discussing was a crime, but it was an entirely foreseeable crime. I, too, asked the previous aviation Minister about this issue two and a half years ago. Is the truth not that these matters really should be the responsibility of the Ministry of Defence, because the consequences of bringing down a civil airliner of this kind are so huge? It may or may not have been the Secretary of State's fault, but it was beyond the competence of his Department. It is far too serious to be dealt with by the Department for Transport.

**Chris Grayling:** I do not think it is a question of one Department or another: we have to work as a team. The truth is that the Ministry of Defence has and did have a really important role. The Home Office has a really important role in enforcement and licensing. The Department for Transport manages the use of airspace. It is a policy area in which the Government need to work as a team. My view is that the response, which brought three Departments together, was the right approach.

**Bill Grant** (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Con): In my 30 years in the fire service, I attended two major aircraft incidents, one of which resulted in multiple fatalities. The whole House and the nation can be grateful for the actions taken at Gatwick airport, where there was no loss of life and no loss of aircraft. Despite the chaos for the travelling public, in the circumstances it has to be

[Bill Grant]

measured as good that there was no loss of aircraft and no loss of life. In the light of the events at Gatwick, what discussions has my right hon. Friend had with airport operators throughout the United Kingdom about mitigating or preventing the malicious incursion of drones into operational airspace? We must bear in mind that those intent on bringing chaos and death to the air-travelling public will not respect exclusion zones, so on their own exclusion zones will not stop the drones.

**Chris Grayling:** That is the central point: we could have done everything imaginable in legal terms, but if somebody is determined to cause an attack of this kind, they will do so. It is now very much about understanding what technology can make a difference. In technological terms, this was very much a learning exercise, because there simply was not an off-the-shelf system available to deal with it. It took a lot of effort to work out what competencies were there and to assemble them in a way that could work. It was the first time that had been done anywhere in the world. We now understand more clearly how to deal with an attack such as this one, and others will have learned from it so that the kind of terrible events that my hon. Friend mentioned can never happen in such a situation.

**Luke Pollard** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): I declare an interest: my boyfriend was one of those people who were supposed to land at Gatwick. Although he landed a few days later, he did so safely, and that was appreciated.

It is right that technological solutions must keep pace with the threats that we face. What consideration has the Secretary of State given to live-update geofencing to make sure that if people are accidentally flying a drone near a restricted airspace—around not only airports but defence installations—that drone will not be able to access that airspace and that it can be live-updated by the authorities to make sure that drones do not enter any restricted airspace?

**Chris Grayling:** This is one of the areas that is currently being worked on at a European level. We are working with EASA on this and we expect regulations to come forward during the implementation period that we would want to be part of in any case, because these technologies are made not just in one country. The point about geofencing is an important one, as is the ability to include technology that enables us to track a drone and to know which drone it is. My hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) made the very real point that a number of these machines are assembled by amateurs on a fair scale, which is why we need the technology to take them down as well.

**Jeremy Lefroy** (Stafford) (Con): Who is responsible for inspecting airfields and airports for their security in matters such as this? Can we have a report in a few weeks' time—I appreciate that not everything can be disclosed—that says that all major airports in the country have been inspected and have put in place the right measures to prevent or deter an incident such as that at Gatwick?

**Chris Grayling:** Most immediately, the security at the airport is the responsibility of the owners themselves, supported by my Department and by the national security agencies. Those discussions are already happening—they were happening within a matter of hours of the incident at Gatwick. I can assure the House that every airport is now taking active steps to look at what measures it can put in place, but the reality is that these are experimental systems and are not universally available yet. It will take a bit of time for other airports to get them in place. In the meantime, the Ministry of Defence capability is there if necessary.

**Mrs Madeleine Moon** (Bridgend) (Lab): I urge the Secretary of State to look at the reports by the BBC's Quentin Somerville who shows how drone attacks, using commercially available drones, have been using chemicals and explosive devices on the battlefields of Mosul. In many respects, we were fortunate—darn lucky—in that we had a wake-up call at Gatwick. May I suggest that the Secretary of State talks not only to the MOD but to NATO, where there is huge expertise about the use on the battlefield of drones, which can be bought commercially and used here by terrorists who want to attack us?

**Chris Grayling:** I can assure the hon. Lady that we are very well aware of that and, indeed, the security services have been providing advice to airports about this for some considerable time. They have provided advice specifically based on some of those experiences in the middle east, and this is something on which we work with them continuously.

**Nic Dakin** (Scunthorpe) (Lab): There was some speculation in the press at the time that there may not have been any drones involved in this incident. Will the Secretary of State confirm how many malicious drones brought all this destruction to Gatwick, and can he tell us, in the light of this experience, what he is doing to make sure that his Department supports airports around the country in getting their contingency plans updated?

**Chris Grayling:** The report of there being no drone was a misspeak by a police officer. I have spoken to the chief constable since and to the airport chief executive—we talk regularly—and there is no question but that there was a drone or a small number of drones. Nobody is quite sure whether it was one, two or three, but it certainly was not a large number—probably only one. It made a return on a regular basis on many occasions just as the airport was about to reopen. On contingency work, I spoke to the operators of all the major airports on the day after this happened. Within a short period of time, after we understood what the issue was, police around the country were carrying out additional patrols around those airports. We have had regular discussions since. Baroness Sugg is holding a further meeting with them in a few days' time to get an update on their plans. All of them have been briefed that we can provide the kind of support that the MOD provided at Gatwick if something happens there.

**Christine Jardine** (Edinburgh West) (LD): I was one of those tens of thousands of people whose journey was disrupted that day. After the initial relief that it had been rearranged in such an orderly way for me to get home to Edinburgh, which also had to cope with the knock-on effect, I was aghast that one of our major

airports could be so vulnerable and that it took so long to get it back in play. That is an issue which, with respect, the Secretary of State will have to pay attention to and address. He said a few minutes ago that these incidents are few and far between, but, with respect, it would take only one to create a catastrophe and there has been an undermining of public confidence in the safety at our airports. Will he bring forward some report, some work to reassure the public, and, without in any way undermining security, detail how our passengers will be protected in our airports?

**Chris Grayling:** I am happy to do that to some degree, but the reality is that the response by the Ministry of Defence included some highly sensitive, confidential, secure equipment. That equipment is there to be deployed at other airports at short notice, should the need arise. I give the hon. Lady an undertaking that we are talking to all those airports about what additional measures they can put in place and are already putting in place to ensure that this cannot happen again. Until now, all the experience of drone incidents around the world has been of irresponsible drone usage. This is the first time that a drone has been deliberately used in a very clever way over a sustained period of time to disrupt an airport. Airports now need to ensure that they are ready to make sure that that cannot happen again.

**Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP):** I hope that it comes as no surprise to the Secretary of State that I am now the fourth member of the Defence Committee to rise. It comes as no surprise to the four members of that Select Committee present in this Chamber that this situation has arisen and that nothing was planned to deal with the consequences other than calling the Ministry of Defence, whose Ministers, I am disappointed to say, are not also on the Front Bench.

As a constituency MP, like many others here with airports within distance of their constituencies, I wonder whether the Secretary of State can give some assurances to my constituents, specifically in Whitecrock in the burgh of Clydebank. Does the Secretary of State recognise that disruptive technology is not new?

With all due respect to my hon. Friends and colleagues who were disrupted during the travel episode, this is also not just about the traveller. It is about the person living on the ground, if a tragic event should bring down a liner on top of a community represented by any of us. Fundamentally, this is not just about airports or aeroplanes. What should happen, as the Chair of the Select Committee himself asked, if someone should use a drone to attack a piece of infrastructure, whether it be an oil refinery or rig, or a large drone hits the front of a high-speed intercity train? The Secretary of State must recognise the consequences of this situation and the impact on people's lives if nothing is done about it.

**Chris Grayling:** Of course. Many people around the world are trying to find the perfect anti-drone solutions but, as Gatwick airport discovered, the reality is that those technologies are still embryonic. We now have in place an assembly of systems that will enable us to deal with an incident such as this again, but there is a lot of work to be done and a lot of work is being done.

## Leaving the EU: Tobacco Products and Public Health

8.47 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Steve Brine):** Happy new year, Mr Deputy Speaker.

I beg to move,

That the draft Tobacco Products and Nicotine Inhaling Products (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2018, which were laid before this House on 1 November, be approved.

Smoking causes 78,000 deaths a year in England, accounting for 16% of all deaths annually. The United Kingdom is a global leader in tobacco control and the Government are committed to ensuring that we remain so after we leave the European Union. As hon. Members know, the Government have negotiated a deal with the EU and are in the process of taking it through Parliament. As has been much discussed, the deal is designed to secure a smooth and orderly exit from the EU. At the same time, it is of course the job of a responsible Government—I am pleased to say that the shadow Leader of the House is listening intently—to prepare for all possible scenarios. We are committed to ensuring that our legislation and policy function effectively in the event of no deal. It is for this scenario that these regulations have been laid. If the UK reaches a deal with the EU, the Department will revoke or amend this instrument to reflect that agreement.

This instrument will ensure that the UK domestic legislation that implements the two main pieces of EU tobacco legislation—the tobacco products directive and the tobacco advertising directive—continue to function effectively after exit day at the end of March. The instrument also amends and revokes some EU tertiary legislation that will no longer apply to the UK after our withdrawal. The amendments and revocations are being made under the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 and are necessary in order to correct deficiencies in the UK and EU legislation in the event of no deal. The primary purpose of this instrument is to ensure that tobacco control legislation continues to function effectively after exit day. These proposed amendments are critical to ensure that there is minimal disruption to tobacco control if we do not reach a deal with the European Union.

This instrument introduces three main changes. First, in the event of no deal, the UK will need to develop its own domestic notification systems for companies that wish to sell tobacco products and e-cigarettes on the UK market. The notification process is essential for ensuring that companies are complying with legislation on product standards. Public Health England and the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency have already commenced work to ensure that domestic notification systems are in place and functional by exit day.

Secondly, in the event of no deal, the UK will not hold copyright to the EU library of picture warnings for tobacco products. Requiring the industry to continue to use these pictures would breach copyright law. Picture warnings are a key part of tobacco control, and it is therefore extremely important that we continue to require the inclusion of graphic picture warnings on tobacco products. The UK has therefore recently signed an



[Steve Brine]

agreement with the Australian Government to obtain their picture warnings free of cost—who knew, Madam Deputy Speaker? This agreement covers all copyright issues. I am very grateful to the Australian Government for their assistance in this matter. Action on Smoking and Health supports the proposals on notification systems and on the picture warnings as

“pragmatic and practical, minimising the amount of additional work involved if there were to be a no deal Brexit.”

Thirdly, this instrument proposes a transfer of powers. Currently, the Commission holds a range of powers under the tobacco products directive that enable it to respond to emerging threats, changing safety and quality standards, and technological advances. This instrument transfers these powers from the Commission to the Secretary of State. It should be noted that all powers in this category relate to technical, scientific and administrative adjustments that may be necessary to respond to changing circumstances in this space.

This instrument will have some impact on the tobacco and e-cigarette industry—there is no getting away from that. My Department ran a short technical consultation in October to seek feedback on the practical issues that will affect the industry in a no-deal situation. It focused on picture warnings and the notification process that I have outlined. We received 32 responses and have welcomed practical feedback on the issues highlighted in the consultation. Tobacco control stakeholders expressed support for the continued use of picture warnings as an effective way of stopping people smoking. They also showed support for the proposals to amend the notification system for e-cigarette and tobacco products as a means of harm reduction. The tobacco industry raised concerns around the timing of implementation and cost, primarily in relation to the changes to picture warnings. The Department has consulted with external experts who confirmed that the timescale for industry to implement these changes would be difficult but certainly manageable. To support industry with these changes, the Department intends to publish detailed guidance later this month.

Let me say a word on the devolved Administrations. It is important to note that the DAs have provided their consent for the elements of the instrument that are considered to be devolved. Furthermore, we have engaged positively with them throughout the development of this instrument. This ongoing engagement has been warmly welcomed. I want to place that on the record for our friends in the devolved Administrations.

In conclusion—

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): Will the Minister give way?

**Steve Brine:** In conclusion, Madam Deputy Speaker, taking my lead from your look—Members will have a chance to contribute—this instrument constitutes a necessary measure to ensure that our tobacco control regulations continue to work effectively after exit day. I should, however, emphasise that, due to the instrument being made under the withdrawal Act, the scope of the amendments in the instrument is limited to achieving that objective. Therefore, at an appropriate point in the future, the Department will review where the UK’s exit

from the EU offers us opportunities to reappraise current regulation to ensure that we continue to protect the nation’s health. That is timely on this day of all days, when we have published our long-term plan.

I urge Members to support the instrument, to ensure the continuation of effective tobacco control and harm reduction. I commend the regulations to the House.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** I apologise to the Minister for my moment of inattention a minute ago. It was not inattention to what he was saying; it was that I had happened to look at the statutory instrument before us, which for the first time in parliamentary history is illustrated. The illustrations are shocking. Having listened carefully to what the Minister said, I was making a mental note to ensure that every teenager I know sees these illustrations. It is not for me to make any value judgment on whether one should smoke, vape or otherwise. The Minister has done that very well.

8.56 pm

**Mrs Sharon Hodgson** (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): It is a pleasure to be here on the first day back to discuss these interesting and colourfully illustrated amendment regulations on tobacco products and nicotine inhaling products, not tucked away in a Committee Room but on the Floor of the House.

As I have said previously on EU exit secondary legislation, I still strongly hope that we leave with a deal and that all these SIs will have been for naught. I understand that, as a matter of contingency planning, it is only right that we discuss these changes as a just-in-case measure. However, I have to say again that if a no-deal scenario was ruled out once and for all, none of this would be necessary, saving vital taxpayers’ money that could have been better spent elsewhere. As I understand it, these no-deal SIs run to around 900, so that be a substantial sum of money. But here we are. The Minister has already set out what these regulations mean, so I will not repeat any of that.

Smoking rates have declined. However, it is estimated that around 6.1 million adults in the UK still smoke. I hope that they were listening to your comments, Madam Deputy Speaker, and that we all show those awful images to as many people—young and old—as possible, because it is never too late to quit. Hospital admissions attributable to smoking increased by 2% in 2016-17 compared with the previous year, and last year we also saw a small increase in the number of women smoking during pregnancy.

Those figures are not surprising when coupled with the fact that £96 million has been cut from the public health budget this financial year alone, adding up to £800 million by 2021. That means cuts to vital public health services, which both the Minister and I are passionate about, including smoking cessation services. The Government must reverse these public health budget cuts if they are serious about reducing smoking rates. It is a shame that today the Secretary of State missed yet another opportunity to do that, in his statement on the NHS 10-year plan. There was no reversal or any new money that I could see for smoking cessation services or public health services. He did, however, maintain that prevention was at the forefront of the Department’s forward view, which was welcome. If that is the case, the



high standards for the safety and quality of tobacco and nicotine products must be maintained or even improved if the UK leaves the EU without a deal.

With that in mind, I have a few questions about the regulations. Will they have any impact on the current advice on e-cigarettes? Will the Government be undertaking a review of e-cigarette regulations to ensure that they are fit for purpose and encourage their use by smokers to quit smoking, while also discouraging uptake by young people? More generally, will the amendments allow for regular reviews and updates of the health warnings?

That brings me to the picture warnings on cigarette packets—anyone who wants to see the new ones can find them at the back of the draft regulations. They replace a number of unappealing photographs that we currently use with new photographs, which are under copyright by either the Commonwealth of Australia or Professor Laurence J. Walsh of the University of Queensland. I am sure that this is a short-term fix, but could the Minister please elaborate, and provide some clarity, on what agreement has been reached with the Australian Government, or indeed with Professor Walsh, on using the photographs? In what form was the agreement made, what does it cover, and how and to what extent does it affect the rights of the copyright owners? What payment, if any, will the Australian Government or Professor Walsh be entitled to as a result? What conditions and constraints will there be on UK businesses using these photographs? What about current packaging that uses the old images? I hope that some contingency has been made for those to continue to be sold.

I am under the impression that these photographs are still being evaluated by the Australian Government. If they are found not to be fit for purpose in Australia, will the Minister take that to mean that they are not fit for purpose in the UK either? I know that the Government will be publishing detailed guidance on the picture warnings and the notification process this month, but it may be beneficial to businesses if the Minister could please give a better idea of when they can expect to receive the guidance?

Finally, do the Government have any plans to use UK-sourced or commissioned photographs? Surely we have some comparable images of our own, taken by doctors or researchers, that we could use? If not, are plans in place to acquire some? The legislation also introduces a fee-making power for characterising flavours and emissions on nicotine and tobacco products. Will the Government be using that power immediately, and what impact will it have on businesses?

Unfortunately, smoking is still prevalent in our country, which is why we must ensure that tobacco and nicotine products meet the highest safety and quality standards. If the worst happens and we do leave the EU without a deal, we must ensure that these standards are upheld, so the Opposition will support the regulations today, in the hope that they will not be needed.

9.2 pm

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson). It is fair to say that all the changes to tobacco regulations that have been made in this House have come from the Back Benches, with

pressure being put on the Government, whichever party has been in power, to make the necessary changes. It is therefore a great pleasure to see my hon. Friend the Minister and the Opposition spokesperson, who are both tremendously supportive of making the necessary changes and implementing tough regulations on tobacco products.

This is clearly one of those statutory instruments that will be required if there is no deal. In any case, once we leave the European Union we will be responsible for our own measures on tobacco enforcement. It is therefore timely that we are having this debate now, before we leave the European Union. Clearly the measures are pragmatic and will minimise the amount of work required once we leave the European Union. However, I have one or two concerns that I hope the Minister can respond to when he sums up.

The current system for notification of e-cigarettes and novel tobacco products is reasonable and minimises additional work, but products that are notified to the UK prior to leaving the EU will not require re-notification. My concern is whether such novel products will come to the fore between now and our departure date, and what the effect of having a deal would be, and therefore whether there we be another period of time in which those products could be introduced. Would we then need to review how those products are dealt with under this statutory instrument?

Secondly, on the picture warnings that we obtained from Australia, which the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West mentioned, one of the key issues is that people who smoke get used to cigarette packets showing messages. We need to rotate those messages and pictures so that they shock people. We want to shock people, particularly young people, to stop them smoking. The concept of rotating pictures and identifying the best images to achieve that shock factor is key. I trust that my hon. Friend the Minister will consider that and keep it under review so that we can introduce it, if needed.

There clearly needs to be a longer-term review, so my third point is that we need to see a report by 20 May 2021, which would give us an opportunity to review all the regulations that apply not only to tobacco products but to e-cigarettes and other heated tobacco products. The Australian Government will clearly evaluate their various different initiatives, and it is fair to say that we have been at the forefront, both in Europe and across the world, in leading on tobacco control. It is therefore important that we encourage smokers to quit and prevent young people from starting to smoke.

Will my hon. Friend undertake to review the regulations regularly so that we can encourage young people and others to give up smoking and, equally, ensure that measures are in place so that people who want to give up are given help and support to do so? More importantly, we should ensure that doctors, when reviewing people's cases, are directing those who smoke to the help and support they need in order to give up and to have better personal health.

I warmly welcome this statutory instrument, but I hope the Minister can give me some reassurance on those three points.

9.7 pm

**Dr Philippa Whitford** (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): Again we are rushing through a statutory instrument because of the threat of a no deal. I would be interested to know what the Minister might be doing differently if we were not having to rush this through.

Smoking is obviously a critical cause of cancer, and although smoking rates have dropped over the past 20 years, there are still far too many people smoking. I welcome the commitment in the explanatory memorandum and the regulations to minimal change in tobacco control. It is important we recognise that smoking also causes non-cancerous diseases such as heart and lung disease and strokes, and is probably the biggest single cause of morbidity in our country.

The regulations mention that we are revoking the common European notification system for both e-cigarettes and tobacco—this is not just about tobacco—and that it will be replaced by a UK system. The Minister talked about the MHRA taking on that work. Will it be ready by the end of March? As the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) asked, will the guidance to industry definitely appear before the end of this month? That is very close, yet the Government are asking industry to change the pictures it is using, and may be asking it to change how some of the warnings are constructed.

Under proposed new regulation 53A of the Tobacco and Related Products Regulations 2016, the Secretary of State will be able to collect fees to fund this work. Will the fees be collected on a continuing basis, with industry having to register with such a body and pay ongoing fees, or will it be only on the registration of a new product? What we might see is the same as we are likely to see on drugs: if a company has to register a product in Europe and then go through a separate process here, it might not register the product here. Although I am obviously not a big fan of tobacco producers, it is important that we do not undermine those producing e-cigarettes and vapes that have helped people come off cigarettes.

The new pictures have been mentioned. The hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) talked about the need to rotate them. Unfortunately, it does not matter what image we are talking about, but if people see it all the time they become inured to it. It is important that any regulations in the UK shadow what we have been doing with our EU colleagues as much as possible.

The Minister talked about the consultation in October, and the explanatory memorandum referred to industry and stakeholders. Will he perhaps clarify for us whether any anti-smoking charities or any health bodies were represented?

Proposed new regulation 16A(2) gives the Secretary of State the ability to allow change in e-cigarette and vape formulations and standards. What concerns me is that paragraph 6.4 of the explanatory memorandum mentions the discussion about the standards being “too onerous”—not for the user, but for the industry—and too restrictive. It is absolutely critical that we do not lower these standards, because if this decision just slips through without our being able to interrogate it, we may regret it further on.

The regulations will revoke section 2(4) of the Tobacco Advertising and Promotion Act 2002, which means that no EU member state is allowed to advertise tobacco in

another member state. The explanation is that EU member states could advertise tobacco in the UK, and we should therefore revoke our obligation not to do that to them. Unfortunately, this is exactly the tit-for-tat race to the bottom that the EU regulations were intended to avoid. Does the Minister really think that allowing UK companies to advertise in Ireland, Holland or France is going to benefit people here?

It is of concern that proposed new regulation 53A, which is on setting fees, says that such statutory instruments must be carried through using the affirmative process, yet all other changes to regulations will be allowed to be carried through under the negative procedure.

It is critical that the standards of tobacco products, e-cigarettes or vaping mixtures are maintained at as high a quality as possible. There is evidence that young people are beginning to use vaping *de novo*. Initially, there has been great benefit in getting cigarette smokers off tobacco and vaping using or e-cigarettes. However, it must be remembered that the pulmonary membrane in our lungs is the most sensitive membrane in the body, and we cannot allow the addition of harmful chemicals that may cause destruction or fibrosis and leave people crippled in the future. We do not yet have long-term experience of these vaping fluids, and it is critical that the Government keep them under observation and maintain as high a standard as possible.

9.12 pm

**Mark Pawsey** (Rugby) (Con): I want to follow the remarks of the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford) about the impact of these regulations on vaping products. The vaping industry welcomes the Government’s sensible planning, but has a particular concern about products that are already registered with the EU. The industry producing such products is looking for some clarification from the Minister and some assurance about whether products that are already registered will need to be re-registered under the new UK-based system.

The Minister has spoken about the opportunity to reappraise our legislation. Of course, e-cigarettes are controlled by the tobacco products regulations, despite there not being any tobacco at all in such products. There are three issues that are of concern to users in particular. The first is the cap on nicotine strength in vaping liquids. In many cases, it is too low to encourage heavy smokers to switch to e-cigarettes, which we know are far better for their health and which we want to encourage. There are restrictions on both the size of bottle in which vaping liquids can be sold and the tank size of vaping devices, both of which appear to be completely arbitrary, with no basis to them.

Both users of e-cigarettes and the manufacturing sector are hoping that this may be an opportunity for the Minister to rectify the regulations, which, frankly, are nonsensical. I look forward to the Minister’s response on those points.

9.14 pm

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I will be succinct, Madam Deputy Speaker. I just have a couple of quick questions for the Minister, but first let me say that I welcome the regulations.

Before recess, I asked the Minister a number of questions that came from the tobacco sector itself. Has he had any contact with the sector to seek its opinion on proposed legislation to ensure that what is put forward reflects its point of view?

The Minister referred to the devolved Administrations. I am ever mindful of the current situation in Northern Ireland, which I hope will change. We have a non-functioning Assembly, which means that the responsibility for the administration of legislation falls on the permanent secretary and civil servants. Will that be done through a statutory instrument, so that the permanent secretary can make a decision? Legislation passed in this place last year on the Northern Ireland Assembly gives the permanent secretary the authority to make a legislative change. I just want to be sure about how that will work in Northern Ireland.

Madam Deputy Speaker, those are my succinct comments.

9.16 pm

**Steve Brine:** I will briefly address some of the points that have been raised. The hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) says she hopes that no-deal contingency will not be needed. Fortunately, I have a cunning plan to ensure that it is not needed, which is to vote for the deal next Tuesday. I look forward to her support.

A number of Members talked about e-cigarettes. The best thing a smoker can do for their health—I have always said this—is to quit smoking. E-cigarettes are not harmless: the nicotine is toxic and addictive, and there are unanswered questions on the long-term effects of their use. There is, however, evidence that e-cigarettes are significantly less harmful to health than smoking tobacco. The control plan that I published last year commits to monitoring the safety, uptake, impact and effectiveness of e-cigarettes and novel tobacco products. We will review all the regulations as part of our post-implementation plan by May 2021. A number of Members referred to that, for which I am grateful.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman), the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West and the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford) talked about the rotation of warning images and the deal with the Australian Government. The deal is indeed to use their picture warnings free of charge. That is very kind of our friends down under. The rotation of picture warnings so that people do not become desensitised to them is very important. We are aware of the benefits of rotating the warnings. In the medium to long term we will consider our options, and they may well include the option of developing new domestic picture libraries. My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East said that there are plenty of images. I am sure we can access them domestically, and I will be looking at that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East talked about products that have already been notified. A new notification system, which will be in place on exit day in a no-deal scenario, has been developed. If there are novel products, they will be notified through the new system. Products notified between now and exit day will continue to be notified through the EU system. I have to say that I am not aware of any novel products that

are due to be notified by the current or new notification processes, but they will be able to deal equally effectively with any novel products that appear on the market.

This is an important statutory instrument. The hon. Member for Central Ayrshire said that we must not in any way water down or lose our ambition on tobacco control. I think she knows me well enough to know that I certainly do not lack ambition in this space. One of the first things I did in this job was to publish the tobacco control plan. Tobacco is still our biggest preventable killer. She is absolutely right to say that, and it is why such a central part of the long-term plan is prevention. One of the simpler things we can do to prevent ill health and the cost it brings to our health service in England, as well as in Scotland, is to stop people smoking.

The hon. Lady asked whether the notification system will be ready. I think I said in my opening remarks that the feedback we have had from the industry is that that will be challenging, but the advice we get from experts is that it will be ready. She also asked about fees being charged on an ongoing basis. I will have to write to her on that point, but I will endeavour to do so this week so that she gets the answers she wants. I have already answered the question about lowering standards, which we most certainly do not want to do.

We are absolutely committed to the tobacco control measures I set out in the plan. I want to ensure that we maintain discipline and our focus on preventing ill health by driving down smoking rates, and we will review all our tobacco control legislation by 2021. Of course, if the House supports the deal next Tuesday, the draft regulations will not be necessary, but in the event that they are, we will be ready.

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. We are about to debate a matter of huge constitutional significance. Hitherto, the sole criterion for voting in Committees of this House has been election. If this measure passes, we will change that to allow people who have not been elected to vote in Committees of this House. That would be a huge change, which we are about to rush through in 40 minutes, without proper scrutiny. The Government have already withdrawn one motion from today's proceedings. Is there any way that, through your offices, you can ask the Government whether they would be prepared to withdraw this motion so that we can debate it fully and properly at an appropriate time?

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** I fully understand and have some sympathy with the point the right hon. Gentleman makes. It is indeed the case that we have a very short amount of time for this important debate. Of course, as he knows, I have no power from the Chair to do anything about the timetabling of matters in the Chamber. As I look at the Leader of the House, I see that she has a determination to get on with this debate now. I can well understand that. It is in the power of the Government to change the business, but as the right hon. Gentleman knows, the House is very busy. All I would say is that I hope people will speak succinctly and briefly, and that it is unfortunate that the earlier business took so long, with so many people saying the same thing over and over again but insisting on having their voices heard, which has curtailed the debate on this very important piece of business.



**Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg** (North East Somerset) (Con): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. My right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest West (Sir Desmond Swayne) rightly says that this is a very important constitutional issue. At 10 o'clock, will the motion immediately go to a vote, or will it require a closure motion?

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Gentleman makes a very good point. If the debate is still continuing, there will be no vote. However, I say once again that this matter is in the hands of Members. If Members who prolonged the urgent questions and statements earlier are listening or paying any attention—there is a very good chance that they have given up and gone home—they know that it was their actions earlier in the day that curtailed this debate. Let us not curtail it any further.

## Committee on Standards: Cox Report

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** I inform the House that Mr Speaker has selected a manuscript amendment in the name of John Stevenson, copies of which are in the Vote Office and which is also available online.

9.24 pm

**The Leader of the House of Commons (Andrea Leadsom):** I beg to move,

That this House approves the Fifth Report of the Committee on Standards, Implications of the Dame Laura Cox report for the House's standards system: Initial proposals, HC 1726, and agrees the following changes to Standing Orders and to the Guide to the Rules relating to the Conduct of Members as approved by the House on 17 March 2015:

Standing Order No. 149 (Committee on Standards)

(i) in paragraph (5), line 3, leave out from “witnesses,” to end and add “may move motions and amendments to motions or draft reports, and may vote.”

(ii) leave out paragraph (5A).

Guide to the Rules relating to the Conduct of Members

Chapter 4: Procedure for inquiries

(i) Leave out paragraph 6(b) and insert –

“b) be in writing or by email, and provide the complainant's name and full postal address; and”.

(ii) Leave out paragraph 11.

The motion stands in my name and that of the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green). I welcome the opportunity to take part in this important debate on behalf of the Government. The motion, if agreed by the House, serves to strengthen the independence of the Committee on Standards and modernise its practices. I will touch more on the content of the motion, and I am sure that the hon. Lady, the Chair of the Committee, will also provide the House with a detailed account of the proposed changes.

It is important that we put these changes in their wider context. Now, more than ever, we must not lose sight of our drive to improve the culture of our Parliament. How has this motion come about? In November 2017, shocking stories of harassment and bullying in Westminster came to light. I have been clear, as has the Prime Minister, that there is absolutely no place for this unacceptable behaviour in Parliament, or anywhere else for that matter. We should be setting an example for others to follow, and my ambition is that our Parliament become a role model for other Parliaments around the world.

In response to the allegations, the Prime Minister convened party leaders and set up a cross-party working group to develop an independent complaints and grievance procedure for Parliament. A programme team, overseen by a cross-party steering group made up of Members of both Houses and staff representatives, then worked on the implementation of the new policy, known as the ICGS, which was agreed by the House and launched in July last year. Throughout our work, there was a clear recognition from the cross-party group that establishing the ICGS was the beginning, not the end, of a bigger movement to challenge and change the culture in Parliament. As part of this, we agreed that there must be a review of the scheme at six and 18 months, as it beds in. This gives us the chance to improve as we go and to constantly ask ourselves what more we can do.

I am currently working with colleagues in the House to establish the first of these reviews and that work will begin later this month. The purpose of each review will be, first, to scrutinise how the new complaints procedure is working in practice; secondly, to address outstanding areas, such as how to incorporate into the scheme visitors to constituency offices and how to manage third-party reporting; and thirdly, to incorporate the findings of the Cox report, following the recommendations of the House of Commons Commission and the other independent inquiries set up as part of the ICGS.

**John Spellar** (Warley) (Lab): Can I ask the Leader of the House about an area of which I was not aware? What does she mean by “visitors to constituency offices” in this context?

**Andrea Leadsom:** It means how visitors to constituency offices might potentially in future be able to submit complaints about the behaviour that they have received in constituency offices.

**John Spellar** *rose*—

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am sorry, but I will not give way. Dame Laura Cox QC’s inquiry—

**John Spellar** *rose*—

**Andrea Leadsom:** I will not give way.

**John Spellar** *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Order. The right hon. Lady is not giving way. We have not got much time.

**Andrea Leadsom:** Dame Laura Cox QC’s inquiry looked into the bullying and harassment of House of Commons staff. Naomi Ellenbogen QC is conducting a similar inquiry on the House of Lords side, and Gemma White QC is currently conducting a broader inquiry into employees on the Commons side. All of the many different employment situations in the House will be covered by a one-off review of historic complaints.

Dame Laura Cox published her report into the bullying and harassment of House of Commons staff in October last year. There were three key recommendations in that report, which the House of Commons Commission agreed and committed to taking forward.

**Justin Madders** (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): I am particularly anxious that the second of the recommendations in the Cox report be moved forward as quickly as possible. Can the Leader of the House give us a timetable for that?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The House of Commons Commission is looking at each of these issues. If the hon. Gentleman will bear with me, I will answer his question in a moment.

Dame Laura Cox also raised serious concerns about the senior management of this place and, as an ex officio member of the Commission, I am keen that these issues be explored further. Her concerns cannot be brushed aside. It will be very important that the Commission does not ease up on the pace of dealing with what are most urgent issues facing the governance

of Parliament. The changes to be made in the light of the Cox report are a matter for the Commission and the House itself.

That brings us to the motion on the Order Paper. I pay tribute to the Committee on Standards for its work, which was done not only quickly, in recognition of the gravity of the situation, but thoughtfully. I also pay tribute to the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston for the constructive way in which she has engaged with the process since the beginning of her chairmanship. It is not an easy task when Committees themselves must assess their fitness for purpose and adapt to calls for change. The Committee on Standards has adopted a clear openness and willingness to do so, while also recognising the need for a further and separate review of the standards system.

The motion relates to the third and key recommendation of the Cox report, on the independence of the process for determining complaints of bullying, harassment or sexual harassment brought by staff against Members of Parliament. The House of Commons Commission agreed in December to establish a small, informal working group to examine and report on that recommendation. The Government are fully committed to ensuring that MPs are accountable for their actions, but also agree with the Commission that it is necessary to consider carefully the potential constitutional implications of wholesale changes in the standards system. In the interim, while recognising that need for further review, the motion seeks to make some important changes in the current system to enhance its independence and ways of working.

**Jess Phillips** (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): I want to put it on the record that, as one who has spoken to people who have been raped, groped and abused in this building, I want the motion to be passed. I wonder whether the right hon. Lady realises, as I do, that we will struggle to get it through because of the lack of time, and will join me in saying that we can see the people who are trying to stop it. Does she agree that that would be a disaster and a shame on this House?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I entirely agree with the hon. Lady that it is important for us to demonstrate that we, as a House, are absolutely committed to ensuring that the dignity and respect that we want everyone to feel in this place is adhered to, and that we do everything we can to make that happen.

**Vicky Ford** (Chelmsford) (Con): May I raise an issue relating to dignity and respect, especially for women Members? As chair of the all-party parliamentary group on women in Parliament, I have written to the Speaker asking him, as a matter of urgency, to consider the issue of proxy voting for women during maternity leave. Please will the Leader of the House also exert some pressure? The issue is becoming very urgent.

**Andrea Leadsom:** I can absolutely assure my hon. Friend that I am committed to changes that will accommodate the need for parents to spend time with their new babies.

The changes sought in the motion will first confer full voting rights on lay members of the Committee on Standards. That means, in practice, that lay members will have equal status on the Committee and will hold a

[*Andrea Leadsom*]

majority in any vote, with the Chair holding a casting vote only in the event of a tie, and it goes some way towards meeting Laura Cox's challenge.

**John Stevenson** (Carlisle) (Con): As my right hon. Friend knows, I tabled an amendment relating to that issue. What I seek from her is an assurance that, when the Gemma White inquiry reports, we shall have an opportunity to revisit the issue and ensure that her analysis can be taken into consideration.

**Andrea Leadsom**: I spoke to my hon. Friend earlier today, and assured him that the six-month review of the independent complaints and grievance scheme would indeed take into account the issues raised by each of the independent inquiries, and that all issues relating to the way in which the process for managing complaints works would be in scope for that.

**John Spellar**: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

**Andrea Leadsom**: I will not give way to the right hon. Gentleman. I have already given way to him.

Secondly, the motion will modernise practices so that referrals can be made by email or in writing. Thirdly, it will abolish the current requirement for the independent Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards to consult the Committee on Standards on whether a case that is more than seven years old, or one involving a former Member, can be investigated by her. That will ensure that she can act independently. Many of us have raised grave concerns about appalling allegations that have gone without investigation as a result of the current arrangements. So ensuring that the PCS can operate independently of the Committee on Standards is vital and will better enable justice for those seeking recourse.

**Caroline Lucas** (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): On the issue of the Committee's willingness to remove any obligation on the standards commissioner to consult the Committee before going to the police, I welcome the Committee's willingness to look at that proposal, but can the Leader of the House reassure us that it will still be a victim-centred approach? She will know from our discussions in the steering group that it is vital that a victim's or a survivor's wish not to have a motion go to the police should be overridden only if there are overwhelming cases of safeguarding. Can she reassure us that there will be some kind of protocol on that?

**Andrea Leadsom**: The hon. Lady will appreciate that this motion has been put forward as a result of the Standards Committee's own recommendations—not something that I am in control of—but I absolutely reassure her that I remain as committed, as do all members of the original working group on the complaints procedure, to putting the complainant at the centre of this process and to ensuring confidentiality about their identity. That is vital to the success of our complaints procedure.

**Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg** (North East Somerset) (Con): As I understand it, the Standards Committee is appointed by the usual channels and, if it were to appoint people like the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) and people with a great commitment to ensuring

that things are done properly—people of the highest standards and probity—why would we have this problem? Why do we lack confidence in people within this House to do the job for which they are elected and for which they have a mandate from the people? Why do we think we are going to get better people from outside?

**Andrea Leadsom**: That is a lengthy question. I would be delighted to meet my hon. Friend to debate it further, but the evidence that was taken over a lengthy period and that was unanimously agreed by the working group and has been supported by the Standards Committee suggested that a greater element of independence was required, and that having seven lay members and seven parliamentary Members on the Standards Committee and the voting as proposed by the Committee's Chairman provides the right balance—having the memory and the corporate understanding of being in this place, while at the same time ensuring that we can benefit from the experience and knowledge of independent lay members.

**Dr Philippa Whitford** (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): Clearly, the objection is to the idea of lay members being part of this, yet this Parliament put that as a construct into the General Medical Council, so we have members of the public who rule on the behaviour of doctors—not their clinical work, but their behaviour. It is important that we have that independent voice here because we work for them—for the public.

**Andrea Leadsom**: I agree with the hon. Lady.

The changes proposed today are a strong and positive step forward for the better. The Government are fully supportive of the work of the Standards Committee and the House of Commons Commission to make sure that the standards system is more independent, transparent and effective. To return to where I began my remarks, today's motion is a separate matter from the new complaints system, known as the ICGS, in so far as it is for the House to make changes to its system of standards, but it is vital that we as a House look at this issue carefully in order that the complaints system in the round can command the confidence of the people who work with or for Parliament and the wider public. Today's motion demonstrates that the House is listening on what more we can do to improve the culture of Parliament and, importantly, demonstrates that we are also taking action. The Government support this change and will support further changes to provide proper recourse for victims and to ensure the proper functioning of our parliamentary democracy.

The recent Christmas message by the Queen had a particular resonance for me when she said:

“Even with the most deeply held differences, treating the other person with respect and as a fellow human being is always a good first step towards greater understanding.”

I would like to take this opportunity to stress that, while we may be divided on a few matters in this place, this is something we can all be united on: our shared ambition to make our Parliament a world leader in its respectful treatment of others. It is in that spirit that I commend this motion to the House.

9.39 pm

**Valerie Vaz** (Walsall South) (Lab): I thank the Leader of the House for moving the motion. I should also like to thank the Committee on Standards for its work on



producing the report. I want to speak to the motion, and also to touch on the amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Carlisle (John Stevenson). This is a short report, but at its heart lies a constitutional issue that warrants consideration. I note from the inside cover of the report that the Law Officers are entitled to attend the Committee although they are not entitled to vote. I want to place on record my thanks to the shadow Solicitor General, my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds), for his helpful discussions.

Before I move on to the specific proposals and questions, I also want to thank Dame Laura Cox for the time that she has given to this inquiry and for producing a wide-ranging report in the given timeframe. I also want to reiterate part of the statement from the House of Commons Commission, which is set out in paragraph 4 of the report:

“The scale of the problem and depth of hurt caused is beyond dispute.”

The Commission went on to state:

“The staff of the House of Commons are essential to the functioning of democracy. We deeply regret that their diligence has at times been so poorly repaid, and that it has taken so long for us to recognise what must be done.”

The Committee’s report then states:

“We, like the Commission...commit ourselves to contributing to putting things right.”

I want to add that the House staff and other people working in this great place need to know that they are valued, and I hope that they do.

Paragraph 5 of the report states:

“The functions of the Committee on Standards and of the House of Commons Commission are different, but with some degree of overlap.”

I agree that the functions are different, but I am unclear as to how they overlap. They have completely separate roles. The House of Commons Commission has elected representatives from different parties, and I am definitely not aware of any overlap. I would not want to give the impression that there was any interference in the work of the Commissioner or of the Committee. Nor does the Commission have any say over the work of the Committee. In paragraph 6, the Committee states that it chose to speak to only one elected representative, the Leader of the House. Was she aware of any discussions taking place with anyone else? Were any other experts consulted?

I want to deal with two other issues before I come on to the question of voting. First, if the Commissioner feels that she should refer matters to the police in a criminal matter, she is bound to do that. She should not have to ask anyone’s permission to do so. Secondly, receiving complaints by email will bring the process up to date, and I am sure everyone would agree that as long as we maintain the principle that any statement or complaint must be signed, it can be sent off by email.

The main proposal concerns voting rights for lay members, which Dame Laura Cox suggested in her report. This has been considered for some time but, as the Committee said, the matter now needs decisive and immediate action. A Committee of the House is covered by privilege, which is defined in article 9 of the Bill of Rights Act 1689 as relating to Members only. However,

giving lay members a vote would change the nature of the Select Committee. As Dame Laura Cox has pointed out in paragraph 380,

“all the difficulties inherent in the process would not be alleviated by the giving of full votes to lay members, which in any event require primary legislation”.

It is arguable that privilege would extend to lay members. Lord Nicholls, giving written evidence to the Procedure Committee in 2011, said that if all members of a Committee were undertaking the work of that Committee, he would expect privilege to extend to all members. Unless they are covered by privilege, this could leave lay members exposed to challenge, and however slight the risk, that cannot be right. There are two different views on this, and the only way to make this clear is through legislation, as Dame Laura Cox and the Committee’s report have said. It is not clear when the Government will bring forward the legislation to protect the lay members, so will the Leader of the House tell us when they will do so? Will she also confirm that advice has been taken on the risk to lay members of judicial review, and will she publish it? Lay members have to be protected.

In paragraph 44 of the report, the Committee states:

“The advice we have received is that, procedurally speaking, the House has the power, if it chooses, to confer voting rights on lay members”.

May I ask who that advice was sought from? Was it given on procedural rules or on a constitutional point? Has parliamentary counsel been consulted? Members and lay members need to be reassured. Once they receive that protection, lay members should, as recommended by the Committee, be allowed to move motions and amendments and vote. Their indicative votes are recorded now, so that would be a logical next step.

Everyone who works in Parliament will be concerned by the recent case in the House of Lords. The task was delegated to a Committee, which looked at the case under a fair procedure. The House of Lords, which is of course different, is however looking at including lay members on its sub-committee, albeit in a minority.

This proposal deals with the process at the end, but we must also ensure that Members and staff are reassured that the process is fair from start to finish and does not leave any person feeling that they have not had a fair hearing or that an injustice has been done, and that the recommendations of the Cox report are progressed without delay. I know that the Commons executive team is dealing with that. However, it does raise a constitutional question as to how to preserve the independence of the process while balancing it against the doctrine of exclusive cognisance. Some Members may want to hear the Leader of the House’s view before they vote, so will she reassure us on that point?

Finally, I thank the Committee on Standards again for its work. We must all play our part in ensuring that our new procedures are robust, fair and effective to protect everyone working and visiting Parliament.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** Order. It is obvious that a great many people wish to speak, but there is hardly any time, so I am imposing a time limit of three minutes on Back-Bench speeches.

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is not customary to impose a time limit when the debate would cease if a closure is not put on the motion.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** It is customary to impose a time limit when the person in the Chair can easily see that the demand for time is far greater than the supply. I am therefore imposing a time limit. I call John Stevenson.

9.46 pm

**John Stevenson (Carlisle) (Con):** Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. My comments will be short. I tabled the amendment, but the Leader of the House has reassured me, so I do not intend to press it. I will make a couple of general comments before talking about the motion before us and the changes to the Standing Orders.

The Cox report highlights concerns about behaviour that should trouble us all. Such unacceptable conduct should not and cannot be tolerated and must be stamped out. It is therefore important we introduce the correct procedures and rules to ensure that behaviour improves and that the culture and environment of Parliament is as it should be for the staff. I agree with the Cox report that Parliament has in the past been reactive in making changes and must get on the front foot and become proactive.

The lay members make a valuable contribution to the Committee on Standards, and their wisdom and knowledge from outside the parliamentary estate is valued, so I support the idea that they should have a vote.

**John Spellar:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**John Stevenson:** There is only a short amount of time for each speaker, so I will not take any interventions.

The only thing that I want to bring to the House's attention is the fact that we must make this change with our eyes open. There are constitutional issues, so we must ensure that we do this with the full knowledge of the consequences. We must consider the individuals who will become lay members of the Committee, the criteria for their appointment, the appointment committee that will select them, the length of service and how members can be removed, and how they must conduct themselves. Political views must also be taken into account, because the Committee is politically balanced at present, so we must consider whether lay members should have to give some indication of their political background if they have one to declare. Finally, we must be aware of the democratic legitimacy and accountability of the Committee on Standards. It is an important function of this House, and we must get things right. I recognise that many professional bodies have lay members that make valuable contributions, but from our perspective it is important that we get the balance right.

My final observation is that this Parliament is part of our democratic process, so democratic accountability and legitimacy are vital to it. Change is required, but it must be managed and properly thought through. Change must not be reactive to the personalities of today; it must be for the long term and look to Parliaments of which Members here will not be a part. We must ensure that we leave a legacy that works.

9.49 pm

**Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP):** I shall try to be as brief as possible. I welcome this report and congratulate the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green) on its timely contribution. I had the privilege of serving on the independent complaints and grievance scheme working group, and I know how many committees and bodies across this House have devoted great amounts of time and effort to trying to address some of the serious issues and difficulties that were identified last year, as the Leader of the House said. I think that we are getting there with some of the things that we have looked at, and I am grateful that we are starting to make some sort of progress in dealing with them.

A couple of things have concerned me about the situation over the past few months. The shadow Leader of the House referred to one of them, namely what happened in the House of Lords. It was totally unacceptable, and my worry and fear is that the same process could happen here in this House. We have to be very wary of that.

I am also concerned about the restoration of the Whip for two Members of the governing party, who had been suspended because of very serious allegations, so that they could participate in a vote of confidence in the Prime Minister. I have no interest at all in the veracity of the allegations and claims that were made against them; my only concern is how the public observed what happened. The view of the public would have been that the House was more interested in internal contests in political parties than in ensuring that serious allegations were properly investigated. I know the Leader of the House, and I know that she is embarrassed about what happened with those two Members.

Progress is being made, however. We are looking at some issues that have, as the hon. Member for Carlisle (John Stevenson) described, constitutional significance and an impact on our work. He is right to raise those issues. I am looking around at other members of the working group, and I think the most important thing is that independence is brought into the system as a predominant feature and guides all our undertakings in this House. There can be no question whatsoever of Members of Parliament marking their own homework when it comes to assessing claims made by individual Members of Parliament. I think it is worth disregarding the potential constitutional risks when we are looking at the independence of the process.

I welcome the fact that the standards commissioner can look at historical cases without reference to the Committee on Standards. The standards commissioner must be given the maximum amount of operational freedom to investigate such cases. In the working group, we raked over the whole idea of historical cases. I was disappointed, as I am sure other Members were, to be informed by legal opinion that we could not do anything about historical cases, but Dame Laura Cox is more than sure that that is going to happen.

The Cox report was a massive wake-up call to the House about the scale of some of the difficulties that we have to confront. Dame Laura has ensured that we will never return to a situation in which such things are overlooked, and that we will do everything possible, as robustly as possible, to tackle some of the issues that exist in the House. I know that the three main recommendations from her report have been accepted

by the House of Commons Commission. As we have seen from the work of the Standards Committee, all efforts are being made to ensure that her report is obeyed in full.

We have a particular role in our community and society. Parliament is our premier institution of democracy, and whatever we do must set an example to the rest of our community and society. We must do everything possible to ensure that those who work in this House do so in a safe environment, with respect and dignity afforded to them. If we use that as a guiding principle, I am sure that we will achieve success and tackle these issues, as we want to do.

I strongly support the report. I hope that other hon. Members do not try to talk this out when they get to their feet this evening, although I am pretty certain that that is exactly what they will attempt to do. I hope that we will return to the matter, and that we will make sure that we have an opportunity to get the motion through this evening.

9.54 pm

**Mrs Maria Miller** (Basingstoke) (Con): Dame Laura Cox rightly said that the bullying and abuse of staff in this place is

“an institutional failure...which has undermined the...authority of the House of Commons”,

and she is right. Anybody who attempts to block these changes at this very late stage, after previous debates, including on the role of lay members, risks not only embedding that perception but further undermining trust in this place. I urge them to consider that.

I fully support the Leader of the House, the changes to the Standing Orders that she has introduced today and her tenacity in doing so. I also fully support the Chair of the Select Committee, the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green), in bringing forward the recommendations so swiftly. In debating the report, we have to acknowledge how the House of Commons has ended up in this situation. I believe it is because we are a dysfunctional and unaccountable organisation in terms of the system of management in this place. Who is actually fundamentally responsible for not having ensured that our staff can work in a safe environment? We still do not really know the answer to that question—or do we? I think that Laura Cox was pretty clear that it is the Speaker of the House of Commons, the House of Commons Commission and the chief Clerk of the House of Commons who are responsible, yet we still see very little change in those areas.

To go alongside today’s changes, we need a fuller picture of how the modest changes that we are debating—and they are modest—fit into the fuller picture of reform that Laura Cox called for. We need to see not only the changes that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House has been so good in bringing forward to make sure that we have training and a grievance procedure, but that we have a clear plan for modernisation; that we have a democratic, transparent and accountable governance structure in the House of Commons; that we fundamentally review the role of the Speaker, which is clearly not currently working as it should; and that we end this piecemeal approach to reform in this place.

An example of that approach, raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford) earlier, is the incredibly long-winded way we have had to bring

forward changes for something such as baby leave, which is a fundamental right for every person we represent in our constituencies. If they work, they have the ability to take time off when they are pregnant or have young children. Members in this place are not able to do that. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House has worked tirelessly to bring the changes forward, but there needs to be clearer and better management structures through which to make such changes in future, and to make sure that this is a modern place of work.

9.56 pm

**Kate Green** (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): This is a matter of the utmost importance for the reputation and standing of this House. We cannot afford to be inward-looking tonight; we have to be outward-looking. The Cox report was an absolute wake-up call to this Parliament to act. I very much welcome the steps that the Leader of the House took leading up to the introduction of the independent complaints and grievance process this summer, but Cox requires us to go further and to have a system that not only is independent, fair and transparent, but that is seen to be so. The proposals in the Committee on Standards report that we are debating are a step on that journey. The Committee and I do not pretend that they are a full response to Cox, but they are a first step, and they are an indication of earnest intent that this House understands that we can no longer allow the public to believe and perceive that we are marking our own homework and that our decisions and adjudications on our colleagues cannot be trusted.

**Mrs Miller:** Does the hon. Lady agree with the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford) that the role of lay members has become inherent in so many different professional organisations? Are we saying that we are not a professional organisation that would welcome such input?

**Kate Green:** I very much agree, and I also very much endorse the comments of my friend the hon. Member for Carlisle (John Stevenson), who rightly pointed to the standing of the lay members who currently belong to the Committee and, indeed, to the full Nolan process we put people through to recruit them to membership of the Committee. I remind the House that the Committee reports to this House. Ultimately, decisions will be taken by this House. We may vote in the Committee on a matter that comes before us—although it is very rare for us to do so—but ultimately the output of our deliberations will be a report to this House, so the elected membership of this House will have a final say.

It is important that the Committee take action now to ensure that the public see we are serious about independence and fairness in the system. That is particularly imperative because under the independent complaints and grievance system that now pertains, the Committee may very well find itself dealing with appeals very shortly. We need to be able to show the public that those appeals will be dealt with appropriately and in a way in which they can have confidence.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I do hope that the House will support the report tonight and give the motion of the Leader of the House the support that it deserves.

**Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con) *rose*—

**Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg** *rose*—



**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** The Question is as on the Order Paper—[*Interruption.*]

**Sir Desmond Swayne:** I was not aware that this was a time-limited debate.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** I beg your pardon? Is this a point of order?

**Sir Desmond Swayne:** On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. My understanding was that the debate proceeds until there is a closure motion.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** No, I have taken the decision that, as there was only 10 seconds before 10 pm, I would, as usual, put the Question. [*Interruption.*] I will take the right hon. Gentleman's point of order after I have put the Question. The Question is as on the Order Paper. As many as of that opinion say aye.

**Hon. Members:** Aye.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Of the contrary, no.

**Hon. Members:** No! No!

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Division. Clear the Lobby.

**Sir Desmond Swayne:** There do not appear to be any tellers, Madam Deputy Speaker, but there is a point of order.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Order. The Question is as on the Order Paper. As many as of that opinion say aye.

**Hon. Members:** Aye.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Of the contrary, no. The ayes have it.

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Sir Desmond Swayne:** On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Correct me if I am wrong, but my understanding is that if there is no order of the House that a debate must end at a particular time, and if Members are standing at the moment of interruption, then that debate should continue at another time, when time becomes available, and not be put to a vote when Members are still standing, waiting to speak in the debate.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** The right hon. Gentleman is, of course, absolutely right in his description—[*Interruption.*] Order! Order! Close the doors!

The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right, of course, in his description of the way in which matters are dealt with at the point of interruption. I took the decision this evening that, as there were 10 seconds left before 10 pm, that was the point at which I should put the Question. The hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green), who was on her feet at 9.59 and 51 seconds—I was watching very carefully—had the courtesy to sit down just before 10 o'clock in order that I might put the Question. I took the decision that the Question ought to be put to the House, as it was the moment for the Question to be put. If the right hon. Gentleman is saying that it was not right for the hon. Lady to sit down with nine seconds to spare, I think he is really splitting hairs. I understand very well the point that he is making, but I took the decision that nine or 10 seconds

meant that we were at the point of interruption and that no one else could have made a meaningful speech in those nine seconds. Of course, I appreciate the right hon. Gentleman's point, which was also made by the hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) in a point of order earlier in the evening, that it is possible for a Member to speak through the point of interruption, and that then there could be no vote and no decision.

My decision and my ruling from the Chair this evening has been that my reading of this Chamber was that the vast majority of Members in this Chamber wanted to have a decision on this matter this evening. I agreed with the right hon. Gentleman earlier that it is a great pity that today we had urgent questions lasting for some two hours and eight minutes that were somewhat repetitive, and that we then had statements lasting for three hours and two minutes that were also rather repetitive. As I said to the right hon. Gentleman in answer to his point of order earlier this evening, these matters are in the hands of Members. If Members insist on having their voice heard again and again, making the same point on the same matter, we will be in a position whereby an important debate such as the one that has just concluded has not had nearly enough time, but these matters are in the hands of Members.

**Sir Desmond Swayne:** Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** I will of course allow the right hon. Gentleman to make a further point of order if he so wishes.

**Sir Desmond Swayne:** It is verging on impertinence, Madam Deputy Speaker, but could you share with us the rationale for your decision, rather than allowing the debate to proceed, which it would otherwise have done had you not terminated it at the moment of interruption? We could then have explored all those constitutional issues that were raised ever so briefly during the short time that we had.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** I will answer the right hon. Gentleman's further point of order by saying this: it has become the practice in this House that everybody who stands up to speak thinks that they have an automatic right to do so in that debate at the point when they stand up to speak. But as the right hon. Gentleman will recall, when he and I were new young Members of this House—some decades ago—it was perfectly normal for us to sit there, hour after hour, and not be called. It was perfectly normal for 100 people to rise at the beginning of an urgent question or a statement, but for only 30 to be called. It was perfectly normal for people to write to the Speaker and say that they would like to speak in a particular debate, but for only half of them to get to do so. I am terribly sorry that the right hon. Gentleman has been disappointed this evening because, of course, his seniority means that it is normal that he is called in a debate, near the beginning of the debate, but many Members really ought to get used to the fact that it is not an automatic right to speak for as long as they wish, whenever they wish, because there are 650 Members of this place and it is important to balance the rights of one as against the rights of all the others.

## Business without Debate

### DELEGATED LEGISLATION

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** I propose to take motions 4 to 12 together, but having become accustomed to being challenged this last half hour or so, I wait to see if there is a challenge. There is no challenge, so we will take motions 4 to 12 together.

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),*

#### EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (SOCIAL SECURITY)

That the draft Social Security (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) (EU Exit) Regulations 2018, which were laid before this House on 31 October 2018, be approved.

That the draft Social Security (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2018, which were laid before this House on 31 October, be approved.

#### EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (FINANCIAL SERVICES)

That the draft Payment Accounts (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2018, which were laid before this House on 6 November, be approved.

#### WILDLIFE

That the draft Humane Trapping Standards Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 14 November, be approved.

#### EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (HUMAN FERTILISATION AND EMBRYOLOGY)

That the draft Human Fertilisation and Embryology (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 19 November, be approved.

#### EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (HUMAN TISSUE)

That the draft Quality and Safety of Organs Intended for Transplantation (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 19 November, be approved.

That the draft Human Tissue (Quality and Safety for Human Application) (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 19 November, be approved.

#### EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (HEALTH AND SAFETY)

That the draft Blood Safety and Quality (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 19 November, be approved.

#### EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (CIVIL AVIATION)

That the draft Aviation Safety (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 26 November, be approved.—(*Iain Stewart.*)

*Question agreed to.*

## UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—(*Iain Stewart.*)

10.11 pm

**Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck** (South Shields) (Lab): I thank the House for allowing me to hold this debate this evening on the statement by the United Nations special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Professor Philip Alston, following his visit late last year to the United Kingdom, which, along with a plethora of other reports, has ensured that the grinding and increasing poverty of daily life for so many in the UK has been brought into the spotlight.

Unlike the Government, who have treated Professor Alston's well-evidenced and thorough statement with complete and utter disdain, I want to personally thank him for his conviction in passionately highlighting the absolute shame, degradation and harm that this Government are inflicting on those they govern, which has led to 14 million people living in poverty.

**Liz McInnes** (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): In addition to the disdain that this Government showed for the UN rapporteur's report, the United States Government showed the same disdain when he produced a report on poverty in the United States. I know that we have a special relationship with the United States, but I think it shames us all that we share that disdain. Does my hon. Friend agree?

**Mrs Lewell-Buck:** My hon. Friend points to a worrying analogy, and I do of course agree.

Professor Alston's statement confirms what many Labour Members have known for a very long time—that when it comes to welfare reform and this Government's policy agenda overall,

“the evidence points to the conclusion that the driving force has not been economic but rather a commitment to achieving radical social re-engineering.”

It has long been embedded in Tory DNA that “there is no such thing as society”, and social experiments in rolling back the state always begin with those who need the state the most. That is why the legacy of every Tory Government is one of deep inequality.

Professor Alston rightly notes that nowhere can this social re-engineering be seen more clearly than in the roll-out of “universal discredit”, as he calls it.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Lady on bringing this matter to the House for consideration. The report highlighted the alarming rise in food bank use. In my constituency, the Trussell Trust food bank had a 20% increase in take-up over the Christmas period because of debts due to delays in first universal credit payments, leading to people being forced to choose between paying rent and feeding their children. Does the hon. Lady not agree that the Minister—I am being respectful to him—must take steps to address the issues highlighted in the report? It cannot be ignored.

**Mrs Lewell-Buck:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I will come to those points later in my speech, but he is right; this cannot be ignored any longer.

[Mrs Lewell-Buck]

In principle, universal credit seemed to make some sense. Consolidation of six benefits into one should have achieved the key tenets of simplifying payments and incentivising people into work. Crucially, however, it was never designed to get support to those who needed it in a timely and efficient manner. In reality, like all welfare reform measures from this Government, it was about creating a hostile environment and demonising and dehumanising benefit claimants. As Professor Alston notes, the Department

“is more concerned with making economic savings and sending messages about lifestyles”

than with responding to genuine needs.

The result has been an unrelenting onslaught of abject harm inflicted on more than 3 million people. The late-in-the-day news that the next phase of roll-out is being scaled back gives no comfort to the millions already suffering. Trussell Trust food bank figures show that in areas where universal credit has been implemented, food bank usage has increased by 52%. The fact that the Work and Pensions Secretary states that she “regrets” the growth in food banks will offer no comfort to the estimated 8.4 million people in the UK suffering from food insecurity, or to the volunteers and faith groups filling the gap left by the state and manning the nearly 2,000 food banks that we shamefully now have operating as a permanent part of the welfare state.

Nor will the Secretary of State’s regret give comfort to my constituents, such as one 18-year-old girl starting out in life who unexpectedly lost her job and who, despite statements made by the Government to the contrary, has not been eligible for housing cost assistance through universal credit. She narrowly escaped homelessness thanks to the intervention of our irreplaceable South Tyneside citizens advice bureau. The Secretary of State’s regret will also not help my constituent who suffers from mental health difficulties and was left with only £1.25 per day to live on after the Department made an error with her payments.

The five-week delay embedded in the system, which often turns out to be longer, was never going to achieve anything other than hardship, because one day going hungry and not being able to pay the bills is one day too many.

**Thelma Walker** (Colne Valley) (Lab): In my constituency, there are nearly 6,000 children living in poverty, and in one ward 40% of children are living in poverty. Does my hon. Friend agree that in one of the richest countries in the world, unnecessary suffering brought about by Government policies is unacceptable?

**Mrs Lewell-Buck:** I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention, and I agree.

The 35-day delay leads to destitution and despair. There is no acceptable rationale for making people wait that long other than, to use Professor Alston’s words, “to make clear that being on benefits should involve hardship.”

That hardship is exemplified clearly in the draconian application of sanctions. It is estimated that across the benefits system, more than 350,000 people were denied access to benefit payments between 2017 and 2018 for the most trivial and minor of reasons—for example,

missing appointments because a relative has died unexpectedly or because claimants themselves have been admitted to hospital, or attending interviews instead of jobcentre appointments. The list is endless.

Professor Alston’s statement pays attention to the 2017 Government transformation strategy, under which all Government services will be “digital by default”. Universal credit claimants have been used as guinea pigs, as this is the first major service to be digital by default. It was either a deliberate act or total incompetence that led the Government to the conclusion that the most vulnerable and those with limited digital literacy and limited access to computers should be the first to test that. Even worse, it has been done against a backdrop of closures of libraries and jobcentres—the very places that those struggling would have gone to for assistance.

This Government have created a disability culture void of medical evidence and based on ignorance, fabrications and downright cruelty. The work capability and personal independence payment assessments—the most damning policies of our time—have seen companies such as Maximus, Atos and Capita being handed multimillion-pound contracts to hit targets based on how many people with disabilities they can push into destitution, and people with Down’s syndrome being asked by assessors how they “caught” it.

**Hugh Gaffney** (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making a very good speech. Does she agree that it is shameful that in 2017 the UN, which we associate with development work in third-world countries, found that 14 million people in Great Britain were living in poverty as a result of the Government’s failed welfare reforms? Does she agree that the Government should be ashamed of the findings of the UN report, which demonstrates that the only increases we have seen in this country are in child poverty, food bank usage and homelessness, as a direct result of Government policies? Does she agree that it is unacceptable for the Government to ignore the UN’s findings on poverty and the treatment of disabled people in this country?

**Mrs Lewell-Buck:** The Government should be ashamed. They should also be ashamed that a wheelchair user with multiple sclerosis was asked how long it would be before she could walk again, and that a young woman with a cancer-related bone marrow disease was denied personal independence payments because she had a degree, because working to gain a qualification is apparently a sign that someone is “not really disabled”. On top of that, people with disabilities are losing their severe disability premiums and enhanced disability premiums under universal credit, leaving them £80 a week worse off.

**Deidre Brock** (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing the debate on this important issue, which I feel has been shamefully neglected by the Government up to this point. Does she agree that the use of informal observations in benefit assessments, which have no criteria and are open to subjective opinion and interpretation on the part of assessors, often results in inaccurate and ill-informed assessments? That has certainly caused some of my most vulnerable constituents considerable distress. Does she therefore agree that the Government should undertake a review of the use of such observations?



**Mrs Lewell-Buck:** I agree that that would be a welcome way forward.

Those stories I have mentioned are not the exception but the norm, so it is little wonder that in 2017 the UN concluded that the UK Government were guilty of “grave or systematic violations of the rights of persons with disabilities”.

The UK benefits system now locks people into a Kafkaesque nightmare, and for some the only escape, tragically, has been to take their own lives. This state-inflicted damage cannot and must not continue.

**Ruth George (High Peak) (Lab):** I too congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate and on her powerful speech. Does she agree that the welfare state system we now have, in which people are left utterly powerless and often without the support they need to appeal decisions, is contributing not only to rising debt but to rising levels of mental health problems, as people suffer from depression and despair because they are unable to get on and be treated fairly?

**Mrs Lewell-Buck:** My hon. Friend is right. I used to be proud to live in a country where people, when in need through no fault of their own, were able to receive help from the welfare state in their darkest hours, but since 2010 that safety net has been eroded and ripped away so that work is no longer a route out of poverty. Punitive welfare reform, benefit cuts, inaction on low-paid and insecure work and the widening gulf between the cost of living and income have led to 4 million people being in work and in poverty, and over 4 million children living in poverty. Stories of children coming to school with a grey pallor and undernourished, rummaging through bins for food and wearing threadbare clothes are commonplace.

What comes through very clearly in Professor Alston’s report is that this Government do not have a vision for this country that works for everyone. His statement and the full report, which will follow in the spring, should be treated as a factual commentary and a warning for future general elections of how Tory Governments rip the very fabric of our country apart and cause irrevocable harm. Eight years of regressive policies have led to the hollowing out and decimation of local government and many other key public services, meaning that costly crisis management, rather than prevention, is now the norm.

We now see the human cost borne out on our streets, where homeless people are dying; where people suffering from terminal illnesses, disabilities and mental health difficulties are being wrongly declared fit for work, which means some attempt to take their own lives, and some are successful; where children and adults are being admitted to hospital for malnutrition; where food banks are having to turn desperate people away because they cannot cope with demand; where families are living in squalid temporary accommodation, with only the clothes on their backs and no end in sight; where vulnerable adults and children are being left with no social care provision at all; and where a whole generation of women have been plunged into poverty after their pensions were stolen from them by this Government.

This short debate in no way does justice to Professor Alston’s report, and I hope we will be able to revisit it in future, because as we debate it here tonight there will be

mums and dads returning home after a hard day’s work with rumbling stomachs, looking through empty cupboards wondering how they will feed their children. There will be elderly people sat alone, the silence of their loneliness piercing as they wonder if they should eat or put their heating on. There will be thousands who have torn open that brown envelope this morning only for the words and decisions within it to tear their world apart. Their pain lies at this Government’s door. Their suffering should be the shame of this Government, but it is not.

Professor Alston noted the

“striking...disconnect between what I heard from the government and what I consistently heard from...people...across the country.”

He added:

“The Government has remained determinedly in a state of denial...poverty is a political choice. Austerity could easily have spared the poor, if the political will had existed to do so.”

In his response I hope the Minister will answer one pertinent question, the answer to which millions of people currently suffering need to know: does that political will exist yet?

10.26 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Justin Tomlinson):** I pay tribute to the hon. Member for South Shields (Mrs Lewell-Buck), who has done a huge amount of work in this area over a number of years. She brings a huge amount of experience to many of the points she has raised.

This report covers not only the Department for Work and Pensions but the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, the Treasury and the Department for Exiting the European Union, but I will be speaking predominantly from the perspective of the DWP. At this stage it is only an interim report, and we are committed to considering Professor Alston’s views and opinions very carefully.

I recognise that hon. Members would now expect me to disagree with the majority of the report as it stands, and there are certainly things with which we do not agree, but I support the important role of the UN special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights. The former Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, my right hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Ms McVey), other departmental Ministers, our respective teams and I were fully engaged with the process. We met Professor Alston, we supported the visits and the engagement throughout the process and, as I said, we will give very serious consideration to his views and opinions.

As a Minister, I am not precious. Government should be challenged and held to account, whether by the UN special rapporteur, by stakeholders or by the fantastic work of the various Select Committees. All Governments of all political persuasions, since the dawn of time, have had challenging reports, and it is rare we get a report that says, “Fantastic. You are single-handedly doing everything perfectly right.” Such reports are an important part of our democratic process, and even the most challenging and most critical reports ultimately shape future decisions.

**Mrs Lewell-Buck:** Will the Minister give way?

**Justin Tomlinson:** I will give way. I will not take too many interventions because I have a lot to cover.

**Mrs Lewell-Buck:** I thank the Minister for giving way. I am a little confused, because the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions have both dismissed the findings and do not agree with the report. Has there been a change of thinking since they made those comments?

**Justin Tomlinson:** What I am saying is that we will consider the report seriously. We obviously do not agree with all the points, but Professor Alston has highlighted some important views and opinions to which we should rightly be looking to respond.

One challenge I make to Professor Alston ahead of his final report is that, at two of the visits, the visits to Newcastle and Clacton, he had the opportunity to meet frontline staff and volunteers. At the recent Women and Equalities questions, my hon. Friend the Member for Clacton (Giles Watling) expressed a huge amount of disappointment from those frontline staff and volunteers, who felt that their fantastic work was not recognised—it had just one line. It is right that the report holds the Government's feet and Ministers' feet to the coals, but we would all recognise that there are people doing a fantastic job, both the paid formal staff and the volunteers, and I hope Professor Alston will reflect on that.

As we consider Professor Alston's views and findings, we must remember that this is a snapshot. On many of the issues raised, we are rightly already taking action, acknowledging that there were issues and that they needed to be dealt with. That is either through the additional money secured in recent Budgets, or through our ongoing and crucial work with stakeholders, with their particular expertise. As I have said, while this covers many Departments, I will focus on where the DWP has the lion's share of the involvement.

Understandably, UC formed a significant part of both the report and the speech we have just heard. To be absolutely clear, this was never a financial thing. We are looking to spend an additional £2 billion compared with the legacy benefits, and rightly so. UC offers the opportunity for personalised, tailored support dealing with housing, training and childcare, and giving claimants who are in a position to seek work an additional 50% more time to find work.

Although there are still challenges and there is much more work to do, if Members visit jobcentres, they will find that the frontline staff do recognise that UC is significantly better than the complex legacy benefits. They were six benefits across three agencies—HMRC, the DWP and local authorities—and, frankly, people had to be nuclear physicists to navigate them. We all know from our own constituency casework how complex it was to unravel the situation.

**Jim Shannon:** My constituency office is about 100 yards from the social security office—it is as close as that—and I have had numerous distressed people come from the social security office to my office looking for advice. I have written perhaps not to the Minister directly but to his Department to outline some of the changes that we feel should be made. In the light of those things, perhaps more needs to be done in the social security office to address the issues early on.

**Justin Tomlinson:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I am coming on to those. UC dealt with the fact that, for some, there was in effect a 90% tax rate.

The well-documented 16, 24 and 30-hour cliff edges were significant barriers for people. It was so confusing and complex that £2.4 billion-worth, we believe, of claims went untaken each year across 700,000 claimants, who were some of the most vulnerable people. My role in the DWP is to represent vulnerable people going through the benefits system and it was often those people who were missing out on money because they were simply unaware that they were entitled to the support that we rightly wanted them to have.

**Ruth George:** Will the Minister give way?

**Justin Tomlinson:** Let me make a bit of progress and I will give way if I have time. The hon. Member for South Shields has raised some important questions and I want to try to cover as many as I can in the limited time. If I can, I will come back to the hon. Lady.

There have already been much needed improvements, partly through the additional £4.5 billion cash boost that has been secured in recent Budgets. There are the changes to advance payments, particularly to make that a part of the discussion in the initial conversation. We have changed repayments from six months to 12 months to 16 months and the rate at which they are done. That is something that we will continue to review. There is the additional, non-repayable two weeks' housing benefit, worth up to £237, and the recent announcement of an additional two weeks of ESA, JSA or income support, worth up to £200. We have scrapped the seven days' waiting. There are the alternative payments—direct to landlords—on housing, and more frequent payments where we feel that will help. There is the additional £1,000 work allowance, worth £630, which alone came to £1.7 billion. There is the 12-month exemption from the minimum income floor for the self-employed, and there is the increase in the severe disability premium from £158 to £326.

However, there are areas where we still need to do further work. The hon. Member for South Shields talked about digital by default. I think we do need to look at that. We have alternatives in place, but we also need to be more proactive in recognising those who would need that support. We have to identify vulnerable claimants and a major step was to put in place a formal arrangement—I championed this—with Citizens Advice. It will remain independent of us, it is widely respected and it is best placed to give support, particularly to vulnerable claimants, not just on the digital side, if that is needed, but general support as people navigate the benefits to which they should be entitled.

Building on that, we have to make sure that stakeholders are absolutely key and at the heart of everything we do in training our frontline staff and providing support for claimants. For example, a month before Christmas, I was working very closely with Women's Aid, Refuge and ManKind, meeting three or four times, so that they could do a root and branch review of the training we do to help to identify potential victims of domestic abuse, update our training manuals and guidance, feed in the feedback they receive from their supporters, and look at the best ways to identify potential victims, refer them to the maximum number of local and national support organisations, and work on the level of support we can offer. That is a principle I would like to see formalised, so that it does not just happen because it is a topical issue; it is a given going forward and we look to do that in many areas.

A lot was said about measures of poverty and what the reality is out there. What we do know is that there are 1 million fewer people in absolute poverty—a record low—including 300,000 children. On the different measures of relative and absolute poverty before and after housing, all are no higher than in 2010 and three are now lower. The average income of the poorest fifth in society under our Government has increased by £400 in real terms.

**Mrs Lewell-Buck:** Does the Minister agree with Professor Alston's assessment that, because the Government use four different measures of poverty, they can essentially say what they want about the figures? The reality is that there are 14 million people living in poverty in the UK.

**Justin Tomlinson:** The hon. Lady has just used one of the statistics. There is cross-party work on looking at alternatives. We are very interested to see if there is a way we can find statistics that we can all agree on. I think that is one area on which we do all agree.

The richest fifth are £800 less well-off under this Government. We are rightly targeting support at those who are most in need. Household incomes have never been higher and income inequality has fallen, having risen under the last Labour Government.

Many Members referred to food banks. Food affordability, the ability to afford a meal, has almost halved in the last five years. It is down to 5.4%. That is 2.5% lower than the EU average. There is still more to do in that area, which is why I am committed to working a lot more closely with the food bank network in this country. For a variety of reasons, some people may be going to food banks who should be receiving formal support. I want to make it as easy as possible to identify, to refer them and to get them back in to the system, so they can receive the full support.

**Liz McInnes** *indicated dissent.*

**Justin Tomlinson:** The hon. Lady is shaking her head. I do not understand why anybody would not want to do everything within their power to identify vulnerable people in society and give them the support we want to give to them. The very heart of the question raised by the hon. Member for South Shields is: is there a will from the Government? There absolutely is—from me and right through the Government.

We are going to keep on working with all stakeholders and partnership organisations to ensure that those in most need in society receive the support that they should. We are also looking at homelessness. Rightly, we have put in an additional £1.2 billion, building on the principles of the duty to refer. We have some exciting pilots: the Newcastle trailblazer; partnership working led by Crisis, which has had some really positive findings; and the Housing First initiatives in Manchester, Liverpool

and the west midlands. Again, they are on the principles of identifying, referring and supporting. There are exciting developments from those pilots and they will go to the heart of future roll-out support.

The key for me, with my individual role in the Department, is sharpening up the tailored support, whether for care leavers, ex-offenders or the parental conflict programme, and ensuring that those who need the extra support that many of us in our lives have been able to take for granted are given it to unlock everybody's potential. Some of the areas I felt were missing from the report related to education attainment to unlock people's potential. I went to a school that was at the bottom of the league tables and two of my best friends went to prison. It is absolutely key that we ensure that, regardless of people's background, they are given the maximum opportunity to succeed. I wholeheartedly support the significant improvements we are making in education.

**Thelma Walker:** As a former headteacher, I talk to a lot of my former colleagues. Many of them, of a morning, are washing children's clothes and giving them breakfast. They are having to give children extra lunch because they are starving. Does the Minister agree that that is totally unnecessary and inappropriate? We should be caring for the most vulnerable in our society.

**Justin Tomlinson:** That is why it is absolutely right that we have targeted support at the poorest in society, so the poorest fifth are now £400 better off in real terms than they were under the Labour Government. We will continue to do that work.

By prioritising sound financial management and a strong, growing economy, we have been able to deliver record employment in every region of the country. Wages are rising the fastest in a decade. We introduced the national living wage, income tax threshold changes and universal credit childcare up to 85% of costs, which is worth up to £15,000 to parents with two or more children, and we doubled free childcare. Those are all priorities for this Government, because we recognise that everybody should be supported, regardless of their background. By treating people as individuals in a simplified system that can give tailored, personalised support, we can unlock their potential, regardless of their unique challenges and opportunities.

As I said, we have to take many of the findings and opinions seriously. We are doing a huge amount of work, and we will continue to do so. I thank the hon. Member for South Shields for raising this very important issue.

*Question put and agreed to.*

10.40 pm

*House adjourned.*





# House of Commons

*Tuesday 8 January 2019*

*The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock*

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## Oral Answers to Questions

### BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### **Jobs (Devon and Cornwall)**

1. **Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): What steps his Department has taken to support businesses to create highly skilled jobs in Devon and Cornwall. [908428]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Richard Harrington):** Happy new year to you, Mr Speaker, and to everyone else. The two local enterprise partnerships covering the area—Cornwall and Isles of Scilly LEP, and Heart of the South West LEP, which includes Devon—are receiving £317 million through the local growth fund to drive regional development. That includes a £3 million investment in the Electronics and Photonics Innovation Centre at the White Rock business park in Paignton, which helps to support skilled jobs in a key local growth sector.

**Kevin Foster:** As my hon. Friend mentions, Torbay's £8 million EPIC centre will open later this year, helping to boost our vital photonics industry. What further support can his Department offer to help boost Torbay's high-tech sector?

**Richard Harrington:** I congratulate my hon. Friend on everything he does for employment in this area and in his constituency. He knows that my Department is working with Heart of the South West LEP, which is leading the development of our local industrial strategy. Torbay is actively engaged in that work. I believe the strategy will identify the particular strengths of the region and future opportunities for increased productivity, including in sectors such as photonics.

**Luke Pollard** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): The development of marine industries in Plymouth and across Devon and Cornwall is a really important part of our local economy. Will the Minister agree to meet a delegation from Plymouth to look at how the creation of the UK's first national marine park could trigger more investment in our marine technologies and industries in the west country?

**Richard Harrington:** It would be a pleasure. The hon. Gentleman and I have met before to discuss such subjects, and I am happy to do so again.

**Derek Thomas** (St Ives) (Con): In my constituency, 85% of employees are employed in small businesses, which tell me they struggle to find the skilled workers they need. What can my hon. Friend's Department do with the Treasury and the Department for Education to ensure that small colleges in particular have the funding they need to provide those skills?

**Richard Harrington:** As my hon. Friend knows, my Department is part of the picture; he correctly says the DFE is responsible for skills, but that is an important part of our industrial strategy, both nationally and locally. We are really pushing to put the skills agenda at the top of LEP programmes and everything else to do with that, because we realise, as he says, that small business will power the economy of the future.

**Scott Mann** (North Cornwall) (Con): The south-west is one of the fastest growing economic areas in the country, predominantly in tourism and tech. With the devaluation of the pound, many people have decided to have holidays in Cornwall, and we have tech-based businesses such as Microtest, a health-based solutions company in my constituency. People are making lifestyle choices about where in the country they want to live. What more can we do to facilitate moves away from the city to the coast?

**Richard Harrington:** As someone with previous experience of business in the south-west, in the tourism industry, I understand exactly what my hon. Friend says. The Government's strategy is very much based on regional devolution—LEPs in particular—and areas such as his will see the benefits of that in the future.

#### **Supply Chains**

2. **Jamie Stone** (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): What steps he is taking to maintain cross-border supply chains after 29 March 2019. [908429]

**The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Greg Clark):** Supply chains between the UK and the EU are vital—they support at least 200,000 UK traders and around 55,000 manufacturing jobs in Scotland alone. The deal the Government have negotiated with the EU, by avoiding customs checks, will protect supply chains and jobs right across the UK.

**Jamie Stone:** I ask this question against the background of yesterday's unthinkable dry run for a no-deal Brexit—80 lorries is hardly the same as 6,000. I represent the furthest-away part of the UK mainland. I have mentioned before in the Chamber Mr William Calder, who runs a fish food company in Scrabster. Half a day's extra delay in getting his fish products to the European market will ruin the gentleman. Does the Minister see just how dangerous the future could be for my constituents?

**Greg Clark:** I agree with the hon. Gentleman. That is why there has been consistent support, especially in Scotland, from organisations such as the National Farmers Union of Scotland and the Scotch Whisky Association. Those who depend on the export trade, including the logistics he describes, have urged the House to back the deal, and I hope he joins us in doing that.

**Sir Patrick McLoughlin** (Derbyshire Dales) (Con): The importance of Dover-Calais is unquestionable. What estimates has the Department made of the implications for the supply network of any reduction in capacity between Dover and Calais?

**Greg Clark:** My right hon. Friend knows that much of the just-in-time production goes through the strait of Dover, and estimates suggest an impact of a reduction of about 80% of capacity between the narrow strait. In my view, it is essential that we avoid that disruption, which would have implications right across the United Kingdom, including in Derbyshire and indeed Scotland, as we have heard.

**Luciana Berger** (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): This week, I received correspondence from a small business owner and constituent of mine who shared his fears about the issues Brexit could cause his chemicals business. The EU is where the majority of his sales are made and where he sources his raw materials. Can the Secretary of State tell us why his Government will not rule out a no-deal Brexit now, which is putting so many businesses in my area and across the country at risk?

**Greg Clark:** The hon. Lady is right that the chemicals industry is a good example of a very integrated industry across Europe. I met the leaders of the chemicals industry in the week before Christmas, and they were very clear that what has been negotiated in the withdrawal agreement and political agreement achieves what they need, which is, first, to avoid no deal and, secondly, to be able to continue what has been a very successful industry, including in the area she represents.

**Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield) (Con): With the worrying news that German output has fallen by 4.7%, what can Britain do, post Brexit, to help the German economy with a thriving British economy?

**Greg Clark:** It has always been my view, and I know it is my hon. Friend's view, that the more we can trade on what has been a very successful model the better. He represents a west midlands constituency and knows how important it is in the west midlands that we have flourishing trade, to the benefit of our economy and those of our neighbours and friends on the continent.

**Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): From Airbus in Bristol to Nissan in Sunderland, millions of British jobs depend upon supply chains that crisscross the channel. Ministers fantasise about replacing them with American or Australian ones, and then, as they did yesterday, hire 80 trucks to drive around Kent in a ghost of Brexit future pantomime of the chaos to come. The Minister for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy has acted honourably in saying he will not be part of a Government who allow a no-deal Brexit, so will the Secretary of State reassure Aston Martin, Brompton the bicycle manufacturer, and the other businesses stockpiling parts—spending money that could be spent creating jobs—by saying he understands the requirements of business and geography and rule out a no deal now?

**Greg Clark:** I completely understand the requirements of business, including the manufacturers the hon. Lady mentions. It is essential that we be able to continue to

trade, which is why I have always been clear—representing very strongly the views of small business and large business—that no deal should not be contemplated, but the way to avoid no deal is to do what the motor manufacturers, the Institute of Directors, the Federation of Small Businesses, the British Chambers of Commerce and all the business organisations say we should do, which is vote for the agreement that will come before the House next week.

**Drew Hendry** (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): Lang may yer lum reek, Mr Speaker.

One way the Government are looking to maintain cross-border supply chains is by Government tender to shipping companies, but is the Secretary of State happy about the precedent set for UK businesses? His colleague the Secretary of State for Transport has awarded a £14 million contract to a company with negative assets of nearly £400,000, no ships and terms and conditions copied from a takeaway, while the contract itself seems to have been awarded on questionable legal grounds. Is this the standard he expects for all UK businesses tendering for UK Government contracts?

**Greg Clark:** It is evident that avoiding no deal is an essential task for all of us in the House, and I hope that in the days ahead the hon. Gentleman and other hon. Members will take the opportunity to obviate the need for those contingencies. The Secretary of State for Transport has an opportunity to come to the House later today, but it seems to me prudent and responsible for every Department to prepare, on a contingency basis, for no deal, while also being firmly resolved to avoid it.

**Drew Hendry:** The Secretary of State has not answered the question. Will all UK businesses see such largesse from the Government in respect of procurement contracts? One of Seaborne's directors ran a business that went into liquidation owing HMRC nearly £600,000, using employee benefit trust tax avoidance schemes. According to the director, the Government did not even consider the money owed to Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs to be relevant. Is that a sign of a Government who are out of control over Brexit?

**Greg Clark:** I hope the hon. Gentleman will agree that, as I have said, every Department should make preparations against the avoidable contingency of no deal. The Secretary of State will describe the procurement processes for which the Department for Transport opted, but it is fair to observe that not a penny of Government money has been paid to the company, and I understand that it will be paid only on receipt of services provided.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): Given that nearly all the roll-on/roll-off lorry traffic between the Irish Republic and the EU travels across the UK motorway network to Dover, what co-operation has been offered by the Republic to mitigate a no-deal Brexit?

**Greg Clark:** My hon. Friend is right to point out that the impact of the Dover strait extends to our trade across the Irish sea. He knows that the negotiation has been with the European Commission and the European Council rather than through bilateral negotiations with



individual member states, but I agree with him that the disruption that would occur would affect our trade across the Irish sea as well.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. May I gently say to colleagues that we have a lot to get through? We need to speed up.

### Pubs Code

3. **Toby Perkins** (Chesterfield) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the pubs code and the Pubs Code Adjudicator. [908430]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Kelly Tolhurst):** We will be undertaking a statutory review of the effectiveness of the pubs code and the Pubs Code Adjudicator. I welcome the recent publication by the adjudicator of arbitration decisions, which will increase transparency in relation to how the code is working in practice.

**Toby Perkins:** At a recent meeting of the all-party parliamentary group on pubs, we heard from many tenants who had attempted to avail themselves of the “market rent only” option under the pubs code, but whose attempts had been frustrated. Will the review to which the Minister has referred involve a full and open consultation to which members of the public will be able to contribute, and which we will all be able to read afterwards?

**Kelly Tolhurst:** I recognise the hon. Gentleman’s commitment to this issue. We are currently working out how we will carry out the review, and, under statutory regulation, we need to do that until the end of March. Of course we understand some of the concerns that have been raised by people who have been affected; we will take account of their views, and I will ensure that those views are heard.

**Dr Sarah Wollaston** (Totnes) (Con): As the Minister will know, in the case of tenanted pubs the rent is partly set according to the volume of beer sold. However, there is a long-standing grievance about a discrepancy between the amount of drinkable beer in a cask and the volume of the cask itself. Will the Minister meet me—and some of my constituents, who are deeply concerned about the issue—to discuss the “72 pints” campaign?

**Kelly Tolhurst:** We recognise that a number of issues affect the pubs community. The Government have taken some important measures relating to beer duty and business rates to help pubs, but I should be happy to meet the hon. Lady and her constituents to discuss the position.

**Gill Furniss** (Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough) (Lab): Between April and September 2018, 33 pubs a week closed and were either demolished or converted to homes or offices. The pub industry is in free fall, and communities are suffering as they see their vital community hubs diminished. What strategy, if any, have the Government to secure a long-term sustainable future for the industry?

**Kelly Tolhurst:** The Government have taken action to secure the future of pubs. We have frozen beer duty, with the result that a regular pint of beer is 2p cheaper than it would have been if we had increased the duty in line with inflation. We have offered the business rate discount to retail properties, and we estimate that 75% of pubs will be eligible for it. That has cut pubs’ bills by a third for two years. We recognise the importance of pubs to our local communities, and we are taking action. For instance, as I have said, we will be reviewing the pubs code and the success of the Pubs Code Adjudicator.

### Renewable Energy

4. **Danielle Rowley** (Midlothian) (Lab): What steps he is taking to support new renewable energy technologies. [908431]

10. **Dr Rupa Huq** (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): What steps he is taking to support new renewable energy technologies. [908437]

**The Minister for Energy and Clean Growth (Claire Perry):** All of us in this House should celebrate the UK’s global leadership in decarbonising our economy: we have had the fastest rate of decarbonisation in the G20 since 1990, and part of that leadership has been through very substantial investment in renewable technology, including subsidies totalling £52 billion since 2010 and auction design and research and development investment. It is paying off: in the third quarter of last year we generated over a third of our energy from renewables, and our support is continuing with over half a billion pounds committed to the contracts for difference process and almost £200 million for cost-reducing innovations.

**Danielle Rowley:** Scottish businesses such as the innovative Artemis in my constituency have developed world-leading tidal and wave energy technologies, but requiring these early-stage businesses to compete with the more mature offshore wind industry for CfD subsidies means there is often no viable route to market for emergent technologies. Will the Minister consider having a three-pot auction for new technologies, including wave and tidal, so there is no direct competition with more established technologies?

**Claire Perry:** The hon. Lady raises an important point. We want to continue to invest in technologies that have the potential both to decarbonise and drive global exports, and that is certainly an area that could contribute, although not at any price: we will not rerun the debate over Swansea, which would have been the most expensive power station the country had ever built and created just 30 jobs. There are potentially better, more valuable projects and I am always happy to look at innovative proposals coming forward to see how we might support this technology.

**Dr Huq:** As well as the obvious, 31 March sees the end of the export tariff on electricity exported into the grid by solar photovoltaic systems. After that, big firms will end up receiving free electricity from all new solar PV installations, which are mainly small businesses and individual households, so they will effectively be subsidising the giants. Will the Government consider a net metering

scheme, whereby the difference between electricity consumed and exported into the grid only is paid for, to rectify this burning injustice?

**Claire Perry:** I admire the hon. Lady's passion. I feel I am rather front-running my answer to Question 9, which I know the hon. Member for Swansea West (Geraint Davies) is teed up to ask, but I will publish today the consultation on the Government's proposals for a smart export guarantee to bring forward this valuable source of energy at a price so that people are not providing it to the grid for free, and to support its development in what we want to call our smart systems plan going forward.

**Rebecca Pow** (Taunton Deane) (Con): While supporting new energy technologies is of course important, so too is supporting technologies that make our energy production more efficient, and many of these technologies are low carbon so they help us meet our climate change targets and cut consumers' household bills. Can the Minister update us on progress made in this area and on the call for evidence I have asked for on this subject?

**Claire Perry:** My hon. Friend has been a doughty campaigner on this issue and will know that we have contributed almost £20 million to the industrial strategy heat recovery fund, and the low-carbon heating technology innovation fund is also receiving funds of up to £10 million. I entirely agree with my hon. Friend's principle. I am not convinced that a further consultation is required, but I am always happy to discuss it with her.

**Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): Is it fair to continue to subsidise solar panels by charging higher prices to other customers who could not possibly afford that investment?

**Claire Perry:** No, and that is why the intention to close the feed-in tariff scheme was signalled many years ago: it has cost to date over £5 billion and we have a legacy cost of over £1.5 billion to fund that scheme going forward at a time when the price of solar is tumbling. We know that many companies are bringing forward large-scale solar installations without needing subsidy.

22. [908449] **Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): The Minister will be aware that the whole point of supporting new renewable energy technologies is to allow them to enter the marketplace and, hopefully, get to the point where they will become subsidy-free. Onshore wind is almost at that point, and it is also the cheapest form of electricity generation at the moment. What discussions has the Minister had with the Secretary of State for Scotland about developing onshore wind in Scotland?

**Claire Perry:** I have regular discussions with my right hon. Friend the Scottish Secretary regarding all the support we are providing for the BEIS Scottish energy sector. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will join me in celebrating the fact that we have opened up the CfD mechanism to the offshore wind provision that is coming for remote island projects—[*Interruption.*] He used to think that that was a very good thing. We should also never forget that it is UK bill payers collectively who

have invested in the success of UK renewable energy. We will continue to review the potential for onshore wind, but the hon. Gentleman will know that the Scottish Secretary and I were both elected on a manifesto that said that further subsidy for large-scale onshore wind was not required or necessary.

**John Lamont** (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): I very much support renewable energy, but many of my constituents in the Scottish borders feel that we now have our fair share of onshore wind, so can the Minister assure me that nothing in Government policy will promote onshore wind farm developments over other forms of renewable energy sources?

**Claire Perry:** That is exactly the point about technology neutrality. I refer my hon. Friend to the Scottish Government's own onshore wind policy statement, which suggests that the number of onshore wind applications is expected to increase by more than 70% on the basis of current planning applications. The current system is clearly working to bring forward onshore wind in the windiest parts of the United Kingdom.

**Sir Edward Davey** (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): Given how vital offshore wind is to Britain's future electricity supply, and how it is increasingly providing good value for money, how can the Minister justify allocating just £60 million to next spring's CfD auction?

**Claire Perry:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for recognising the incredible contribution that offshore wind can make, and I hope he will join me in wishing great success to our negotiating teams in bringing forward the vital sector deal. The point is, given that the price has tumbled since he was one of the people who designed the excellent auction structure, that we should be able to bring forward the amount of capacity we have said we need—1 GW to 2 GW—with that amount of subsidy. The system is working to get us to subsidy-free provision of this extremely important offshore wind energy.

**Dr Alan Whitehead** (Southampton, Test) (Lab): The Minister will be aware that the recent EU Court judgment, which effectively freezes the capacity market in the UK, turned substantially on the lack of level playing field access to capacity market support for new low-carbon energy technologies such as demand-side response. Does she intend to respond positively to the judgment by recasting the capacity market to reflect remedies for this lack of equal access, or is she perhaps hoping that, after a decent interval—and a lot of damage to existing participants in the capacity market—normal service will be resumed?

**Claire Perry:** The hon. Gentleman raises an incredibly important point. We have been working on this issue closely with the industry for several months since the judgment came forward, and it is absolutely right that we reassure the industry and investors of our commitment to holding auctions in the near future to ensure electricity supply for next winter, and that we do all that we can to ensure that this market is put back on a legal and orderly basis. It does work—it is the envy of many countries around the world—and we are working closely with Ofgem and the industry to ensure that we can take that market capacity structure forward.

### Supply Chains

5. **Peter Aldous** (Waveney) (Con): What recent steps he has taken to support businesses and their supply chains. [908432]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Richard Harrington):** The Government support businesses throughout the UK by encouraging innovation, investing in infrastructure and skills and, more importantly, building long-term partnerships with businesses as part of our modern industrial strategy. We have demonstrated our support for the importance of our supply chain through the automotive, aerospace and nuclear sector deals.

**Peter Aldous:** I am grateful to the Minister for that reply. Fabrication yards in UK ports have supply chains that extend throughout the UK, but there is real concern for their future. Can the Minister confirm that the oil and gas and the offshore wind sector deals will make provision for realising the full potential of those yards and their supply chains?

**Richard Harrington:** I certainly can, and I welcome the deal proposals that have been put forward by both the offshore wind and the offshore oil and gas sectors.

24. [908451] **Debbie Abrahams** (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): It is almost a year since Carillion collapsed, leaving losses to small business supply chains of more than £2 billion. My constituent, Neil Skinner, was among those affected. Will the Minister and the Government support my ten-minute rule Bill, which is coming to the House next week and would introduce project bank accounts for all public sector contracts in order to prevent such losses to small businesses?

**Richard Harrington:** I am sure that the hon. Lady will be delighted to know that we are working closely with the sector. I have some experience of project bank accounts in the construction sector and I have seen them work. We will look very carefully at this.

**Nic Dakin** (Scunthorpe) (Lab): Precisely what support is being given to the steel industry and its supply chain?

**Richard Harrington:** The hon. Gentleman and I frequently speak about the steel industry, and I meet regularly with the trade body, UK Steel, and all the different companies to monitor the future carefully. The industry is important to us, and I am still hopeful that we can work on a sector deal, so I am interested to hear proposals from the various companies.

### UK Space Industry

6. **Mark Garnier** (Wyre Forest) (Con): What steps he is taking to support the UK space industry. [908433]

**The Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation (Chris Skidmore):** The UK plays a leading role in space science and exploration, and our commercial sector is globally competitive, underpinned by Government support of up to £370 million a year. We have further committed £92 million to develop options for a possible UK global navigation satellite system to maintain the

UK's security capabilities, and £31.5 million to kick-start small satellite launch from the UK as part of our modern industrial strategy.

**Mark Garnier:** I can tell from that answer that my hon. Friend recognises the increasing importance of the space sector in our everyday lives, particularly for communications and broadband. Does he therefore agree that elements of the space sector should be designated and treated as part of the UK's critical national infrastructure, thus receiving the extra support and potential financing that such designation would provide?

**Chris Skidmore:** My hon. Friend is right that space capabilities are fundamental to UK prosperity and security. Every day, we rely on telecommunications, earth observation, position navigation and timing services from space. Many of the parts of the UK's critical infrastructure—from telecommunications to transport—also depend on services from space to operate effectively, and that is why the space sector is designated as a critical national infrastructure sector, with efforts focused on improving the security of our critical assets.

**Mr Barry Sherman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Does the Minister not understand that the aerospace industry is crucial to the future of our country? A company that operates in my constituency made components for the Mars probe, and such firms, which are at the leading edge of technology, are terrified by the chaos of the possible no-deal Brexit that the Government are leading. The supply chains are so complex that the company in my constituency faces ruin, as does the country's whole aerospace industry under this Government's watch.

**Chris Skidmore:** I congratulate the company in the hon. Gentleman's constituency on its success with the Mars landing. I recently went to Imperial College to congratulate the team that created the sensors that detected the first sounds on Mars. It is crucial to say that our commitment to the European Space Agency is independent of our relationship with the EU. We put in support of £370 million a year that allows us access to a market worth £6 billion. When it comes to ensuring that we have stability and security for the company in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, I look forward to seeing him in the Lobby next week supporting the Government's deal.

**Vicky Ford** (Chelmsford) (Con): Last week, while the Chinese were exploring the dark side of the moon, NASA was 6.5 billion km away on the far side of Neptune taking photos of Ultima Thule, and the sensors that took those images were made in Chelmsford. Will the Minister therefore join me in giving a massive shout-out to everyone at Teledyne e2v and congratulating them on this world-first achievement?

**Chris Skidmore:** Absolutely. I join my hon. Friend in congratulating Teledyne e2v on its involvement in NASA's New Horizons mission. The stunning image of that distant world showcases UK technology at the leading edge of space exploration. As I said, we have already detected the first sounds from Mars through a project led by Imperial College and the University of Oxford, and Surrey Satellite Technology will unveil tomorrow its completed build platform for the Eutelsat Quantum—the



first geostationary telecommunications satellite that will be fully reconfigurable in orbit—which highlights the UK Space Agency’s continual successes.

**Mr Speaker:** Thank you. We are now considerably better informed.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): Will the Minister outline how many new jobs have been created to meet the need for 30,000 new employees that was highlighted in last May’s “Prosperity from Space” report?

**Chris Skidmore:** The sector currently employs around 38,500 people and has grown significantly since 1999-2000, when 14,651 were working in the sector—that represents an annual growth rate of 6.7%. The UK has committed to ensuring that we grow our share of the global space market to 10% by 2030. That offers huge potential for increasing not just our share of the market, but the UK’s prosperity and productivity. I hope that the “Prosperity from Space” report, which was published by the space sector and my predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey (Mr Gyimah), whom I thank, will lead to a deal for the space sector and, potentially, to investigation of a national space programme—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I do apologise, but progress is not just too slow; it is too slow.

#### People in Insecure Work

7. **Stephen Morgan** (Portsmouth South) (Lab): What steps he is taking to support people in insecure work. [908434]

14. **Janet Daby** (Lewisham East) (Lab): What steps he is taking to support people in insecure work. [908441]

**The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Greg Clark):** The Government’s good work plan represents the largest reform to employment rules in over 20 years. It includes measures to boost transparency and tackle one-sided flexibility for those in insecure work, and I have already tabled legislation in Parliament to take forward the programme.

**Stephen Morgan:** A recent Resolution Foundation report shows that barely half of agency workers remain in one job beyond six months, making the Government’s arbitrary timeframe of 12 months before the right to request a direct contract kicks in totally meaningless. Labour has committed to giving all workers equal rights from day one; why have the Government not committed to doing the same?

**Greg Clark:** The hon. Gentleman will welcome the reforms that have been made to deal with insecure work and, in particular, to do something that has been campaigned for by the trade union movement and supported by many employers, which is to remove the Swedish derogation that has provided a loophole for employers to avoid those rights. That legislation is now before the House, and I hope he will support it.

**Janet Daby:** Does the Secretary of State agree that the recently introduced right to request guaranteed working hours is not sufficient to protect workers on zero-hours contracts?

**Greg Clark:** No. This is a very important extension of the rights of people on zero-hours contracts. It is important to recognise, first, that the number of employees on zero-hours contracts remains very small and, secondly, that most of those on zero-hours contracts want to have that flexibility. Those who do not want that flexibility and prefer a longer and more stable contract will now have the right to request one.

25. [908452] **Rachel Reeves** (Leeds West) (Lab): Only days after the Secretary of State published his response to the Taylor review, Uber was once again found by the courts to be denying basic rights to its workers. When will the Government bring forward legislation to clarify workers’ status so that they do not have to go through the courts and tribunals system to get the rights to which they are entitled?

**Greg Clark:** The hon. Lady will recognise that our package immediately introduced legislation for those rights that can be legislated for with secondary legislation. Primary legislation will shortly be brought forward for the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee, which she chairs, and the Work and Pensions Committee to scrutinise.

**Frank Field** (Birkenhead) (Ind) *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I was not looking for the right hon. Gentleman, although it is always a pleasure to be reminded of the fact of his presence.

**Rebecca Long Bailey** (Salford and Eccles) (Lab): I wish you and the Secretary of State a happy new year, Mr Speaker, but the sad fact is that the good work plan does little to change the lives of precarious limb (b) workers, who will still not be entitled to statutory sick pay, maternity pay or the right to claim unfair dismissal. For those on a zero-hours contract, all the requests in the world will not legally oblige their employer to provide more stable employment. I have asked this question time and again to no avail: can the Secretary of State confirm what happens when an employer refuses a request for more stable working hours?

**Greg Clark:** It is very clear that we are not making it mandatory for people not to have a zero-hours contract. Such contracts are available to employers, but employees will have the right to request. Reasonable employers have offered more stable contracts to employees, but the Taylor report is very clear that the flexibility that zero-hours contracts offer is valued by many of the people who use them.

**Rebecca Long Bailey:** I am glad the Secretary of State has clarified that the right to request a more stable contract is, in fact, a meaningless proposal on paper. What is worse is that the Government also rejected recommendations from their own director of labour market enforcement to increase fines for companies that breach the minimum wage and for that money to be used to increase enforcement resource. The Government also rejected his recommendation that public procurement contracts should compel compliance with labour market regulations. With reports that the average employer can

expect an investigation once in every 500 years, does the Secretary of State really think he is being serious about enforcing workers' rights?

**Greg Clark:** I am working closely with Sir David Metcalf, the director of labour market enforcement. On his particular recommendation about increasing penalties, we just have increased the penalties and it is reasonable to look at their effectiveness. I have made the commitment to the House that, of course, we will increase them if that proves necessary, but one of the other reforms that we are making is to boost the enforcement of workers' rights by bringing together the different enforcement bodies so that such employers—the minority that do play fast and loose with the rights to which employees are entitled—should expect justice to be brought about. This will be part of the package that we have tabled.

### Paris Agreement Goals

8. **Mr Virendra Sharma** (Ealing, Southall) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the potential effectiveness of the Paris rulebook agreed at COP24 in meeting the Paris agreement goal of holding the increase in global average temperature to less than 2° C. [908435]

**The Minister for Energy and Clean Growth (Claire Perry):** I want to pay tribute to our UK negotiating team, which did such a fantastic job at the recent conference of the parties in developing a robust set of rules that will take us forward to achieve what we need, which is further hardcore nationally determined contributions in 2020. We want to use our leadership in this space to continue progress, which was why I was pleased to announce our expression of interest in hosting the 2020 COP right here in the UK. I hope the hon. Gentleman will support that.

**Mr Sharma:** I thank the Minister for that response. What sanctions are the Government willing to use to ensure that other countries meet their 2020 emission reduction targets?

**Claire Perry:** We do not have the power to sanction under international law—or, indeed, under the current United Nations proposals—but we can work positively through initiatives such as the Powering Past Coal Alliance, which I was pleased to set up with my Canadian equivalent last year, to encourage all countries that, like us, are committed to phasing coal out of their energy system in a short period. We now have more than 80 members a year after launch, so we can continue to lead by example.

### Renewable Energy

9. **Geraint Davies** (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): When his Department plans to publish its proposals on rewards for small-scale renewable energy exports to the grid. [908436]

**The Minister for Energy and Clean Growth (Claire Perry):** I want to give the hon. Gentleman the good news that I will be publishing today the next stages of our proposals for a smart export guarantee to reflect two principles: that nobody should be providing energy to the grid for free, or indeed at negative pricing, as has happened in some countries; and that the value of community energy projects, which is real and significant,

can be recognised. That consultation will be published later today and I look forward to his response, because I know he is a long-standing campaigner in this area.

**Geraint Davies:** It would have been useful to have had that publication before Question Time to enable informed questions to be asked. I put it to the Minister that some 60 MW of solar energy in Wales alone rely on the export tariffs. Will she be looking at differential tariffs for existing versus new providers, so that there is no breach of contract with existing providers, and ensure that tariffs are set so as to encourage solar rather than fracking and so that we are in accordance with our Paris commitments, which have just been referred to?

**Claire Perry:** The hon. Gentleman should know that we have signalled for many years how the closure of the feed-in tariff will work. We have spent almost £6 billion on existing contracts, and those contracts will of course be honoured. We have also announced with the closure of the scheme that there is a limited application period for projects for the next couple of months. There will be some that are brought forward, but it is only right that, as the price of this power provision has tumbled, we stop using other people's money to subsidise something that we do not need to do in order to bring forward solar.

**Douglas Ross** (Moray) (Con): While we have been in the Chamber, the Minister's consultation has gone online, and Members and the public have until 5 March to respond to it. What reassurance can she give that those responses will be listened to? There is concern in the solar industry and among others that 91% of responses to a previous consultation by her Department were against the end of export tariffs, yet that went ahead. Will she meet me and an excellent local business, AES Solar, which has concerns but would like to discuss them with her and community representatives?

**Claire Perry:** I would be delighted to meet my hon. Friend and I am also very interested in the consultation results. I want to make the point quickly that the era of crude subsidy is over, partly because the price of renewables has dropped so significantly. We are trying to ensure that bringing forward the decentralised energy that we believe is so important to our system is also the objective of this tariff, and I would be interested to hear his views as well as those of his constituents.

### Manufacturing and Automotive Sector

11. **Bridget Phillipson** (Houghton and Sunderland South) (Lab): What steps he is taking to support the manufacturing and automotive sector. [908438]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Richard Harrington):** The automotive sector is one of the great success stories of our country, and our sector deal is a good example of how we will continue to support it going forward. We have committed around £1 billion over 10 years up to 2023 through the Advanced Propulsion Centre to research, develop and commercialise the next generation of low-carbon technologies, to keep us at the cutting edge of the automotive industry's development.

**Bridget Phillipson:** The UK car industry is under huge pressure, yet far from providing the certainty that the sector needs, we will be debating our trading relationship with the European Union for years to come. Is it not the case that the deal that the Government are putting forward fails to protect tens of thousands of highly-skilled automotive jobs in my region? Not only that, but it is far worse than the deal we have now.

**Richard Harrington:** I am sure the hon. Lady knows that the deal has been backed by everybody in the automotive sector. I meet regularly with them and they have been outspoken about the perils of defeating the Prime Minister's deal. I hope that the hon. Lady will think about that when she goes through the voting Lobby.

**Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con):** What is the Minister's response to the report published last month by the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee—the membership of which, by the way, includes the Scottish National party Front-Bench spokesperson, the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry)—which concluded:

“The consistent and overwhelming message expressed by”  
business

“is that to make...decisions they need certainty and it is for that reason they support the Withdrawal Agreement”?

**Richard Harrington:** As ever, my hon. Friend has absolutely nailed this. The automotive sector, like the BEIS Committee, is totally in favour of the Prime Minister's deal. I am sure that the SNP spokesman has listened carefully to what my hon. Friend said, and I am sure that he will be supporting the deal next week.

18. [908445] **Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP):** The Scottish Government's £18 million advanced manufacturing challenge fund is at serious risk of being undermined by Brexit, with the Bank of England's analysis showing that the UK relies on the EU for more than 30% of manufacturing sales. When will the UK Government start listening to the majority of Scots and protect Scotland's economy and jobs by keeping us in the single market and the customs union?

**Richard Harrington:** I must remind the hon. Lady of my answer to the previous question: the best thing for the Scottish economy is the Prime Minister's deal. I hope the hon. Lady will consider that when she votes next week.

**Mr Speaker:** I am very saddened that the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field) is departing our midst. I know he has many pressing commitments and a very full diary, but if he stayed, he might get called. It would be very sad to lose the right hon. Gentleman's pearls of wisdom.

### Aerospace Businesses

12. **Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con):** What steps the Government has taken to support aerospace businesses.  
[908439]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Richard Harrington):** You are racing ahead, Mr Speaker; we had got so far behind.

My hon. Friend should know that we are strongly supporting the aerospace industry through our aerospace growth partnership, which includes supporting business with nearly £2 billion of public research and development funding from 2013 to 2026. The sector deal for aerospace includes £125 million of funding to support the electrification of flight, developing new aircraft technologies and transport concepts. I am sure that will be excellent for your future holidays, Mr Speaker.

**Fiona Bruce:** What plans do Ministers have to extend the Sharing in Growth scheme in the aerospace industry? It has helped Congleton business Senior Aerospace Bird Bellows to improve productivity and secure new orders. The company is very much looking forward to receiving the Minister on his planned visit to Congleton in March.

**Richard Harrington:** I am very much looking forward to seeing my hon. Friend on that visit. We are in dialogue with senior management at Sharing in Growth about the scope to extend the programme further, and that will continue ahead of the comprehensive spending review.

**Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op):** The Space Studio School in Feltham, started by the Rivers Academy, continues to innovate, bringing about high-quality science education and industry-related work, and engaging with the National Space Centre, the European Space Agency, NASA and the aerospace industry around Heathrow. Does the Minister agree that even stronger relationships between schools and industry are vital to ensure that we stay competitive? Will he agree to visit the Space Studio in west London to see what is being done there and what more can be done to improve opportunities for young people?

**Richard Harrington:** Yes and yes.

**Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP):** The Minister will be aware of the problems as well as the possibilities for Bombardier in east Belfast, as my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson) has raised them consistently. Given the job loss announcements several weeks ago, will he undertake to do whatever he can on the possibilities for expansion next year?

**Richard Harrington:** The hon. Gentleman knows, I hope, that Bombardier is a company close to my heart. I speak regularly to him and his colleagues and to the company, and I will do anything I can to ensure that company's prosperity.

### Support for Businesses (Scotland)

13. **Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP):** What recent discussions he has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on fiscal support for businesses based in Scotland to prepare for the UK leaving the EU without a deal.  
[908440]



**The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Greg Clark):** I have regular discussions with the Chancellor of the Exchequer. The best outcome for Scotland is to deliver the deal that we have negotiated with the EU. That will provide the certainty that Scottish businesses need and protect jobs and prosperity.

**Tommy Sheppard:** A recent report by the Fraser of Allander Institute found that three quarters of Scottish businesses felt that they did not have adequate information to prepare for Brexit. Given that, do the Government now regret rejecting the Scottish National party's proposal for a £750 million small business support scheme to help them prepare for the eventuality of Brexit?

**Greg Clark:** Advice and support is available to businesses right across the UK, but it remains the case that the best certainty that business can have is to know that the agreement that has been reached with the European Union, which rules out no deal and involves a substantial transition period, will be approved next week in the House of Commons. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will support that.

### Youth Entrepreneurship

15. **Jeremy Lefroy** (Stafford) (Con): What steps his Department has taken to promote youth entrepreneurship. [908442]

17. **Henry Smith** (Crawley) (Con): What steps his Department has taken to promote youth entrepreneurship. [908444]

**The Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation (Chris Skidmore):** A total of 390,000 18 to 24-year olds are involved in starting businesses in the UK, and the British Business Bank has provided £52 million in start-up loans to young people since 2012. In December we launched a youth engagement programme, including a celebration of UK science, technology, engineering and maths projects and an industrial strategy competition to inspire 13 to 19-year-olds.

**Jeremy Lefroy:** I welcome that and I welcome the start-up loans scheme, which has helped a lot of young entrepreneurs, but will the Minister talk with his counterparts in the Department for Education to see how we can embed entrepreneurship and life skills in business into the school curriculum?

**Chris Skidmore:** Absolutely. Indeed, as a Minister also in the Department for Education, I work with that Department and understand the importance of ensuring that young people develop entrepreneurial skills. Our careers strategy launched in 2017 places a strong emphasis on our interaction with entrepreneurs. We have connected more than 2,000 schools and colleges with enterprise advisers, launched a £2.5 million investment fund to support employer encounters, and created 20 new career hubs.

**Henry Smith:** Sam's Kitchen was set up by a young entrepreneur in Crawley several years ago. On meeting him recently, he reported a large number of frequent and, it seems, unnecessary inspections. How can we

make sure that we get the balance right between necessary regulation and not imposing too much of a burden on young, growing businesses?

**Chris Skidmore:** I understand that Sam French is a young entrepreneur selling homemade gingerbread men and women. I congratulate him on his success. Perhaps he may like to send some to you to sample, Mr Speaker. I am pleased that he shares his experience with other young entrepreneurs. It is important, however, that inspections in the food industry are based on a national code of practice and are intended to give the necessary reassurances to business and consumers so that they can buy products with absolute confidence.

**Mr Speaker:** I might want it, but I probably should not have it.

**Vernon Coaker** (Gedling) (Lab): Is not part of the problem of encouraging youth entrepreneurship that vocational education is seen as second rate? How will we change that?

**Chris Skidmore:** The hon. Gentleman raises a very important point, which is why the Government have commissioned the Augur review to look at post-18 education. In addition, we are developing a full range of T-levels that will soon be operational. It is absolutely important that we level the playing field and ensure that the 50% of people who are not going to university have that opportunity to develop their skills going forward, particularly around technical education.

### Topical Questions

T1. [908453] **Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

**The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Greg Clark):** Since we last met, I have been delighted to be in Bristol, a hub of brilliant technological innovation, to launch the aerospace sector deal with a commitment from business and Government to invest a quarter of a billion pounds in the aircraft of the future. I announced a life sciences sector deal, featuring £1 billion of industry investment from the global biopharmaceutical company UCB. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Energy and Clean Growth has been in Katowice representing the UK at COP 24. At home, we published our Good Work Plan, and, just last week, the energy price cap came into effect, ensuring that all customers get a fair deal.

**Alison Thewliss:** I thank the Secretary of State for that answer.

A meeting of stakeholders was recently held in Pollokshields in my constituency to discuss the problems of fireworks in the community, as they really cause local residents a huge amount of distress. The Minister wrote to me last year saying that a meeting would be set up with me and other MPs to discuss the matter further. Will he give me more information as to what progress has been made to set up the meeting, as my constituents do not want to be forgotten about?

**Greg Clark:** The hon. Lady is quite right that the issue is a matter of concern not just in her constituency, but in others. I will ensure that the meeting happens in the next two weeks.

T3. [908455] **Kevin Hollinrake** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): The Financial Reporting Council identified six areas that warrant further inquiry in PwC's administration of Premier Motor Auctions, but delegated that inquiry to the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales—a trade body with limited powers. Will the Minister agree to meet me to ensure that this and any other insolvency practitioner issues are properly investigated?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Kelly Tolhurst):** It is right that the FRC refers any concerns it has relating to the insolvency case to the ICAEW, which is a recognised professional body that regulates insolvency practitioners. In this case, I understand that the ICAEW has considered the issues put forward and is investigating a number of matters. I will happily meet my hon. Friend to discuss this issue again, as I already have. It is right that we investigate any concerns that British businesses have about the regulations.

T2. [908454] **Mr Clive Betts** (Sheffield South East) (Lab): Fracking activities in Lancashire have recently had to be suspended because earth tremors triggered the traffic lights system. As a result, the Minister has said that she is now looking at whether that system should be relaxed. Will she tell us what she is thinking, and will she give us an assurance that there will be full consultation with all stakeholders before any change is made, and that the matter will be brought back to this House for the approval of Members?

**The Minister for Energy and Clean Growth (Claire Perry):** I think I have answered a similar question before, although not from the hon. Gentleman. I have absolutely no plans to change the traffic lights system. The current fracking proposals being tested in Lancashire right now were developed with that system. The fact is that that system is working and being triggered even by micro-tremors; the hon. Gentleman will know that we have had some great evidence from the University of Liverpool as to how small the tremors actually are. If we are to take forward what could be a very valuable industry, it is only right that we do so with the toughest environmental regulations in the world, so I say again that there are no plans from the Government to change the traffic lights system.

T4. [908456] **Peter Aldous** (Waveney) (Con): With the high street undergoing a period of significant upheaval, will the Secretary of State confirm that he is working closely with the Chancellor and the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government to ensure that high street businesses are able to compete on a level taxation playing field with their online competitors?

**Kelly Tolhurst:** We continue to work closely with the Treasury and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to ensure that the needs of high street retailers are understood. In the 2018 Budget we

announced a reduction in business rates worth £900 million over two years for small businesses. The digital services tax, a 2% tax on revenues specific to digital businesses, will ensure that they pay tax reflecting the value that they derive from UK users. We have also established the Retail Sector Council, which has now decided on its future work programme, as part of which business costs and taxation are one topic being considered.

**Laura Pidcock** (North West Durham) (Lab): New research from the TUC shows that household debt is at its highest ever level, with average debt per household now at over £15,000. It is blatantly obvious that the cause is years of austerity and wage stagnation. Millions of workers are now reliant on borrowing, making up for low wages by increasing their debt—not for holiday or luxuries, but through using credit cards for everyday essential such as nappies and food. That is so stressful. Will the Minister please explain what the Government are doing to address this crisis, and why Conservative Members refuse to join the Labour party in advocating a real minimum wage of at least £10 an hour and a return to serious collective bargaining for workers in the UK?

**Claire Perry:** I heard the news reports of this particular analysis, but I also heard that the analysis had been entirely discredited because it included student debt, which does not accrue to every household. If we were to strip that out, the rate of accrual—[*Interruption.*] Would the hon. Lady like to listen, rather than chunter? I will carry on. If we strip out student debt, which does not accrue to every household, we see that the growth of consumer credit has actually slowed. Once again, I am proud to stand here and represent the Government who finally did what the hon. Lady's Government had 13 years and did not do—introduce a national minimum wage and ensure that it goes up well ahead of inflation. [*Interruption.*] A living wage.

**Mr Speaker:** I call Will Quince. [*Interruption.*] I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is delighted to have excited such a reaction, but I would like to hear what he has to say.

T6. [908458] **Will Quince** (Colchester) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker. Will my right hon. Friend join me in welcoming the £900 million cut in business rates announced at the most recent Budget, which will benefit thousands of small businesses up and down our country, including in Colchester?

**Kelly Tolhurst:** I am delighted to join my hon. Friend in welcoming this recent measure, which has benefited small businesses so well. We have cut corporation tax to 19%. As a result of cuts made by this Government since 2017 through the small business rate relief, over 655,000 small businesses—the occupiers of a third of all business properties—pay no rates at all.

T5. [908457] **John Spellar** (Warley) (Lab): I am sure Ministers understand that the new Euro 6 diesel engines are considerably more efficient and cleaner, and that encouraging uptake of diesel vehicles would be good for the environment, with both cleaner air and less carbon dioxide emissions. However, production of vehicles is down, partly because of the downturn in China and

uncertainty over Brexit, but also because of the damaging, self-promoting anti-diesel campaign by the Secretary of State's ministerial colleagues at the Departments for Transport and for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. What is he going to do to get Government policy back on track in support of the British motor industry?

**Greg Clark:** In the "Road to Zero" strategy document, it is very clear that diesel engines, especially the new generation, are a perfectly acceptable choice environmentally as well as economically. The right hon. Gentleman will know that diesel sales are falling across the whole of Europe, but we have been very clear in this country that it can play an important role in the transition to zero-emission vehicles.

T10. [908462] **Mark Pawsey** (Rugby) (Con): Following on from the previous question, maintaining an uninterrupted supply of components for just-in-time manufacturing and the ability to sell tariff-free into European markets, both of which are enabled by the Prime Minister's deal, is vital to the continued success of the UK auto industry. Forty constituents of mine, all of whom work at Jaguar Land Rover, have reminded me of that through their emails. Will the Secretary of State welcome that approach?

**Greg Clark:** I do indeed welcome the representation from my hon. Friend. The automotive sector is one of our most successful, and it is globally admired. Its success depends on having the just-in-time production that makes it so competitive. In my view, it is vital that we pose no threat to that in our new relationship with the European Union.

T7. [908459] **Steve McCabe** (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): The Minister will be aware of the rising cost of the smart meter programme for dual-fuel households. What is she going to do to curtail those costs, make transparent the true cost to households, and ensure that any benefits that eventually accrue are actually passed on to consumers?

**Claire Perry:** I had an inkling that the hon. Gentleman might ask a question about this, because he has been a long-standing campaigner in this area. I am pleased to report that the programme is accelerating; I know he will welcome that. I welcomed extensively the National Audit Office report on the cost profile, which showed, effectively, a cost overrun but still a very, very substantial net benefit to both consumers and the economy. I believe that we are minded to accept almost all of the recommendations that were made. This is a vital programme for upgrading our energy system. I hope that he has had his smart meter installed. I saw over Christmas quite how much electricity cooking the Christmas turkey cost, and it was a very valuable exercise.

**Tom Pursglove** (Corby) (Con): What role does the Minister see for the push on technical skills in boosting youth entrepreneurship?

**The Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation (Chris Skidmore):** As I have stated before, technical skills are absolutely important when it comes to boosting youth entrepreneurship. I take this opportunity to mention to my hon. Friend the launch of the new

year-long youth industrial strategy competition at the industrial strategy fair that will be held in March this year, with prizes being awarded at the Big Bang fair in March 2020.

T8. [908460] **Martin Docherty-Hughes** (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): The Scottish Government's draft 2018-19 budget means that 90% of firms will pay lower rates than those based anywhere else in the UK. So, for the second time, why will the Secretary of State and his Government not support Scottish industry and back the call from the SNP and the Institute of Directors for a £750 million SME Brexit advice service?

**Greg Clark:** As I said to the hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard), that advice is available to businesses right across the country. But in supporting business confidence, the hon. Member for West Dunbartonshire (Martin Docherty-Hughes) should reflect on the fact that Scotland has now become the highest-taxed part of the United Kingdom, and that is, in itself, undermining the confidence that investors have in Scotland.

**Andrea Jenkyns** (Morley and Outwood) (Con): Associated Waste Management is a successful business based in my constituency. It has recently been acquired by Beauparc, one of Ireland's leading waste management companies, but it is keeping its head office in my constituency. The new arrangements have secured the long-term growth of this locally founded business. Does my right hon. Friend agree that such investments are a vote of confidence in the UK economy and send a clear message that we are open for business post-Brexit?

**Greg Clark:** My hon. Friend is right that the fundamental attractions of the UK economy are as strong as ever. We have some of the best skills in the world, some of the most innovative people and some of the best scientists and researchers, but we also have access to a substantial European market that has proved attractive to businesses from around the world. We should continue with that, and we should have both.

T9. [908461] **Christine Jardine** (Edinburgh West) (LD): Given that the European Union is the biggest regional market for whisky—worth £1.4 billion last year—and that no deal would force significant label change costs on independent producers, which currently do not have to display an EU importer address, what are the Government doing to reassure and compensate producers that are already incurring significant costs due to this Government's dither, delay and uncertainty?

**Greg Clark:** I might ask the hon. Lady what she is doing to address that. The Scotch Whisky Association has been very clear; it has said that the withdrawal agreement is a compromise but a positive step towards much needed business certainty. If she cares about the industry, she should vote for the deal.

**Bill Grant** (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Con): Sadly, my constituency has an unemployment rate of 6%, which is twice the UK average. What progress has been made or can be made on the Ayrshire growth deal, which is essential to Ayrshire's future prosperity?



**Greg Clark:** I know that my hon. Friend has been a vociferous champion of the Ayrshire growth deal, which was referred to in the Budget. I hope that we will see some progress on it in the next few weeks. For Cumnock in particular, the prospects will be very attractive. For a town that has contributed significantly over the years, including to UK energy supplies and industrial goods, it will be a fitting tribute—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. We are extremely grateful to the Secretary of State.

**Marion Fellows** (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): The Association of Accounting Technicians' recent survey found that 73% of MPs agreed with its recommended changes to the prompt payment code, which are making the code compulsory, ensuring that larger businesses pay in 30 days and implementing a penalty regime. Will the Minister introduce those changes in legislation, to help the many small businesses that will benefit?

**Kelly Tolhurst:** I thank the hon. Lady for her question. As she will know, we launched the call for evidence in October, and it finished in November. We are reviewing the evidence presented. In October we made announcements to underpin, secure and make better the prompt payment code. The small business commissioner has delivered £2 million of collections for small businesses over the first year in his position. We will continue to work to ensure that small businesses get the payments they need when they should.

**Maggie Throup** (Erewash) (Con): Prior to Royal Assent for phase 2b of High Speed 2, will my hon. Friend consider establishing a cross-departmental taskforce with the Department for Transport, to provide businesses that are being forced to relocate with the necessary advice and support, including financial support?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Richard Harrington):** My hon. Friend should know that I have listened carefully to her question. In the first instance, a meeting between myself, herself and a representative from the Department for Transport might be a way to get that moving.

**Frank Field** (Birkenhead) (Ind): Last week I wrote a letter to the Secretary of State about the taskforce in Liverpool and Birkenhead that wishes to save Cammell Laird from any further redundancies. Will he meet us this week, as a matter of urgency?

**Greg Clark:** I am grateful for the right hon. Gentleman's advice and his advocacy for a solution to the difficulties that Cammell Laird faces. We are meeting the trade unions and others on Thursday, and I hope he will be able to come to that meeting.

**Laura Pidcock:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

**Mr Speaker:** I will take the point of order, and I would appreciate it if the ministerial team waited to hear it because it relates to Question Time.

**Laura Pidcock:** Under her breath, the Minister for Energy and Clean Growth mentioned the living wage, but of course in practice there is no such thing. The Minister could correct the record in that it was indeed the Labour party that in 1998 introduced the minimum wage, which her party strongly opposed.

**Claire Perry:** Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. Sorry; I am blaming the excitement. Of course I am happy to correct the record. The hon. Lady is absolutely correct: the Labour party introduced the national minimum wage. It was quite clear that that was inadequate for many people on the lowest incomes, particularly women who were underpaid, which is why we introduced the national living wage—something I wish she would support.

**Mr Speaker:** Thank you. I am extremely grateful to the Minister.

**Anna McMorrin** (Cardiff North) (Lab) *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Is it on the same matter? No. This matter has been—

**Anna McMorrin:** Not on this matter, but on these BEIS questions.

**Mr Speaker:** I say to the hon. Lady that it must not be a continuation of the argument. I will give her the benefit of the doubt. However, on that matter the Minister has been very clear, and we thank her for that clarity.

**Anna McMorrin:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Given that climate change is the most pressing and urgent issue facing us and future generations, may I seek your advice about how I can ask the Minister for Energy and Clean Growth, who has responsibility for climate change, to make an oral statement on her recent attendance at COP 24 at Katowice?

**Mr Speaker:** The hon. Lady has achieved her own salvation. It seems to me that she has used the device of an entirely bogus point of order to register a point that she probably would have wanted to register if she had been called to do so, but could not because she was not.

**Claire Perry:** Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. I was delighted to answer a question on this very point, because our negotiation team was, as always, excellent. I was also happy to accredit the hon. Lady; I do not know whether she managed to attend our superb stand and entire presence at Katowice. My door is always open to her, as an expert in this area, to discuss this. I do not think an oral statement will be necessary. Perhaps she and I could grab a cup of tea, as this is dry January, and have such a conversation.

**Mr Speaker:** Thank you.

## Speaker's Statement

12.41 pm

**Mr Speaker:** Before we proceed to the urgent questions, I would like to say something that relates to the events that unfolded outside this place yesterday.

In the course of proceedings at various times yesterday, the hon. Members for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty), for Grantham and Stamford (Nick Boles) and for Wakefield (Mary Creagh) and the right hon. Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden) all raised with me their very grave concerns about aggressive, threatening and intimidating behaviour by demonstrators at Abingdon Green and, in many instances, between Parliament and Abingdon Green.

To those points of order, I responded, I hope, sympathetically and as effectively as I could. Colleagues will realise that I had not myself witnessed the behaviour, which was taking place while the House was sitting and I was in the Chair, but I was extremely concerned to learn of those developments. Moreover, it was clear beyond doubt both that there was an intensity of feeling on the matter and that that intensity of feeling was across the House. I undertook to look further into the matter.

Of course I am aware—as colleagues will know, for it has been reported—that a very large number of Members have written to the commissioner of the Metropolitan police. I thank them for doing so. I have myself today written to the commissioner of the Metropolitan police, Cressida Dick, in support of those representations, and my letter has been published. We respect the operational freedom of the police, and we absolutely understand that they have difficult judgments to make in balancing the precious right of peaceful protest on the one hand and the right of Members of Parliament, journalists and others to go about their lawful business unimpeded and unthreatened. My sense of the opinion of colleagues, and they have considerable evidence for their view, is that, as things stand, the balance is not right.

I must say to the House that, frankly, it is intolerable if Members of Parliament and journalists go about their business in fear. This situation cannot stand. I have written with force, passion and politeness to the commissioner of the Metropolitan police seeking a review of policy. I hope that that is regarded by colleagues across the House as helpful. I would like to thank all those Members yesterday—on the Floor of the House and in conversations with me—who registered their concerns. I share them, and I will do my best to ensure that those concerns are properly addressed without delay.

**Sir Nicholas Soames** (Mid Sussex) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. May I thank you very much for your response and the sense of what you have said, which the whole House will have appreciated? However, will you add to the list not just politicians and journalists but ordinary members of the public, who themselves have been grossly abused just by being present?

**Mr Speaker:** I entirely accept what the right hon. Gentleman has said. In making that powerful point, he prompts me to add a reference to schoolchildren coming on to the estate to visit the education centre, for a wider

tour or both. They should not have to witness such insulting and, frankly, toxic behaviour. It is one thing to observe such behaviour, but it is another actually to do something to seek to prevent it, and it is, I think, for the latter that we in this House are looking. I thank the right hon. Gentleman.

**Chris Bryant** (Rhondda) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I fully concur with all the things that were said yesterday and, indeed, by yourself just now, but I do not think this is just about policing, if I might say so. The arrangements at Abingdon Green, with the barriers placed in the way they are, mean that Members going from this palace can take only one route. That is making things more difficult and worse. I urge the House authorities to look at how they can relate better with the broadcasters to make sure that that area, which is part of our parliamentary estate, is better protected.

**Mr Speaker:** It may be, and I say this in all seriousness, with no frivolity or levity, that there is a symbiotic relationship between the House authorities and the hon. Gentleman, for I am able to say to the hon. Gentleman that we are seized of that point. It did not seem to me to be relevant to my letter to the commissioner, and I did not want to give what would, in any case, on that point, be only a holding statement to the House today. If I can say so with great politeness and respect to the hon. Gentleman, we have got that point—he is right—and we are looking to do something about it.

**Stephen Doughty** (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Thank you for the comments you have made and the action you have taken, and I certainly agree that your view is shared across the House by Members of all parties and all views—nobody wants to see this behaviour going on. May I just add that, of course, threats have also been directed at the police themselves? Earlier this morning, I spoke with some of the police officers protecting us all—they are doing a fantastic job. They, too, are being subjected to racist abuse and threats, and we all saw the tragic events here at the House, with the death of PC Keith Palmer. Nobody wants to see that situation again, so I hope that those conversations will be fruitful and that we can ensure that all of us can go about our business safely.

**Mr Speaker:** Thank you. It is a type of fascism, let us be quite clear about that—it is a type of fascism. Women and ethnic minority citizens, in particular, are being targeted. I do not say that they are the only people on the receiving end of this completely unacceptable behaviour, but they have been, and are being, deliberately and disproportionately targeted. That is not acceptable, and we have to ensure that something is done about it.

**Matt Western** (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Thank you for your intervention and for writing to the Metropolitan Police Commissioner. Is there not also a responsibility among the leaderships of our parties, and among Ministers and shadow Ministers, when they speak in the media, to reiterate what you are saying and not to seek to inflame some of the heightened tensions we are going to witness over the coming days and weeks? If I may say so, I was slightly surprised by an interview this morning with the

[*Matt Western*]

Secretary of State for Brexit, in that I thought he could have been more forthright in his condemnation of what happened yesterday.

**Mr Speaker:** I hope the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, because I did not hear that interview. I must, in passing, observe that I was told that the Secretary of State for Brexit—presumably because he was asked about the subject—did reference the concerns that exist about this totally unacceptable behaviour. Beyond that, I think it is fair to say that I should not comment, because I did not hear the interview, but we all have a responsibility to use moderate language and to treat each other with respect. I really do think that this is something that can unite the House, whatever people's views in this Chamber on Brexit or indeed anything else. We all believe that we and everyone else should be able to go about our lawful business unimpeded. Denying someone's personal space, shouting abuse, swearing at them, making sexist, racist or misogynistic remarks, or implying or stating directly that someone should lose his or her life because of the view that that Member holds is wrong—period. If there are people out there, as clearly there are, who do not get that point, well, they will have to be made to get it.

## Universal Credit: Managed Migration

12.51 pm

**Margaret Greenwood** (Wirral West) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if she will make a statement on the Government's plans for the managed migration of people claiming legacy benefits to universal credit.

**The Minister for Employment (Alok Sharma):** Universal credit is a vital reform that overhauls a legacy system that trapped people out of work; with six different benefits, administered by three different Government Departments, it was utterly confusing for claimants. All new claimants now receive universal credit. In the future, we will move claimants who have not changed circumstances from legacy benefits to universal credit in an approach known as managed migration. It is right that the Government should seek to align provision for all, in order to eventually operate one welfare system. The Department has long planned to support initially 10,000 people through this process in a test phase, before increasing the number of those migrated. The first phase will give us an opportunity to learn how to provide the best support, while keeping Parliament fully informed of our approach. Universal credit is proceeding as planned, with no change to the timetable of completing managed migration by December 2023.

**Margaret Greenwood** (Wirral West) (Lab): Over the weekend, it was widely reported in the media that the Government had decided to ask for powers from Parliament for a managed migration pilot to move 10,000 people from legacy benefits to universal credit, rather than the managed migration as a whole of about 3 million people. One headline read:

“Threat of revolt forces rethink of ‘catastrophic’ universal credit”.

The Minister's response does nothing to clarify the situation.

This is a matter of very real concern. Under so-called managed migration, the Government intend to switch off the vital financial support received by millions of people and leave them to apply for universal credit. There are very real fears that vulnerable people will be put at risk of falling out of the social security system altogether. Over a third of these people are currently claiming employment and support allowance because they are ill and disabled. In some cases, they will have been claiming it for a long time and may find it extremely difficult to make a claim for universal credit. A policy change of this significance, which was indicated in the press, clearly should have been announced in the House but the Government failed to do so. The Secretary of State failed to clarify the situation when she was asked to do so yesterday.

Will the Minister—it is disappointing that the Secretary of State is not in her place—tell the House whether the Government intend to ask Parliament initially for powers to carry out a pilot for the managed migration of 10,000 people or for the process as a whole, which would affect nearly 3 million people? Will the Government pledge, as they did before Christmas, to debate the regulations, in whatever form they take, on the Floor of the House? If the Government seek powers for a pilot in



the first instance, will the Government address the fundamental concern of numerous voluntary organisations that nobody's claim for a legacy benefit will be ended until they have either made a new claim for universal credit or have said that they do not wish to do so?

The result of putting back the timetable for managed migration, as the Government already did in the Budget, will mean that many more people will transfer to universal credit through natural migration. Can the Minister tell us how many people the Government estimate will move to universal credit through natural migration, and what savings that will make for the Treasury?

The Government announced in June that those in receipt of severe disability premium would not have to transfer to universal credit without transitional protection. Will the Government compensate those who have already done so and missed out as a result? What action will the Government take to ensure that those affected are fully compensated? The Government have chosen to shift the burden of what should be the Government's responsibility to ensure continuity of social security on to claimants, forcing them to apply for universal credit. Will the Minister explain precisely what the Government are going to do and will they stop the roll-out of universal credit?

**Alok Sharma:** May I just clarify, if it was not clear yesterday when we had oral questions, that the Government had previously committed to hold a debate on the affirmative regulations in relation to the managed migration regulations? That will happen in due course, and we will debate them as and when parliamentary time allows. We will of course, as we have set out previously, meet our commitment to severe disability premium recipients. We will also ensure that the start date for the July 2019 test phase involving 10,000 people is voted on.

The hon. Lady raised a number of issues. She raised the issue of vulnerable people. I hope she will have seen our response to the Social Security Advisory Committee's recommendations, in which we set out very clearly—I am sure we will have a chance to talk about them—how we will be looking to move people across, working with stakeholders to ensure protections are in place for the vulnerable.

The hon. Lady talked about voluntary organisations. We will be working with voluntary organisations. We have already had meetings with 70 stakeholders and we have plans for further discussions. We want to design the process together with them. The timetable is as set out. We will have a pilot phase starting in July 2019. In 2020, we will then move on to volume migration.

I want to end on one point, which is that every time the hon. Lady gets up she talks about stopping the roll-out of universal credit. To be clear, we have now rolled it out across the country. If she wants to support people, she should vote with us when we bring forward support for the most vulnerable. She voted against the £1.5 billion of support. She also voted against the £4.5 billion. When the regulations are debated, she should support them and not oppose them. Let me clarify once more that we will hold a debate on affirmative regulations in relation to the managed migration regulations.

**Damian Green (Ashford) (Con):** If the Government do proceed on a pilot basis with moving people across from existing benefits, that would be extremely sensible.

Does my hon. Friend share my experience of talking to job advisers and other staff in jobcentres? They are very enthusiastic about universal credit, as opposed to previous benefit systems, precisely because it helps them to better help other people into work in ways they were not able to do before. Can he reassure me that for all the issues with transition, which we all know are there, the Government are as committed as ever to making sure this new and better benefit system is rolled out fully?

**Alok Sharma:** My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. That is the experience of colleagues on the Government Benches when we talk to people—[*Interruption.*] Well, I would just say to the hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) that she ought to go out there and talk to work coaches. I would say that to all colleagues, because in my experience they are telling me that for the first time they are doing what they came into the Department for Work and Pensions to do, which is to provide one-to-one support rather than having to explain an incredibly complicated legacy benefit system where people have not been able to claim all the money due to them.

**Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP):** Thank you for granting this urgent question, Mr Speaker. I commend Labour for securing it. It is important because at the weekend, reading any of the papers, it would have seemed that everything had changed in the minds of Ministers on universal credit, with the Work and Pension Secretary's apparent U-turn. In actual fact, however, nothing had changed. I am sorry that the Secretary of State is not here to respond, given that the misleading headlines were in her name.

The Government were of course quite happy to ride that wave of publicity, but yesterday at DWP questions the scale of that so-called U-turn became clear. We now know that at present there are no plans to make any changes to universal credit, which is what everyone is really interested in.

Delaying the vote on the managed migration of people from legacy benefits to universal credit is a small acceptance from the Government that things may not be well with universal credit. We have six years of evidence and lobbying to show the Secretary of State that. She knows she cannot get away with kicking the can down the road. She knows that changes need to be made and that what is on the line is not just her credibility but the lives of recipients who desperately rely on that support. After all, we never know when it might be us relying on that safety net.

My question to the Minister is clear and unambiguous, and I hope he will be, too. Will he commit, with the Secretary of State, to putting pressure on the Chancellor to release the money to repair universal credit, starting with ending the two-child policy, stopping the benefits freeze and overhauling the punitive sanctions regime?

**Alok Sharma:** The hon. Member for Wirral West (Margaret Greenwood) asked earlier why the Secretary of State is not here. The reason is that she is in Cabinet. Her commitment is absolutely clear. She has visited jobcentres and talked to stakeholders and organisations that care about getting universal credit right, so there

[Alok Sharma]

should be no indication in the House that she is not taking her duties incredibly seriously. She is hugely committed to this.

As I said, earlier this year, we brought forward £1.5 billion of funding to help people by allowing advances of up to 100% on day one if individuals require that and having a two-week run-on for housing benefit, and another £4.5 billion was announced in the Budget. This is all about making a difference and helping the most vulnerable in our society—something the Opposition should welcome.

**James Cartledge** (South Suffolk) (Con): We have had a very successful roll-out in Sudbury. I urge my hon. Friend not to pause the overall roll-out of the system. I well remember as an employer the problems of staff who refused to work more than 16 hours under the old system. He is doing the right thing. If this takes a bit longer to introduce, personally, I will welcome that.

**Alok Sharma:** I have set out our timetable, but my hon. Friend is absolutely right that the legacy benefits system is incredibly complicated. I mentioned that we have £2.4 billion under-claimed under the legacy benefits system because it is so complicated. That of course is changing under universal credit.

**Ms Angela Eagle** (Wallasey) (Lab): Will the Minister be up front with the House and admit that universal credit has been a disaster right from the beginning? It has been delayed, it has cost money and the Government are having to delay it further because they are worried about its effect. In Wallasey, there was a 39% increase in food bank usage after the roll-out of universal credit. It is causing real distress, and there are still £4.7 billion of benefit cuts to be administered between now and 2020. Will he admit that this is a rolling disaster area and commit to properly reviewing it and doing the right thing?

**Alok Sharma:** Perhaps the hon. Lady was not listening. I have already set out the extra funding we have brought forward. I wish she would support this. Of course, as we go through this process we learn and make changes as appropriate, but the reality is that we now have a much simpler system, under which people are able to get the one-to-one support they were not able to get before. She should welcome that.

**Sir Oliver Heald** (North East Hertfordshire) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that it was necessary in the roll-out of universal credit to learn the lessons of the failed introduction of tax credits, which left many people on low incomes right across the country in a big-bang situation where they were faced with large debts? Does he agree that, contrary to that approach, this Government have taken time and tested the system as they have gone? They continue to do that with the test involving 10,000 people, which I strongly support. I suggest they continue that approach.

**Alok Sharma:** I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for his support. We have always said there will be a test phase, and that is what we will have. He is absolutely right to highlight that the introduction of tax credits was not a success, whatever Opposition Members

may say. It is absolutely right that we listen and learn, and that is precisely what we will do as we go through the test phase.

**Stephen Timms** (East Ham) (Lab): Tax credits were a great success. In answering my question yesterday about the five-week wait before claimants are entitled to their benefit, the Minister pointed out that advances are available. That is true, but of course that means people are indebted to his Department right at the start of their claim. Press reports at the weekend stated that the roll-out would be paused because of worries about growing indebtedness. Are Ministers concerned about rising indebtedness among benefit claimants because of universal credit?

**Alok Sharma:** As I said yesterday, I know the right hon. Gentleman takes these issues extremely seriously, but so do we. That is why we introduced a change last year to ensure that advances of up to 100% are available on day one. Some 60% of those who come on to universal credit now take advantage of those advances. There is also the two-week run-on for housing benefit and, as he knows, we set out in the Budget further measures, which will come into place in 2020, when those moving across from out-of-work DWP legacy benefits will also get run-on.

**Martin Vickers** (Cleethorpes) (Con): We must not lose sight of the fact that inevitably there are problems during the transition phase, but I draw the Minister's attention to an email I received yesterday from Brian Herzog, one of my constituents, who wrote that "my mental health did a complete nose dive and it was Universal Credit that saved me in so many ways."

He added:

"Please trust me...it's a great system. I'd be happy to be used as an example of why it does work".

Well, I have done that. Does the Minister agree that we must do all we can to ensure that the transition phase moves smoothly and to support the staff who do an excellent job of delivering universal credit, but we must not lose sight of its successes for the vast majority?

**Alok Sharma:** I thank my hon. Friend, who works incredibly hard for his constituents. He is right to highlight that universal credit works extremely well for the vast majority of people, and of course we wish his constituent well, but I accept that we need to get this right for everyone. That is why, when it comes to managed migration, we will have a test phase.

**Kate Green** (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): Will the Minister clarify whether the regulations he proposes to bring forward before July will cover only those encompassed by the pilot, or whether they will be the comprehensive managed migration regulations? Will they also deal with the severe disability premium?

**Alok Sharma:** The hon. Lady takes a great deal of interest in this area, so she will have seen the regulations that are currently before the House. If I may repeat myself, we have committed to holding a debate on any affirmative regulations, we have said we will meet our commitment to those in receipt of severe disability

premium, and we have said we will ensure that the regulations are in place so we can start the test phase in July 2019.

**Alex Burghart** (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): In Brentwood, the roll-out of universal credit has been very successful thus far. I congratulate the Government on their use of test and learn to ensure that universal credit learns lessons that previous benefit systems did not. Will the Minister commit to sharing with the House the details of the pilot of 10,000? When does he expect to be able to do that?

**Alok Sharma:** My hon. Friend is very knowledgeable about these matters, as a former member of the Select Committee on Work and Pensions. We are in the process of designing the pilot. As I have said very clearly, we are having discussions with key stakeholders to make sure we get it right. Clearly, there will be plenty of opportunity in the future to debate it. Let me be very clear that we will, at the end of that phase, set out how it went.

**Maria Eagle** (Garston and Halewood) (Lab): Many of my constituents have been left without money and food—effectively destitute—for extended periods during the roll-out of universal credit. Can the Minister guarantee that those of my constituents due to be migrated on to universal credit, whether as part of a pilot or more generally, will not be left in this condition?

**Alok Sharma:** We want to make sure that the process of moving on to universal credit works for everyone. I am sorry if I repeat myself when I talk about the extra £1.5 billion. I said earlier that we brought that forward earlier this year—I meant, of course, during 2018. I have talked about the extra money made available in the Budget as well. Of course, we want to get this right in order to help all our constituents. That is what we are here for: to ensure we help people, but also to help people to progress into work.

**John Howell** (Henley) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that, in my constituency, which neighbours his, our feedback on universal credit has been generally positive, and would he accept my appreciation for the positive response that he and his colleagues have given to me when I have raised implementation problems with him as we have gone along?

**Alok Sharma:** I thank my hon. Friend for his kind comments. I hope it is clear to colleagues on both sides of the House that my door is open. When colleagues come with individual cases, I do take them up. I am always open and ready to have meetings on individual cases, and I will continue to be ready to do that.

**Jamie Stone** (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): When universal credit was initially rolled out some time ago, people living in the highlands were the unwitting guinea pigs in this experiment. Now that some of the flaws in universal credit are becoming apparent, is there not a case for financial compensation for these people for all they have undergone?

**Alok Sharma:** As I have said—I am sorry if I have to keep repeating myself—we want to make sure that universal credit works for absolutely everyone. Wherever

we sit in the House, we want our welfare system to work for everyone. We will continue to work with stakeholders and others to make sure we get this absolutely right.

**Alex Chalk** (Cheltenham) (Con): Piloting managed migration for universal credit is an entirely sensible approach, as it means that lessons can be learned, but can the Minister assure me that, when learning those lessons, he will consider the evidence from charities and other experts so that the best possible evidence base is available and we can have the best possible system?

**Alok Sharma:** My hon. Friend raises an important point. We talk about stakeholders. We held an event for 70 stakeholders in October. We are working on work streams with stakeholders looking at how to create a successful claimant experience, what the role of delivery partners and external organisations might be in migration, how we communicate and engage with claimants, and how we identify and support our most vulnerable claimants. That work is going on right now. We will continue to do that to get this right.

**Ruth George** (High Peak) (Lab): The Minister says he wants to make sure universal credit works for absolutely everyone, but there are still 2.4 million households that will be more than £2,000 a year worse off under universal credit, of which 1.6 million will be moving on to universal credit in the next 12 months, under natural migration. What will the Government do to support those people and make sure it works for them?

**Alok Sharma:** As the hon. Lady will know, once universal credit is rolled out, there will be £2 billion more in the system than under the legacy welfare system. I know she cares deeply about these matters, but if she wants to support her constituents, she should have voted to support the measures we introduced to help people—I have talked about the extra money. Unfortunately, she has not been able to support them.

**Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): How does the generosity of the Minister's arrangements compare internationally?

**Alok Sharma:** Different countries will have different welfare arrangements. It is important for us to have a welfare system that not only provides support but is sustainable and ultimately helps people into work. That the employment rate now is at a joint record high is testament to the work the Government have done, including on welfare reform.

**Stephen Doughty** (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): The problem is that the individual cases keep coming and coming because of the Government's failures on universal credit. A constituent contacted me because of an issue about early payment from her employer before Christmas. She was forced to go to a food bank—over Christmas! Surely, the Minister does not think that that situation is acceptable.

**Alok Sharma:** As I have said, we want to get this right for everyone, and where there are individual cases, of course we will take them up, but the hon. Gentleman seems to imply that, under the legacy benefits system,



[Alok Sharma]

the world was entirely rosy. He and I know, as Members of Parliament, that the legacy benefits system is inferior to universal credit.

**Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): I welcome the tone of the response from the Minister so far—it is always good to see him at the Dispatch Box—but could he confirm how the Department will go about selecting the 10,000 to take part in the pilot, how it will monitor it and how it will report back on its evaluation?

**Alok Sharma:** My hon. Friend raises an important point. During the test period, we will be testing a number of approaches to moving claimants on to universal credit safely and in the most effective way. This will include testing a non-mandatory approach, where claimants will be invited to go through the process. We will be testing claimants on all benefits and in a range of circumstances to make sure that we move all claimants on to universal credit safely.

**Dame Louise Ellman** (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): The reality for many people in my constituency is that universal credit is plunging them deeper into poverty. What specifically will the Minister do about this, and when?

**Alok Sharma:** I visited Liverpool last year and talked to colleagues in jobcentres who told me that universal credit was working well, that they supported it and that it enabled them to offer help. The hon. Lady talks about providing support for individuals. The best support we can provide is helping them to get into work, and that is what is happening under universal credit.

**Neil O'Brien** (Harborough) (Con): Universal credit is solving some serious problems in the benefits system. It is helping people to move into work more quickly and, together with the national living wage, is helping to drive down unemployment. The Minister is right to take a cautious approach to rolling out universal credit but, further to the question from the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green), can he assure me that he will move as quickly as possible to introduce regulations that solve the problem for people on severe disability premium? I have a constituent whose disabled son has lost money because he has moved local authority. It is obviously an indefensible situation. He will want to fix it. Can he assure me that we will move quickly to solve this problem?

**Alok Sharma:** My hon. Friend is right to highlight the issue of the recipients of severe disability premium. We recognise that issue, which is why we have committed to putting in place a hard gateway so that people are not naturally migrated across.

**Steve McCabe** (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): If there is to be a pilot, will the Minister look again at the advice of Sir Ian Diamond, the chair of the Social Security Advisory Committee, who says it is not necessary for all those on legacy benefits to make fresh universal credit claims, which is bound to increase administration costs and undoubtedly will result in some of the most vulnerable losing out on the benefits they are entitled to? He says it is not necessary because the Department already has the key data for most of those claimants.

**Alok Sharma:** Of course, we are in regular contact with the Social Security Advisory Committee and the hon. Gentleman will know that in our response to it we highlighted the limitations of pre-population, which I think is what he is talking about. I ask him to look at when we moved people from incapacity benefit to employment and support allowance. We did not have all the appropriate information and this led to the Department estimating the need to spend about £1 billion on historical underpayments. We want to ensure we get this right, but of course it is important to build in safeguards, particularly for the vulnerable, and that is what the test phase is all about.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): One of the aims of universal credit is to more accurately target financial support to the most vulnerable people, who need it most. As I understand it, when fully rolled out, up to 1 million disabled people will be able to claim something like £100 a month more than they currently receive. Is my understanding correct?

**Alok Sharma:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. There will be that extra money. As I have said, this is about making sure that we target funds at those who need it most. That is why we introduced changes in work allowances in the Budget, which will make a difference to people with children and, of course, those with disabilities as well.

**Chris Stephens** (Glasgow South West) (SNP): Will the pilot just move 10,000 people on to the existing system, or will there be meaningful changes before it begins, as requested by the Select Committee and by stakeholders? Will the Minister look at the position of individuals who turn down jobs involving zero-hours contracts, who are liable to be sanctioned under universal credit but would not be sanctioned under legacy benefits?

**Alok Sharma:** I am always happy to have a detailed discussion with the hon. Gentleman on any issues, but let me commend to him our response to the Social Security Advisory Committee's recommendations. As he will see, we have taken on the vast majority of those recommendations—and, of course, we have committed ourselves to working with stakeholders, which we are already doing.

**Tom Pursglove** (Corby) (Con): On Friday, it was great to be interviewed by a university student from Corby, Bethany Kilgallon, about universal credit. What message would my hon. Friend want me to pass on to her about the successes of universal credit so far, and the way in which the roll-out will be handled in future?

**Alok Sharma:** My hon. Friend has raised a fundamental point. Universal credit replaces a very complicated legacy benefits system, and is ensuring that people get into work faster and stay in work for longer. That, ultimately, is what we should all be trying to do, as well as helping people to progress when they are already in work.

**Debbie Abrahams** (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): For the record—I know that you are aware of this, Mr Speaker—tax credits lifted 1.1 million children out of poverty, whereas the Government's policies are set to increase the number of children in poverty by

more than 1 million. We know that disabled people who are out of work will be worse off even after the Budget. The High Court decided last summer that transitional protections were needed, and that the Government were acting unlawfully and discriminating against disabled people. The Minister has been asked this three times: when will those transitional protections be put in place?

**Alok Sharma:** The hon. Lady talks about poverty. May I point out respectfully to her that since 2010, 1 million fewer people are living in absolute poverty, including 300,000 fewer children? *[Interruption.]* The hon. Lady may not like the answer, but she cannot argue with the facts. As for the regulations, we have been very clear about them, as was the Secretary of State yesterday.

**Neil Coyle** (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab): Happy new year, Mr Speaker.

Five years after the roll-out of universal credit and two years after it was meant to finish, it is costing three times as much as the legacy benefits, and the Government have had to announce a pilot to test whether it even works. Is this not an admission of colossal failure, with equally colossal human and financial costs?

**Alok Sharma:** I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman is arguing against our conducting a pilot, but that would be irresponsible. We have always made it clear that we need to get this right, which is why we will organise a pilot.

**Christine Jardine** (Edinburgh West) (LD): I was delighted to hear the Minister say that he would listen to what is said about the changes that will have to be made. Does that mean that he will accept the necessity for a guarantee that vulnerable people on existing legacy benefits need not apply, that there will be some way of ensuring that they are being moved successfully on to universal credit before their legacy benefits are stopped, and that someone from the DWP will visit them at home to ensure that they are receiving what they are entitled to, and are completely aware of the changes?

**Alok Sharma:** As the hon. Lady will know, home visits are already available under the welfare system and the universal credit arrangements. However, she has raised an important point about the need to ensure that no one who is vulnerable falls through the cracks. We want to ensure that as well, which is why we are working with health charities and others to make certain that we get this absolutely right.

**Alison McGovern** (Wirral South) (Lab): A quarter of households in receipt of universal credit are lone-parent households, and we know that as people move on to universal credit, 50% more of those households will lose rather than gain. Given the tax cuts that the Government have handed out to the richest households, can the Minister give me a single reason why any lone-parent household should be worse off rather than better off? Can he give me a single justification for that?

**Alok Sharma:** If the hon. Lady is so keen to support lone-parent households, she should have supported us and voted for the work allowances that we introduced in the Budget.

**Hywel Williams** (Arfon) (PC): It has long been the Department's intention to allow universal credit applications to be made through the medium of Welsh in Welsh-speaking areas, particularly in north and west Wales, but that facility has been denied to people so far by deficiencies in the computer system. What will be the impact of the "managed migration test phase", restricted to 10,000 claimants, on that rather larger and more long-term policy intention?

**Alok Sharma:** I will double-check and write to the hon. Gentleman if I am wrong, but I believe that we have put in place the arrangements required to enable people in certain jobcentres in Wales to communicate in Welsh.

**Liz Kendall** (Leicester West) (Lab): It sounds as if the Minister thinks that all the lessons have been learnt and all the problems with universal credit have been solved, but let me tell him that in Leicester, one of the areas in which the roll-out has occurred later, too many people are still waiting too long. They are getting into debt, and there has been a huge increase in demand for food banks. May I urge the Minister, even before any pilot involving people on existing legacy benefits, to stop and carry out a fundamental review with all the experts and charity groups, so that we can secure the reform that we need and my constituents do not have to fear the future?

**Alok Sharma:** Payment timeliness may be one of the issues to which the hon. Lady refers. The position has improved. When people cannot receive their full payments at the end of the first period, it is often because we have been unable to obtain verification because no information on housing or childcare costs has been provided, but support is available in the system. If there are individual cases in which the hon. Lady thinks that things have not gone well, she should come and talk to me: I would be very happy to have that discussion.

**Grahame Morris** (Easington) (Lab): Yesterday, during DWP questions, the hon. Member for Clacton (Giles Watling) said that he struggled with online applications, which caused some mirth on the Government Benches. May I pursue the question asked by the hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Christine Jardine)? I tabled some written questions about the number of requests for face-to-face assessment interviews. I was told that since March 2015 there had been 144,000, of which only 308 had been home consultations. Can the Minister explain why so few people have been offered home assessments? If he cannot do so, will he conduct an investigation in the Department to find out why so many sick and disabled people are being denied such assessments?

**Alok Sharma:** There are a number of ways in which people can claim universal credit. There is, of course, the online process, and help with that can be provided in jobcentres. There is also the Freephone telephone line, and people can also have appointees. As the hon. Gentleman has said, there are home visits, but, again, I would be happy to discuss the issue with him.

**Mr Kevan Jones** (North Durham) (Lab): Many people going on to universal credit find it difficult to manage their finances. May I ask the Minister to give serious consideration to local working with credit unions? I am

[Mr Kevan Jones]

a director of NE First Credit Union for the North East, which offers people simple bank accounts and affordable finance. Would the Minister consider linking credit unions with the DWP so that people can not only receive advice, but stop getting into the hands of loan sharks?

**Alok Sharma:** I would be happy to meet the hon. Gentleman to discuss that suggestion and see what is possible, but, as he will know, we have a new arrangement with Citizens Advice and Citizens Advice Scotland to ensure that advice is given to people to help them as they move on to universal credit. That arrangement will kick off formally in April. We have made £39 million available, and of course we want the process to work well.

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): The Minister must accept that he is kicking the can down the road and that managed migration is of no comfort to people in Glasgow North who are making new claims, are on a natural migration waiting weeks for the first payment or are subject to the mendacious two-child policy. If the UK Government cannot fix the flaws they themselves admit exist in UC, is it not time to devolve these powers fully to the Scottish Parliament and Government, who will put fairness and dignity at the heart of social security?

**Alok Sharma:** I would like to think that I have a good working relationship with my opposite number in the Scottish Government and of course we will continue to work with them on a range of issues. It is important that we get this process right for everyone and that is our intention.

**Ms Karen Buck** (Westminster North) (Lab): I served in 2011 on the Welfare Reform Bill which paved the way for UC, and it is clear that the questions the Government could not answer then about UC they still cannot answer now, eight years later—and a little humility on the part of the Minister would be very welcome. Does he recognise that managed migration clients will not for the most part be the same as roll-out clients? There will be a higher level of vulnerability, with many people unable—and will continue to be unable—to work because of sickness and disability? What extra provision is he building into the system to make sure even this pilot does not leave people with a debt crisis and at risk of losing their home?

**Alok Sharma:** The hon. Lady gets to the point of the pilot phase, as that is precisely what we want to make sure happens: we want to get this right particularly for the most vulnerable. We are working with a range of stakeholders. I set out in an earlier answer the work-streams we are working on, and we will continue to do that until we get this right.

**Richard Burden** (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab): In an area such as mine where UC has already been rolled out, if somebody on legacy benefits who has more than two children reports a change of circumstances, they are told they must migrate on to UC only then to be told that because they have more than two children that migration cannot take place. By the time they have been

told that, their housing benefit and council tax benefit and other benefits will have been stopped. It takes weeks to sort that out and real hardship is caused in the meantime. Small wonder therefore that food bank use and indebtedness are rocketing. Can the Minister say plainly that there are practical problems with the current system of roll-out, and what will he do to sort it out?

**Alok Sharma:** We have been fixing problems, and we will continue to do that. Again I say—I make this offer in all sincerity, not least because this is how we will learn in this process—that where the hon. Gentleman has a specific case I will be happy to sit down with him and talk it through and see what we can do to make sure that the system works for others who come after his constituent.

**Laura Pidcock** (North West Durham) (Lab): The Government always try to individualise our constituents' problems, but these are systemic flaws in the system. People every single day are made deliberately worse off under this scheme which makes them wait five weeks. Deep design and administrative flaws have been listed exhaustively in numerous reports. Is it acceptable to continuously test and learn on people? Is it acceptable that every single day we have people naturally migrating on to UC, because they are no less vulnerable and deserving of protections than those on managed migration? Will the Minister please halt the natural migration and the managed migration?

**Alok Sharma:** The roll-out of UC has already taken place across all jobcentres. UC is continuing; I have set out the timetable, as the Secretary of State did yesterday. But the hon. Lady is right that we need to make sure we get this right and that is why we have the test phase. I am pleased that at least some colleagues on the Opposition Benches have acknowledged that this is an important part of making sure we get this right in terms of managed migration.

**Chris Bryant** (Rhondda) (Lab): There is a fundamental flaw that I think is utterly pernicious in terms of UC—the first five-week wait. I had a constituent in my surgery before Christmas who was in tears, because, she explained, “I have never been in debt in all my life, and now I have had to go into debt, and it is the system that is encouraging me to do that. In fact, I heard the Prime Minister on television last night say that it is a good thing that I can take out a loan which I pay back.” We must stop pushing the poorest people in our country, who are often the proudest people in our country, into debt.

**Alok Sharma:** Of course we do not want to push anyone into debt, but may I just be clear that these advances are interest-free, so over a—[*Interruption.*] Over a 12-month period people will get their monthly payment and then their additional advance which they pay back over that period, and of course we will be extending that to allow people to pay that back over 16 months. Many people have welcomed the advances and now about 60% of those coming on to UC are taking out advances.

**Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): Will the Minister look at a serious flaw in debt repayment between legacy systems and the UC system? A constituent of



mine has been diligently repaying an historical tax credit debt but that debt also moved when she moved on to UC. HMRC deducted £11 a month, but the DWP wants to take £79.46 from an income of only £317.82 per month after housing costs. Will the Minister meet me to discuss this case and the unfairness in the system, because people cannot live on this amount of money?

**Alok Sharma:** Of course I will meet with the hon. Lady, as I have done previously on issues she has raised. As a general rule, one would not expect deductions to be more than 40% of a standard allowance, and of course that figure will come down to 30%.

**Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): May I express to the Minister my concern about the worry and anxiety that people face when making UC claims? We had the roll-out in December in Hull. If there is a pilot from the middle of 2019 will some of the pilot numbers come from Hull, and will people in Hull be in any way penalised if they do not make a claim in time?

**Alok Sharma:** Of course we want to support people as they come on to UC, whether they are naturally migrating or in the test phase. We have now put in place a provision with Citizens Advice to make sure people are provided with that consistent support across the country and I want that to work well.

**Mr Paul Sweeney** (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): My constituent lost his job in October and waited five weeks for his first payment of UC, receiving £149 at the beginning of December, which has to last him until the middle of this month. He received an advance payment of £549.79 in November which he used to pay for his rent. This has been deducted from his future payments, hence causing hardship to him, and the DWP is unable to reduce the repayments during the current assessment period and has not agreed to do so from January. However, he was left over Christmas with no money to live on and no access to other possible funding. What will the Minister do to make the assessment period more flexible in order to protect claimants from suffering such obvious hardship?

**Alok Sharma:** The assessment period is five weeks. We of course did away with the seven-day waiting period that was in place previously, and of course 100% advances are available on day one if people require them. The hon. Gentleman raises a detailed individual case, however, and I would be very happy to talk to him about it, perhaps after this urgent question.

**Ged Killen** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Lab/Co-op): Nearly 30% of eligible households in my constituency are already on UC, but many cases that I deal with

involve people whose legacy benefit was incorrectly withdrawn and who are then forced to apply for UC and find themselves with a lower award, and there is no transitional support for these people. What will the Minister do to address that? Surely at a minimum they should be allowed to stay on the legacy benefit?

**Alok Sharma:** Without knowing the individual cases the hon. Gentleman raises I cannot comment in any detail—[*Interruption.*] I have been asked to answer on policy, and that is precisely what I am doing. The reality is that we have now rolled out UC across the country, so new claimants or those who have a change of circumstance will move on to UC. But again, I am happy to discuss individual cases.

**Martin Docherty-Hughes** (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): The regulations that the Government intended to lay did have provision for back payments for those who transitioned through natural migration and lost their entitlement to severe disability premium. Given that both women's aid organisations in my constituency, Clydebank Women's Aid and Dumbarton District Women's Aid, are gravely concerned about the impact of transition not just on those vulnerable women fleeing domestic abuse but those who have children who are disabled, will the Government now bring forward regulations to initiate these back payments and ensure no one loses out in the future? A yes or no answer would be helpful.

**Alok Sharma:** I am very happy to talk to the hon. Gentleman about this. I assume that he refers to the run-on of the DWP legacy benefits from 2020, and of course this will apply to claimants on managed migration and to those who naturally migrate, provided that they do not have a break in their claim.

**Drew Hendry** (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): Since as far back as 2013, Inverness and then the rest of my constituency suffered through the pilot and on through the full-service roll-out of universal credit. The new year front page of *The Inverness Courier* newspaper described the rise of poverty in our community, and that was directly attributed to universal credit. Over nearly six years, the UK Government have failed to listen to any of the agencies, the charities, the council or the people who have been affected. What does the Minister say to those people who have suffered directly over all that time from having their plight ignored by this Government?

**Alok Sharma:** I have a lot of respect for the hon. Gentleman, and I am sorry that we are ending this urgent question on a discordant note, but respectfully, I do not agree that we have not listened. That is precisely what we have been doing, and we will continue to do so through the test phase and beyond.

## Seaborne Freight

1.41 pm

**Andy McDonald** (Middlesbrough) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the awarding of a contract to Seaborne Freight as part of his no-deal contingency planning.

**The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling):** The Government are working towards ensuring that we leave the European Union in March with a sensible agreement for the future, through the withdrawal agreement that the House will consider next week, but any responsible Government need to plan for all eventualities. As part of that work, the Department for Transport has been undertaking a wide range of activities to mitigate the impact on the transport system of a potential no-deal EU exit, particularly around the movement of freight. For example, my Department has been delivering measures such as the Haulage Permits and Trailer Registration Act 2018, which puts systems in place if a permit system is required to ensure that UK heavy goods vehicles can continue to be used in the EU.

We have also put in place Operation Brock as a replacement for Operation Stack, in order to deal with disruption at the channel ports. This is not simply a Brexit-related measure. We do not want to see any repeat of the issues that Kent faced in 2015, with the closure of the M20. If there is any disruption at the ports, for whatever reason, Operation Brock should keep the motorway open while we prepare the long-term solution of a lorry park. Yesterday, Kent County Council and my Department carried out a live trial of one part of Brock, on the route from Manston. We were satisfied with the number of vehicles that took part, which was more than enough to determine a safe optimum release rate from Manston to the port of Dover via the A256 and caused minimal traffic disruption along the route.

This is a range of examples of the sensible contingency planning that a responsible Government are carrying out to ensure that we are prepared for a range of outcomes. We remain committed to ensuring that movement across the UK border is as frictionless as possible, whatever the outcome. However, without planning, there could be significant disruption to the Dover strait, particularly if no agreement is reached. Given the importance of these routes to the UK economy, it is vital that we put in place contingency plans to mitigate any disruption that might occur in a no-deal scenario.

The Department is working with the port of Dover and the channel tunnel—as well as with our French counterparts, at both official and ministerial level—to ensure that both operate at the maximum possible capacity in all instances. Those discussions are positive and I am confident that everyone is working constructively to ensure that the Dover-Calais route—particularly at the port of Dover—and the tunnel continue to operate fluidly in all scenarios. However, in order to ease any pressure on those routes, my Department has completed a proper procurement process to secure additional ferry capacity between the UK and the EU. Following this process, three contracts were awarded to operators, totalling a potential of £103 million. Almost 90% of that was awarded to two well-established operators:

£46 million to Brittany Ferries and about £42 million to DFDS. These contracts provide additional capacity on established routes, and through additional sailings and, in some cases, additional vessels, into ports in northern Europe and other parts of France.

A third, smaller contract, which is potentially worth £13.8 million, was awarded to Seaborne Freight, a new British operator, to provide a new service between the port of Ramsgate and Ostend. Let me stress that no money will be paid to any of these operators unless and until they are actually operating ferries on the routes we have contracted. No money will be paid until they are operating the ferries. No payment will be made unless the ships are sailing, and of course, in a no-deal scenario, money will be recouped through the sale of tickets on those ships.

As I believe the House knows, Seaborne is a new operator looking to reopen that route, which closed five years ago. As a result of this, we ensured that its business and operational plans were assessed for the Department by external advisers, including Slaughter and May, Deloitte and Mott MacDonald. These included Seaborne's plans to charter vessels for service, as is common across many transport modes including airlines and rail operators. We also conducted searches on the directors of Seaborne via a third party, and found nothing that would prevent them from contracting with the Government.

I make no apology for being willing to contract with a new British company, particularly one that has a large number of reputable institutional backers. We contracted with Seaborne Freight because the service it proposes represents a sensible contingency in the event of disruption on other routes. I am also pleased that this award supports the port of Ramsgate, which operated as a commercial ferry port as recently as 2013 and has taken roll-on roll-off services as recently as last year. I am looking forward to seeing ferry services resume from this port. The infrastructure work required to make that possible has already started, and it is one of the most visible and symbolic elements of how seriously my Department is taking contingency planning for all Brexit eventualities.

**Andy McDonald:** The Transport Secretary has awarded a £14 million contract to a company with no money, no ships, no track record, no employees, no ports, one telephone line, and no working website or sailing schedule. Two of Seaborne Freight's directors would not pass normal due diligence requirements. One of them, Ben Sharp, is already under investigation by a Government Department. Did the Department for Transport consult other Departments about Mr Sharp's fitness as a company director? Ben Sharp quit his business activities in the Gulf leaving a trail of debt behind him. His company, Mercator, was merely a shell finding vessels for security companies. Is it correct that he operated without the licence he needed pursuant to the Export Control Order 2008? Did he operate without that licence? Yes or no?

It is abundantly clear from the promissory note published by "Channel 4 News" that Sharp owed and still owes Mid-Gulf Offshore more than \$1 million, and many more companies besides. How is it that Slaughter and May, Deloitte and Mott MacDonald were instructed to restrict their due diligence examination to the face value of the presentation put to them by Seaborne? Why on

earth have they been allowed to restrict their investigation to the present company and not to consider the trading history of the individuals concerned, particularly Ben Sharp? The mayor of Ostend has made it clear that Seaborne cannot berth at his port as it has no bank guarantees and no contract with Ostend. It is without capital. Who is investing in Seaborne? Who is paying for the dredging of Ramsgate?

This is a shoddy and tawdry affair, and the Secretary of State is making a complete mess of it. This contract is likely to be unlawful and it violates every current best practice guidance issued by Whitehall. When will he realise that this country cannot continue to suffer the consequences of his gross incompetence? Why is this calamitous Secretary of State still in post?

**Chris Grayling:** I am not even going to address the idiocy that the hon. Gentleman has just come up with. He has made a number of allegations, which I suggest he goes and makes elsewhere. I am simply going to say this: the Government have let a contract for which we will pay no money until and unless ferries are running. That is responsible stewardship of public money. On other matters, from the due diligence we have done, there is no reason to believe that anyone involved in this business is not fit to do business with the Government. I say this again: we are not spending money unless these ferries operate.

**Mr Owen Paterson** (North Shropshire) (Con): Many of us would agree that much the best end solution for the talks between the Government and the EU would be a wide-ranging free trade agreement, as offered by President Tusk in March, with zero tariffs. However, to bring the EU to the table, to counter the arrogant boasting of Mr Selmayr in the *Passauer Neue Presse*, which many of us have been reading since we heard about it yesterday, and to show that we are deadly serious, it is obvious that we must prepare for World Trade Organisation terms. I therefore commend the Secretary of State for his various actions to show that we are serious about preparing this country to work under those terms, through which we work with the rest of the world.

**Chris Grayling:** I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. It is absolutely right and proper that we prepare for all eventualities. The sad thing is to see the Labour party trying to destroy Brexit and taking a destructive approach to any sensible measures that this Government take to prepare for all Brexit eventualities. Frankly, Labour is not fit to be in opposition let alone in government.

**Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Seaborne Freight has no boats, negative equity of £374,000 and no history of running ferry or freight services. The current director, Brian Raincock, and chief executive Ben Sharp both had companies liquidated owing Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs money, with Raincock's debt at £600,000. HMRC is us, the taxpayer, so what constitutes due diligence? What red flags were identified? How did that company get handpicked for direct negotiations for operating out of a port that is not even ready?

The Secretary of State's written statement indicated that direct negotiation was possible under regulation 32 of the Public Contracts Regulations 2015, which relates

to emergency situations brought about by unforeseeable events. However, the Government claim to have been planning for no deal for over two years. What legal advice was provided? What level of madness exists to contract contingency planning to a company with no track record of such service?

Saying that the company will get paid only if it can deliver misses the point, because if it does not deliver the so-called emergency contingency service, that would leave us high and dry. Is that the project for which the ministerial direction was required? Is there a central Government instruction and process for the awarding of such no-deal Brexit contracts? If so, can we see it? Does this contract comply with that guidance? If so, that highlights the shambles of this Government's no-deal preparations. When will the Secretary of State do the right thing and go?

**Chris Grayling:** This procurement was done properly and in a way that conforms with Government rules. It secures the position of the taxpayer by ensuring that no money will change hands unless and until the ferries are running. The hon. Gentleman does not seem to listen.

**Sir Bernard Jenkin** (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): I join my right hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson) in supporting my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's determination to be prepared for all eventualities. He has succeeded on aviation services, the transit convention and other things that will ensure that trade keeps flowing. However, what lessons can be learned from this situation? No matter how good this company might be, this is a difficult contracting environment in which things must be done quickly under intense political and public scrutiny. Will my right hon. Friend ask the permanent secretary to conduct a quick lessons-learned exercise so that companies with which the Government are contracting are better prepared than this one for the scale of public scrutiny to which it has been subjected?

**Chris Grayling:** My hon. Friend makes a valid point about public scrutiny. This contract was properly signed off by my Department's accounting officer, and it was done in the best possible way when dealing with a new business, which is to ensure that the business will be paid only when it delivers the service. That is a responsible use of taxpayers' money.

**Lilian Greenwood** (Nottingham South) (Lab): I have already written to the Secretary of State with a long list of questions about his Department's procurement of additional ferry services as part of no-deal planning, and I look forward to receiving his response. Yesterday, however, Lloyd's Loading List reported some extraordinary remarks from the CEO of Seaborne Freight, Jean-Michel Copyans, about the proposed Ramsgate to Ostend route. He said:

"Then we've had to identify the vessels best suited to the type of crossing, which we're keeping a secret for the moment."

With no crew, no signed contracts in place with Ramsgate or Ostend, no clear plans to bring the infrastructure back into service and now "secret" ships, is there not a huge question mark over the deliverability of the service?

**Chris Grayling:** My officials and I have confidence in the deliverability of the service, but if the firm fails to deliver it, we do not pay.



**Charlie Elphicke** (Dover) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that no-deal contingency planning is very much in the national interest? Will he join me in condemning those who want to try to prevent no-deal planning through parliamentary wrecking tactics and sabotage, and through Trump-style Government shutdown threats? Does he agree that such tactics from the Labour party would make problems in Kent and elsewhere more likely, and that they are irresponsible, reckless and wrong?

**Chris Grayling:** I completely agree with my hon. Friend. He will agree that it is right and proper that we do everything we can to keep trade flowing through the port of Dover and the channel tunnel as smoothly as possible. We are taking prudent measures to ease potential pressures on those ports, which is the sensible thing to do. The risk to the taxpayer is not there, because we will not pay unless the service is delivered. The Labour party does not seem to believe in no-deal Brexit planning.

**Hilary Benn** (Leeds Central) (Lab): The Secretary of State takes a rather unusual approach to contract letting, because as soon as he is questioned about the ability of the firm with which he has contracted to deliver on what it has promised, he tells the House, "If they don't do it, we won't pay." He said a moment ago that he is confident that the company will be able to run the service, so will he answer a very simple question? Has Seaborne Freight told the Department which vessel it has acquired in order to provide the service, which could be needed in just over two months' time?

**Chris Grayling:** The company has told my Department in great detail about its plans, which are being finalised commercially. We are confident that the firm will deliver the service.

**Sir Nicholas Soames** (Mid Sussex) (Con): My right hon. Friend will be aware that Seaborne Freight has had it in mind for well over two years to start the Ostend-Ramsgate route. Does he agree that the constant denigration of the contract, which means that the contractor will not get a single penny of anyone's money until it fulfils the contract, is damaging to sensible work? Finally, if we were—God forbid—to crash out on WTO terms in the extreme circumstances mentioned by my right hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson), will the Secretary of State tell the House whether he would have any arrangements to take up shipping from trade?

**Chris Grayling:** My right hon. Friend makes a good point. There seems to be visceral hatred of small business on the other side of the House and a visceral belief that the Government should not be willing to contract with small business. The Government are told time and again that we should contract and work with small business, and help small businesses to develop, but when we do so, we get nothing but a wall of criticism from Opposition Members. The Labour party hates business. This new Labour party is very different from the one of 10 years ago—it simply hates business.

I say to my right hon. Friend that if we find ourselves in a no-deal situation, there are other measures that we can bring forward. We are actively looking at how we would do so.

**Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): I have never seen a Minister bluster and bluff quite as much as this Minister has today. Following everything that the Secretary of State has heard from the shadow Secretary of State and the Chair of the Transport Committee, does he not have one iota of concern about the contract being let to this shyster?

**Chris Grayling:** Mr Speaker, that is an inappropriate thing for any Member to say, and I am not going to respond to it.

**Mr Speaker:** I simply say that the Secretary of State is perfectly entitled to his assessment of whether it is appropriate in political terms. No breach of order has taken place procedurally, but the Secretary of State has made his judgment, and I accept that.

**Dr Sarah Wollaston** (Totnes) (Con): I am glad to hear the Secretary of State confirm that no money will change hands, but there will undoubtedly be vast manpower and bureaucracy costs in no-deal planning, and we know that there are actual costs when it comes to commissioning refrigerated warehousing and special air freight. All that could be avoided if the Government ruled out no deal. No deal would be catastrophic, and no sensible Government should inflict that on their people.

**Chris Grayling:** Of course, the best way of avoiding no deal is to ensure that the deal passes through this House, and I will vote for it next week.

**Angus Brendan MacNeil** (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): It feels like we are on the set of a film called "Carry On Brexit". *Le Figaro* described the contract as ferries "sans bateaux". The firm's terms and conditions are from a pizza delivery company, so we wonder whether the MV Hawaiian and the MV Pepperoni will be sailing the route. To get away from "Carry On Brexit", the serious point is that the Secretary of State is saying that if the company does not deliver ferries, there will be no payment, but if it does not deliver the ferries, what will be the fall-back, stopgap or contingency? If there are no ferries, the whole thing falls apart—it is "Carry On Brexit"!

**Chris Grayling:** What a load of absolute tripe. I can tell the hon. Gentleman has not been listening to me. Ninety per cent. of this contract has been awarded to substantial and established ferry operators—DFDS and Brittany Ferries. We did not have a reason to exclude a small business from taking a small part of the contract with a legitimate, valid bid.

**Craig Mackinlay** (South Thanet) (Con): It is remarkable, is it not? If the Government were to do no planning for all Brexit eventualities, they would be condemned. Now they are doing sensible planning, they face derision. I have met Seaborne Freight, which has shown itself, over a number of years, to be the only party interested in running new services between Ramsgate and Ostend—that was even before this contingency planning. Personally, I welcome the dredging and improvements now taking shape at the port of Ramsgate at no cost to local taxpayers. We will have a regeneration bonus, no matter what, and I welcome that.

Thanet District Council and the people of Ramsgate will do all they possibly can for Brexit provision, so I welcome the measures the Secretary of State has taken, but there are people in this House who do not seem to be listening. Will he say once more that there will be no cash for Seaborne Freight if it does not run the services?

**Chris Grayling:** I am very happy to reiterate that. It is a responsible approach to a new contract with a new business that we will pay when the business delivers. It is disappointing to hear that the Labour party is so opposed to the regeneration of the port of Ramsgate. It was not so long ago that the Labour party represented Ramsgate in Parliament but, given this negative attitude, it does not deserve ever to do so again.

**Luciana Berger** (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): One of the directors of Seaborne Freight has been named by the *Financial Times* as Brian Raincock, whose previous company went into liquidation in April 2017 owing £585,000 to its main creditor, HMRC, which is essentially the British taxpayer. Is the Secretary of State content that this excruciating fact apparently did not come up during his Department's due diligence on Seaborne Freight before it awarded the contract? Whether or not Seaborne Freight delivers the ships, it has still been awarded a £14 million contract, so hon. Members on both sides of the House rightly have an issue with the Secretary of State and his response today.

**Chris Grayling:** I keep telling the hon. Lady that the £14 million will not be paid unless Seaborne Freight delivers a service. I will not comment on the tax affairs of an individual, and nor should she. The due diligence on all those participating in the company found no reason why they are unfit to do business with the Government.

**James Duddridge** (Rochford and Southend East) (Con): I congratulate the Secretary of State on his detailed preparations, but will he also consider how south Essex can support those preparations at Tilbury, London Gateway and London Southend airport? London Southend airport has experience of just-in-time delivery to Dagenham and is run by Stobart Group, an excellent freight haulage firm.

**Chris Grayling:** I absolutely agree. Of course, if we find ourselves in a no-deal scenario, a number of other ports, including Tilbury, will play a part. I hope we do not reach that point, and I think we all agree that we want a sensible free trade agreement with the European Union after 29 March, but the reality is that we need to make sure we are prepared for all eventualities. In such a situation, many of our ports up the east coast and along the south coast will play an important part in making sure that trade flows freely.

**Joanna Cherry** (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): I am very concerned about the legality of this procurement process. In his statement yesterday, the Secretary of State said that he had proceeded under regulation 32 of the Public Contracts Regulations 2015, which allows the Government to circumvent the normal, transparent and EU-mandated procedures. I have a copy of the contract notice here, which is freely available on the internet, and it says that the basis for proceeding under

regulation 32 is "extreme urgency." As my hon. Friend the Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown) said, the idea that no deal is a possibility and, to quote the Prime Minister, that no deal is better than a bad deal has been around for some time, so how can the Government, at this late stage, justify proceeding with procurement that is appropriate only in the case of extreme urgency?

I have two questions for the Secretary of State and, just for once, my constituents would like to hear an answer. First, will he release the legal advice that permitted him to proceed under regulation 32? Secondly, as he will be aware, if he has proceeded wrongly under regulation 32, his Department and the Government are open to legal action. How much money has been set aside for the contingency of court action about the illegality of the procurement process and a claim for damages?

**Chris Grayling:** It is my view that, as we move towards leaving the European Union, preparing for all eventualities is a matter of extreme urgency, which is also the advice that my Department has received and has given to me.

**Mr Steve Baker** (Wycombe) (Con): If Opposition Members had an ounce of sense and concern for the national interest, they would welcome the fact that the Department for Transport is preparing to leave the European Union under all circumstances and they would recognise the courage of the Secretary of State, his Ministers and his officials in testing and operationalising their plans. Does he share my disbelief at the policies that are being urged on him by Opposition Members, and will he reassure me that he will continue his excellent work to prepare this country for leaving?

**Chris Grayling:** I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for his comments. I give him an absolute assurance that I will continue that work. Frankly, the tragedy is that the Labour party seems to have abandoned interest in the national interest.

**Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): The train timetable fiasco, the drone disruption, the Manston lorry park carry-on and, now, ferrygate—the Secretary of State is the embodiment of the Peter principle.

On the earlier point about competition, can the Secretary of State explain the "extreme urgency brought about by events unforeseeable by the contracting authority"?

Can he explain what was unforeseeable about no deal, for which the Government have been planning for the past couple of years and to which they have referred many, many times in this place? What was unforeseeable about that?

**Chris Grayling:** Sadly, what was unforeseeable is the attitude of many hon. Members, mostly Opposition Members, towards the Prime Minister's sensible agreement. The agreement meets all their requirements, and they are now saying they oppose it anyway.

**Mr Simon Clarke** (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Con): The shadow Secretary of State and I both represent Middlesbrough, which voted overwhelmingly

[Mr Simon Clarke]

to leave, so I found his comments attacking the Secretary of State for making robust preparations for no deal very surprising.

Will the Secretary of State commit to engaging Teesport in the preparations for any scenario that may arise from Brexit? It is important that we make all the preparations required for all contingencies.

**Chris Grayling:** I am very grateful for my hon. Friend's comments. I reiterate that we are looking to involve other ports across the country as we make preparations for an eventuality that I hope will not happen. The reality is that the people of Middlesbrough voted clearly to leave, and they will not understand why the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Andy McDonald) is letting down their 2016 vote.

**Mr Chris Leslie** (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): If this contract fails, our country will have even greater problems with the continuity of trade, so it will be the public who pay the price—it will not be just the central contractor that loses money.

I seek a bit of accountability from the Secretary of State. The front page of today's *Financial Times* says that the Department for Transport commissioned a study showing that just an extra 70 seconds of analysis or discussion of each truck crossing the channel could lead to a six-day queue for vehicles getting on a ferry. Has he seen that study? Is the study accurate, and will he publish it now?

**Chris Grayling:** We have made it very clear to the House that queues will be caused if the French seek to impose maximum control and put in place limited checks. Why on earth does the hon. Gentleman think we are putting some of these contingency measures in place? He asked what happens if the contract does not go ahead, but I have said that 90% of the extra capacity is being provided by two established operators that will continue to deliver the services we have contracted.

**Bob Stewart** (Beckenham) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend reassure the House that the Port of Dover and Eurotunnel are making detailed contingency plans in case of no deal?

**Chris Grayling:** I give my hon. Friend that assurance. We are working with both organisations, and we are also having detailed discussions with the French. The leadership in Nord-Pas-de-Calais and Paris, and the leadership of the port and the tunnel on the French side, are as keen as we are to see fluidity continue through those ports. We are taking contingency measures, but our prime focus is on making sure that trade flows freely, whatever checks are required.

**Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): The Transport Secretary's colleague the Home Secretary has been trying to stop people getting across the channel while the Transport Secretary is busy contracting with companies that have no ferries at all. Is his next whizzo move to contract people who are doing people smuggling in dinghies?

**Chris Grayling:** That is an absurd question that does not merit an answer either.

**Damian Collins** (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con): If there are delays in processing freight through the channel tunnel in my constituency or the port of Dover, is the Secretary of State convinced that his contingency planning means that we will not see a return to Operation Stack and that the M20 motorway will remain open in both directions if there are delays? Will he also update us on when he expects his Department to produce its site list for the potential long-term off-road lorry parking solution in Kent?

**Chris Grayling:** It is my belief that Operation Brock will prevent the closure of the M20. That is my prime concern—what happened in 2015 should not be repeated. I think there is sufficient capacity to ensure that that will not take place. We have completed the infrastructure works that are necessary on the motorways to ensure that the flow in both directions can continue, and we are now doing the detailed testing to understand flows of traffic and how to manage them to make sure that we do not see the kind of disruption we saw in 2015. I am hopeful that we will move quickly from the consultations we are having now to being able to decide a permanent location and get the thing dealt with once and for all.

**Grahame Morris** (Easington) (Lab): Any members of the public watching this debate will be absolutely amazed. They will think it is bizarre that we have a Transport Secretary who signs a shipping contract with a shipping company with no ships. Given that the company is going to hire in ferries, does he have any idea what plans it has to crew its ferries and whether UK crews would be used?

**Chris Grayling:** There is a complete lack of understanding of business models on the Opposition Benches. Opposition Members should understand that when they go on holiday next summer there is a fair chance they will be flying with an airline that owns no planes. The reality is that transport operators do not always own their own assets; they contract or charter them in and they operate the service. I do not think that Opposition Members understand that. As to the crewing of the ships, that is a matter for the company itself.

**Victoria Prentis** (Banbury) (Con): Will the Secretary of State confirm to me that it is normal to award contracts, in a small part, to new operators and that while perhaps 90% of operators used by the Department are established, it is perfectly normal for the Department properly—acting legally as part of its procurement process—to include new operators as part of the consideration?

**Chris Grayling:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right; that is normal, and we do not actually do enough of it. The Government are frequently criticised for contracting only with big business and not with small business. Ironically, now we are contracting with small business for a small part of a package we need, we are getting criticised for it, so we cannot win either way.

**David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab): Further to the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger), will the Secretary of State confirm that one director of this company owes £580,000 to HMRC from a previous



failed administration? Will he say what due diligence was undertaken on that contract? Will he also tell us how we are going to repay that money to the Treasury?

**Chris Grayling:** I am not going to comment on individual tax affairs. All I am going to say is that due diligence was carried out into the participants in this business and no reason was found why they should not contract with Government.

**Mr Marcus Fysh (Yeovil) (Con):** It is very reassuring to hear about my right hon. Friend's discussions with the ports of Dover and Calais and the contingency plans that he is putting in place. Will he tell us more about how companies can get to know what they have to do to make sure that their declarations are appropriately communicated to the port? That seems to me to be a potential pinch point that we need to look at.

**Chris Grayling:** Certainly one part of the no deal preparations that we are now going through—HMRC is very actively engaged in this—is about the declaration processes that businesses would need to go through. The reality is that this happens already. Goods are shipped from this country to Switzerland, for example, through established processes in this country and on the continent. We will need to ensure in the run-up to a no-deal Brexit that business is up to speed with what it needs to do. A huge amount of work in this respect is already happening.

**Sir Mark Hendrick (Preston) (Lab/Co-op):** Things are getting bad when a former Conservative party chair accuses this Government of using Dr Strangelove tactics. This is a perfect example. Instead of trying to prepare for a no-deal scenario, why do the Government not just look at extending article 50 so that we can avoid this catastrophe?

**Chris Grayling:** Two things: first, I think it would be wrong to block Brexit. Secondly, I think it is right that the Government prepare for all eventualities. They would be accused of being irresponsible if they did not do so.

**Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con):** The view from my constituency, which has the M20 and the M2 running through it, is that we must not have another Operation Stack, so I welcome all contingency measures that my right hon. Friend is taking, but the reality is that whatever happens, the vast majority of our freight will have to continue to go through Dover-Calais. Therefore, the flow of that route is absolutely critical. Will he advise us of how ready the French are to carry out any customs checks that might be required in the event of a no-deal Brexit?

**Chris Grayling:** We have had detailed discussions with the French. I am very optimistic that they have the same ambition that we do, and they are putting in place plans to ensure that happens. I have had personal commitments from the leadership in Nord-Pas-de-Calais, and of course there is a legal requirement for them put those plans in place, particularly with regard to the tunnel, as the treaty of Canterbury requires them to keep trade and traffic flowing smoothly through the tunnel. I have every reason to believe the French will uphold that commitment.

**Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab):** In April 2018, Seaborne Freight issued in writing an investor briefing that claimed:

“Detailed port agreements with Ramsgate and Ostend negotiated and agreed”.

but it is now clear that no such agreements exist to this day. Indeed, the Mayor of Ostend has given an interview in which he said:

“A start-up in March is simply impossible. There is currently no agreement with Ramsgate and also with Ostend”.

If the Secretary of State has satisfied himself that due diligence checks have been carried out that confirm the suitability of Seaborne Freight to receive a £13.8 million Government contract, will he tell us what weight he has attached to the fact that Seaborne Freight has issued inaccurate investor briefings? Will he also finally answer the question asked by my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), the Chair of the Brexit Committee, and name just one ship that due diligence checks have revealed Seaborne Freight is likely to be able to bring into service by March?

**Chris Grayling:** I am not sharing, nor is it my responsibility to share, the company's commercial information. I simply remind the hon. Gentleman that no money will change hands unless the company is running this service. That seems to me to be the best possible protection for the taxpayer's money.

**Stephen Metcalfe (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con):** Will my right hon. Friend expand on the discussions he has had with the management team and what expertise and experience they are bringing to the table to operate this service?

**Chris Grayling:** My officials have had detailed discussions with the management team and have gone through their plans in detail. My hon. Friend might have seen the article in *Lloyd's List*, which has also been shown the business plan and gave it a thumbs-up as being a viable option. This is a team of people who have experience in this industry and who we believe will deliver this service, but of course they will be paid only if they do so.

**Stephen Morgan (Portsmouth South) (Lab):** Some 95% of fresh produce in the Channel Islands gets there via Portsmouth international port. Delays at our port would mean empty shelves in the Channel Islands in 48 hours. What guarantee can the Secretary of State give today to ensure uninterrupted delivery from all our ports of critical goods such as fresh food and medicine?

**Chris Grayling:** On incoming freight, we intend not to put in place complex checks at the border. We have been clear all along that the Government's priority, apart from security, will be to ensure free movement of trade. Of course, goods arriving from the Channel Islands will not be subject to the kind of constraints we might see going in at Calais, and the issues around transport blockages really relate only to the short straits around Dover and the tunnel, not to other ports, where the movement of ships is not on a sufficient scale to cause significant blockages.

**Matt Warman (Boston and Skegness) (Con):** It would be irresponsible not to prepare for no deal, of course, but would it not be even more irresponsible to be spending money where we did not need to?

**Chris Grayling:** That is why we are not going to spend the money until the ships are available and running. The reality is that we do need to spend money to prepare for a no-deal Brexit. I hope that money proves not to be needed—I want us to have a sensible partnership in the future—but believe me, if we were here now facing a no-deal Brexit and no preparation had been done, the shouting from the Labour party would be enormous.

**Mr Paul Sweeney** (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State talks about supporting entrepreneurialism. I am a big fan of “Dragons’ Den”, and I think this is one of those pitches that everybody would have been cringing at had they actually seen it, but it seems to be good enough for the Secretary of State. He talks about a no-deal Brexit. I think the Government should rule out a no-deal Brexit, but if he is insistent on planning ahead for it he needs sure delivery of freight capacity on shipping routes. The Ministry of Defence has immediate access to four roll-on roll-off ferries. Why on earth has he not committed to using those assets, which are immediately available to him, instead of insisting on a highly risky contractual arrangement with a dubious private contractor?

**Chris Grayling:** What I have done is insist on a highly substantial commercial arrangement with two very established cross-channel ferry operators and given a small amount of business to a new operator. If there is a no-deal Brexit, which I hope will not happen, we have several other measures that we can bring into place.

**Rebecca Pow** (Taunton Deane) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend assure the House that he is in consultation with not only Dover and Calais but other ports about what would happen in the event of no deal, which I sincerely hope will not happen? The way to avoid no deal, of course, is to vote for the deal. In Taunton Deane, many businesses, lots of them small, rely on exporting and ferries. They must not be hampered and we must act responsibly to give them assurances.

**Chris Grayling:** The clearest assurance that I can give is that I have been to Calais and met my French counterpart to talk about this issue, I have met the president of the Nord-Pas-de-Calais, and officials have had discussions, and I have had no sense from any of those conversations that the French want anything other than to maintain the fluid movement of trade through the channel ports. That is something to which we should all aspire.

**Jonathan Edwards** (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): Does not this sorry episode clearly indicate that the absurd mantra of a managed no deal is a contradiction in terms?

**Chris Grayling:** As I say, the Government do not aspire to a managed or an unmanaged no deal—we want to secure a deal—but it is not responsible not to prepare for all eventualities.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): I commend the Secretary of State for recognising that it is absolutely in the national interest to make preparations for a no-deal Brexit, not least because it strengthens our negotiating hand, even at this late stage. Will he tell the House what the common transit convention is, not only

for the benefit of the House but in particular for the benefit of those on the Opposition Front Bench, and explain how it will mitigate the worst effects of impeded traffic flows in the event of no deal?

**Chris Grayling:** The common transit convention is the international agreement by which trade flows across multiple countries. It has already been announced that in leaving the European Union the United Kingdom will remain part of that convention, which will play a significant part in ensuring that trade flows freely in all situations. None the less, we need to make sure that we cannot get blockages at key ports, and that is what we are working to do.

**Wayne David** (Caerphilly) (Lab): In the interests of transparency, will the Secretary of State indicate to the House which companies were considered for the contracts?

**Chris Grayling:** We received three compliant bids, all of which we judged acceptable and accepted. Two of them were from major operators that will provide around 90% of the capacity, plus there was this small additional contract. Should we choose to return to the market, there is also potential interest in the provision of extra capacity. I hope we will not need that, because I hope that we will have a proper deal come next week.

**Douglas Chapman** (Dunfermline and West Fife) (SNP): It has certainly been an “I see no ships” sort of week, but what consideration has the Secretary of State given to utilising ports in other parts of the UK—namely, the high-exporting country of Scotland? I hear really good things about the potential for a Rosyth-Zeebrugge ferry link, for which potential ships have actually been identified. Is not Scotland losing out? How can we realise Scotland’s potential in this Brexit fiasco?

**Chris Grayling:** I appreciate that the Scottish National party does not support Brexit and, indeed, would like to do everything it can to stop Brexit, but we will work to make sure that every part of the United Kingdom, including Scotland, is able to continue to trade freely around the world and gain from the benefits that will be achieved in this country in a post-Brexit world.

**Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab): I see no ships, but I do smell something fishy, and I think other colleagues do as well. Is the Secretary of State really saying to the House that the best choice for the contract was a company that cut and pasted its terms and conditions at the last minute from a fast-food company? Is his new Brexit mantra “A meal deal’s better than no deal”?

**Chris Grayling:** Of course, it is not a single contract. There are multiple contracts, of which 90% is going to two of the biggest cross-channel operators—something the Labour party appears to be completely ignoring. The fact is that we have chosen to give a small proportion of the business to a legitimate bid from a small start-up business, and I think that is something the Government should do more often, not less.

**Chris Stephens** (Glasgow South West) (SNP): I think our plea to the contractors is that we want these ships, not excuses. Quite astonishingly, in answer to a question from the hon. Member for Easington (Grahame Morris),

we heard from the Secretary of State that there will somehow be driverless ferries—that there will be no staff—so presumably there is no national minimum wage requirement in the contract. First, will the Secretary of State publish the legal advice that he says he was given? That seems sensible, given the House’s concerns. Secondly, will he tell us what were the procurement requirements in relation to equipment, such as ferries, or indeed in respect of the socioeconomic impact in relation to wages, for example?

**Chris Grayling:** In effect, what we are doing is buying tickets in advance on cross-channel ferries on a number of routes around the country. That is what we are doing. It is no more and no less than that.

**Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op):** It is quite incredible that the Secretary of State has awarded a contract to a company with no ships, no investors, no customers, no credible business plan, no employees and no premises. Is he aware that Seaborne Freight tried to get an option to purchase the following four ships: the Hartmut Puschmann, the Espresso Catania, the Espresso Ravenna and the Via Adriatico? They all operate in the southern Mediterranean and would need a complete refit to be able to operate in the channel. In addition, two of the ships failed EU safety inspections. On top of that, Tirrenia, which owns the ships, said that it would not sell them because it did not believe that Seaborne Freight had the money. I visited Tirrenia’s website and found that I could go on a Mediterranean cruise on the four vessels in April. Was the Secretary of State aware of that?

**Chris Grayling:** I am not going to comment on the commercial plans of Seaborne Freight. I am satisfied that it will have the ships necessary to operate the service, but if it is not able to deliver them, it will not be paid.

**Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op):** Brittany Ferries has been awarded a no-deal ferry contract but, unlike Seaborne, it actually has ferries. No-deal sailings into Millbay port in Plymouth will increase traffic by 50%. Will the Secretary of State point to where on the 200 metres of tarmac between the ferry port and Plymouth city centre he expects facilities to be built for the lorry park, the customs checks, the veterinary checks and the environmental health checks?

**Chris Grayling:** Let me say two things. First, I thought it would be good for the port of Plymouth to have more traffic; I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman does not agree. Secondly, the reality is that, as I said earlier, we do not intend to impose a hard border for traffic coming into the United Kingdom. We intend to focus on the fluidity of trade as our priority. It will be security first and fluidity second, and other matters will come well afterwards. We are not imposing a hard border on this side of the channel.

## Points of Order

2.27 pm

**Danielle Rowley (Midlothian) (Lab):** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Following the revelation by a former universal credit helpline employee that call handlers are instructed to use “deflection scripts” to hurry people off the phone when they have phoned up for help with universal credit, my office submitted a freedom of information request to the Department for Work and Pensions to ask to see the scripts. The response I received was that there are no scripts, but that there are “agent-led processes” and “supportive lines available”. The Department did not provide any detail of those lines, which was the clear intention of the FOI request. I do not think that the Department should be able to use semantics to avoid scrutiny. I have requested a review of the response and asked whether I could be provided with the relevant materials.

The code of practice on FOI rules states that requests should be acknowledged and replied to within 20 days. Even accounting for the Christmas break, that date has now passed and I have not received a response. The Government appear to be flouting the mechanisms set up to ensure that they are transparent and can be held to account by Parliament. Will you please advise me, Mr Speaker, on what I should do to receive this important information, to which I am entitled under freedom of information legislation, as the Government have not complied?

**Mr Speaker:** I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her point of order and for her characteristic courtesy in giving me advance notice of her intention to raise it. I am sorry to disappoint her, but I am not sure that I can help her today. The reason is that responses to freedom of information requests by Government Departments are a matter for those Departments; the Chair has no locus in relation to the subject. It is perfectly open to the hon. Lady to continue to pursue the matter, but she does so under a regime that is informed by statute and in relation to which she will, I imagine, have rights, and quite possibly rights of appeal. As I am sure the hon. Lady will know, the issues fall within the purview of the Information Commissioner. However, whereas in relation to answers to parliamentary questions there is a direct parliamentary ownership and the Chair does have locus, in this case I do not. That said, the hon. Lady has made her point with force and alacrity, and it will have been heard on the Treasury Bench.

**Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con):** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I am absolutely certain that if in the urgent question anything disorderly had happened you would have immediately corrected it, but I wonder whether there is any way that the House could be asked to reflect on how much longer privilege can survive in a democratic society if it seems to appear that privilege is used for party political purposes to smear those who, perhaps, do not deserve to be smeared.

**Mr Speaker:** I note what the hon. Gentleman says and I thank him for his courtesy in accepting that I would rule out of order something that, under our procedures, warranted such a decision.



[Mr Speaker]

The hon. Gentleman, who is both a noted intellectual—sometimes an iconoclastic intellectual—and someone who always likes to explore new subjects, has raised a most interesting matter appertaining to privilege. He could usefully busy himself by reading the literature on the subject of privilege. There is, for example, an ongoing debate about whether the House should work, as it does, using traditional methods in relation to privilege, or whether there is a case for a modern statute on the subject. I do have views on that matter, but I will not burden either him or the House with them at this time, but I just have this image of him beetling off to the Library and reading scholarly tomes on the subject, and ere long we will probably hear his thoughts on the future of privilege.

**Drew Hendry** (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. During Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy questions this morning, the hon. Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr), who is no longer in his place but who has been notified that I am making this point of order, asked the Minister what his response was to the conclusion of the report of the BEIS Committee, published last week, which includes myself as a Front-Bench spokesman. The report said:

“The consistent and overwhelming message expressed by these sectors is that to make business decisions they need certainty and it is for that reason they support the Withdrawal Agreement.”

What he failed to do, I am sure inadvertently, was to add that it said:

“Leaving the EU without a deal would have catastrophic consequences and must be avoided. That said, no businesses that we have taken evidence from held the view that—from an industry perspective—the Withdrawal Agreement and Political Declaration provide a deal as good as the one we already have with the EU.”

How do I go about correcting the record, Mr Speaker?

**Mr Speaker:** I think the hon. Gentleman knows that he has found his own salvation—he has just done that. I am bound to say to him—I hope that he will take this in the right spirit—that over the past three and a half years or so, certainly since the 2015 election, spats between members on the Scottish National party Benches and on the Government Back Benches, particularly involving those on the Scottish Government Back Benches, have become an increasing sport. They have become not merely an increasing spectator sport, but, increasingly, a participant sport. The hon. Gentleman has corrected the record as he sees it, and I hope that, as a consequence, he will go about his business for the rest of the day with an additional glint in his eye and a spring in his step.

**Mr Paul Sweeney** (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. It relates to the point of order raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Danielle Rowley) about parliamentary scrutiny. I tabled a written question to the Government—in this

case the Home Office—asking them when they intend to announce the new contracts for the asylum seeker accommodation in Scotland and I received a reply yesterday saying that they would be announced in “due course”. I have now heard through the press and through social media that they have in fact announced the contracts today, and the Mears Group will take over from Serco. Surely that sort of ambiguity and obfuscation is really disrespectful to Members. It also flouts the whole process of having written parliamentary questions if the Government can be so vague in their responses.

**Mr Speaker:** I will go so far as to say that I agree with the hon. Gentleman that the answer to his question was not helpful. Moreover, I hope that he is with me when I say that, ordinarily, the deployment of the three words, “In due course,” tends to suggest and to be interpreted by Members to mean not for quite some time. It is therefore at least mildly surprising that the hon. Gentleman got such an uninformative response, but one that perhaps suggested that progress would not be speedy only to discover indirectly, rather than at first hand, that the announcement had in fact been made. I do understand his discontent, and I can only repeat my view that ministerial replies to parliamentary questions should be both speedy and substantive. In providing such replies, it would always be helpful if Ministers saw it as a proper courtesy to answer Members first. If there are no further points of orders—

**Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con) *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Has the right hon. Gentleman got a point of order?

**Sir Desmond Swayne:** If I might offer an observation, Mr Speaker, on your response to the point of order raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker).

**Mr Speaker:** I am now all agog. I am always excited and in a state of eager anticipation to hear what the right hon. Gentleman has to say on everything.

**Sir Desmond Swayne:** I just wish to offer the opinion that, with respect to the answer that you gave to my hon. Friend, Mr Speaker, change is always for the worse.

**Mr Speaker:** I cannot say that I am entirely surprised to hear the right hon. Gentleman volunteer that view. He and I came into the House together in May 1997, so I have known him for nearly 22 years. I think that he is probably well familiar with, and even given to regularly reciting to himself, that old adage of Lord Falkland, which is that if it is

“not necessary to change, it is necessary not to change.”

I think we will leave it there for now, but I will always profit from the right hon. Gentleman’s counsels.

## International Development Assistance (Palestinian National Authority Schools)

*Motion for leave to introduce a Bill (Standing Order No. 23)*

2.37 pm

**Dame Louise Ellman** (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to prohibit international development assistance to schools operated by the Palestinian National Authority that do not promote values endorsed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization; to require the Secretary of State to publish an annual report on the extent to which such development assistance for schools operated by the Palestinian National Authority supported the promotion of those values; and for connected purposes.

I know from the many speeches that I have delivered in this House on this topic that the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians provokes strong passions. Tragically, the past five years have seen the total absence of a political process that brings both sides together to make painful but necessary compromises to resolve this conflict. There is still vital work that we can do to strengthen the civic society foundations on which any lasting settlement must be built. We must recognise the threat posed to these peace-building efforts by those who incite hatred, glorify violence and promote terror. The reality is that the Palestinian Authority is at the heart of this threat. We can no longer turn a blind eye to what British aid is helping to foster: not the infrastructure of a democratic, independent and peaceful Palestinian state, but a body promoting values that are inimical to the establishment of that state.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Enfield North (Joan Ryan) suggested in her debate last July that

“it is vital that old hatreds and prejudices are not passed on to new generations of children and young people.”—[*Official Report*, 4 July 2018; Vol. 644, c. 165WH.]

The Palestinian Authority is acting as a transmission belt for those very hatreds and prejudices.

The focus of my Bill is education, which is crucial in shaping young minds and it is the focus of the Department for International Development’s aid to the Palestinian Authority. The memorandum of understanding that governs this British aid is explicit: as a condition of funding, the PA must adhere to the principles of non-violence and respect for human rights. Ministers tell us repeatedly that their unpublished reviews suggest that the PA upholds those principles. The facts show otherwise.

For example, take the naming by the Palestinian Authority of schools, summer camps and sports tournaments after terrorist murderers and Nazi collaborators. At least 20 PA schools in the west bank and Gaza are named after terrorists, and three after Nazi collaborators. Those include Salah Khalaf, the head of Black September, a terror group whose name will forever be associated with the torture and murder of 11 Israeli athletes at Munich in 1972; Nash’at Abu Jabara, a member of Hamas, who built the suicide belts used by bombers in numerous terror attacks on Israeli civilians; and Amin Al-Husseini, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem during the British mandate, a Nazi collaborator who moved to Berlin during the second world war, was responsible for an SS division and fought against the release of 5,000 Jewish children who perished in the gas

chambers. These are not choices made by obscure local officials. They are deliberate decisions taken by the Palestinian Authority at the highest levels.

Ministers in this country do not appear concerned. Last year, the Department for International Development claimed ignorance on whether any of the thousands of teachers and public servants whose salaries it pays work in schools named after these purveyors of hate, whose names should be consigned to the history books. Outside the classroom, too, children are subjected to a barrage of vicious antisemitic propaganda. Children’s programmes on official PA TV feature children reciting poems calling Jews “barbaric monkeys”, “the sons of pigs” and the “most evil among creations”.

According to the Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education, or IMPACT-se, the reformed school curriculum for primary and secondary schoolchildren introduced last September is

“more radical than ever, purposefully and strategically encouraging Palestinian children to sacrifice themselves to martyrdom”.

Five-year-olds are taught the word for “martyr” as part of their first lessons in Arabic, 11-year-olds are taught that martyrdom and jihad are

“the most important meanings of life”,

and teenagers are taught that those who sacrifice themselves will be rewarded with

“72 virgin brides in paradise”.

Arabic language books describe terrorists such as Dalal Mughrabi—who led the infamous coastal road massacre in which 38 Israelis, including 13 children, were massacred—as “heroes”.

These lessons in hate are all-pervasive, infesting every aspect of the curriculum, and this curriculum drips with vile antisemitic tropes—that Jews sexually harass Muslim women and that they attempted to kill the Prophet Mohammed. There is no suggestion that peace with Israel is desirable or possible. References to peace agreements, summits and proposals previously present in school books have been expunged. In their place are lies about the al-Aqsa mosque being under threat and calls to “eliminate the usurper”—to conquer Haifa and Jaffa.

Young Palestinian minds are being poisoned. The opportunity for Britain to help promote the values of peace, reconciliation and coexistence is being squandered. This is not about a peaceful future. It is a scandal.

DFID Ministers were warned 18 months ago about the content of the new curriculum. They dismissed those concerns. Promised reviews have never materialised. Last September, the Minister of State, Department for International Development, the right hon. Member for North East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt), claimed that the PA had

“taken action to help address concerns raised”.

IMPACT-se research shows that there have been no major changes in the current school year. Indeed, the PA has deceived international donors for nearly 20 years with the suggestion that controversial schoolbooks are simply being “piloted”. Ministers have been repeatedly asked to suspend all aid to the PA that directly or indirectly finances those teaching and implementing this curriculum until fundamental changes are made. They have refused to do so. It is now time to require them to act.

[*Dame Louise Ellman*]

My Bill calls for two actions: first, that teaching programmes in Palestinian Authority schools financed by the UK should promote common values such as peace, freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination; and secondly, that Ministers should conduct and publish an annual review to ensure that UK funds are spent in line with UNESCO-derived standards of peace and tolerance in education. British aid should support the goal, shared by Members across this House, of a two-state solution. It cannot and must not make that goal harder to achieve, but that is precisely what our support for these lessons in hatred is currently doing. It is time to stop this pernicious policy that works against a peaceful future for Palestinians and Israelis.

2.45 pm

**Sir Hugo Swire** (East Devon) (Con): I rise to oppose this Bill and start by drawing the attention of the House to my chairmanship of the Conservative Middle East Council.

The British Government have already agreed to a proper review of the Palestinian curriculum that is due to report by September this year. Surely, it makes sense to wait for that investigation to run its course and only then to consider—when we have seen all the evidence—whether there is any need to legislate on this difficult matter.

It is worth reminding the House that, according to DFID,

“no UK taxpayers’ money to the Palestinian Authority goes to schools or to fund education materials that incite violence.”

I do not completely understand where the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (*Dame Louise Ellman*) is coming from—whether she wants to assess the overall curriculum and textbooks used by the Palestinian Authority, or whether she wants to assess each individual’s teaching and interpretation of the curriculum. In 2013, a team of American, Israeli, Palestinian and international education experts carried out a study funded by the US State Department, finding that dehumanising or demonising is rare in both Palestinian and Israeli textbooks.

With the United Nations Relief and Works Agency facing its greatest financial crisis ever and the PA nearing a financial breakdown, surely this is not the time to add pressure by making further cuts. Both the PA and UNRWA are in serious financial trouble after the completely misguided recent US termination of support for UNRWA and of its wider assistance to the Palestinians, as well as new Israeli legislation aiming to withhold Palestinian clearance revenues as of 2019.

According to DFID,

“UK financial assistance to the Palestinian Authority...has paid the salaries of up to 39,000 teachers, doctors, nurses, midwives and other health and education public servants”

in the west bank and Ramallah in 2018. These staff have

“immunised up to 3,700 children and provided around 185,000 medical consultations annually; and educated around 24,000 young Palestinians.”

If the Department for International Development—I would be very interested to hear the Minister’s answer to this point—were to withdraw funding for education, as is suggested, this would inevitably create a vacuum.

Given the law of unintended consequences, I think that people need to be very aware of who might fill that vacuum. For example, countries such as Qatar could well exploit the vacuum created if DFID were to withdraw its funding, and we all know what the inevitable results of that could be.

No one in this House would doubt that education is a major tool for international development. Most Israelis I know pride education above almost everything else, not least because of its ability to transform lives, and many of the moderate Israelis I know would be appalled by the suggestion that this funding should be cut.

Once, when I was a Minister of State at the Northern Ireland Office, we took a group of former loyalist paramilitaries to Jerusalem to talk about reconciliation and people living together and alongside each other. I took time off and visited the Hand in Hand school—the Max Rayne-funded school in Jerusalem where Jews and Arabs are funded and educated alongside each other; they have a shared education. That, surely, is something we should be concentrating on, rather than penalising the Palestinians, who, after all, are penalised enough as it is at the moment.

For those of us who are genuinely committed to a two-state solution and genuinely concerned for the plight of the Palestinians, not least in Gaza—we will talk about that at some other point—this Bill would be a regressive step. We really do fundamentally believe that the best hope for the people of that region, and indeed for peace in the wider world, is a two-state solution. Those of us in this House who are genuinely committed to justice for the Palestinians alongside justice for the Israelis want some kind of solution rather than just subscribing to the vague concept of it by kicking the ball ever forwards to avoid having to address it. We should be looking towards better ways of supporting a stable Palestinian Authority that can act as a creative partner for peace with Israel in preparing the ground for a two-state solution before it is finally too late.

*Question put (Standing Order No. 23) and agreed to.*

*Ordered,*

That *Dame Louise Ellman*, *Joan Ryan*, *Ian Austin*, *Theresa Villiers*, *Stephen Crabb*, *Jim Shannon*, *Rachel Reeves*, *John Howell*, *John Spellar*, *Andrew Percy*, *Guto Bebb* and *Bob Blackman* present the Bill.

*Dame Louise Ellman* accordingly presented the Bill.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 8 March and to be printed (Bill 311).*

### FINANCE (NO. 3) BILL (PROGRAMME) (NO. 2)

*Ordered,*

That the Order of 12 November 2018 (Finance (No. 3) Bill (Programme)) be varied as follows:

1. Paragraphs 10 and 11 of the Order shall be omitted.
2. Proceedings on Consideration shall be taken in the order shown in the first column of the following Table.
3. Each part of the proceedings shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the times specified in the second column of the Table.



Table

Proceedings	Time for conclusion of proceedings
New Clauses, new Schedules and amendments relating to the effect of any provision of the Bill on child poverty or equality	Two hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Motion for this Order
New Clauses, new Schedules and amendments relating to the subject matter of any of Clauses 68 to 78, 89 and 90	Three and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Motion for this Order
New Clauses, new Schedules and amendments relating to tax thresholds or reliefs; new Clauses, new Schedules and amendments relating to tax avoidance or evasion; remaining new Clauses, new Schedules and amendments to Clauses and Schedules; remaining proceedings on Consideration	Five hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Motion for this Order

4. Proceedings in legislative grand committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion five hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Motion for this Order.

5. Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion six hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Motion for this Order.—  
(*Mel Stride.*)

## Finance (No. 3) Bill

*Consideration of Bill, as amended in the Committee and the Public Bill Committee*

### New Clause 1

#### IMPACT OF PROVISIONS OF SECTION 5 ON CHILD POVERTY AND EQUALITY

(1) The Chancellor of the Exchequer must review the impact of the provisions of section 5 and lay a report of that review before the House of Commons within six months of the passing of this Act.

(2) A review under this section must consider the impact of the changes made by section 5 on—

- (a) households at different levels of income,
- (b) people with protected characteristics (within the meaning of the Equality Act 2010),
- (c) the Treasury's compliance with the public sector equality duty under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010,
- (d) different parts of the United Kingdom and different regions of England, and
- (e) levels of relative and absolute child poverty in the United Kingdom.

(3) In this section—

“parts of the United Kingdom” means—

- (a) England,
- (b) Scotland,
- (c) Wales, and
- (d) Northern Ireland;

“regions of England” has the same meaning as that used by the Office for National Statistics.’—  
(*Peter Dowd.*)

*This new clause would require the Chancellor of the Exchequer to review the impact of clause 5 on child poverty and equality.*

*Brought up, and read the First time.*

2.53 pm

**Peter Dowd (Bootle) (Lab):** I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** With this it will be convenient to discuss new clause 5—*Review of public health and poverty effects*—

(1) The Chancellor of the Exchequer must review the public health and poverty effects of the provisions of this Act and lay a report of that review before the House of Commons within six months of the passing of this Act.

(2) A review under this section must consider—

- (a) the effects of the provisions of this Act on the levels of relative and absolute poverty in the UK,
- (b) the effects of the provisions of this Act on life expectancy and healthy life expectancy in the UK, and
- (c) the implications for the public finances of the public health effects of the provisions of this Act.’

**Peter Dowd:** I rise to speak to new clause 1 in my name and that of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition and other Members.

In opening for the Opposition today, I shall start with a few general comments on the Bill before moving on to my substantive remarks on child poverty and equality. First, I must mention the new schedule the Government have tabled, at this late stage, on intangible fixed assets. It is yet another example of the Government's absolute

[Peter Dowd]

contempt for parliamentary processes—a result of their desperation to cling to power. Although the Chancellor announced this proposal at the Budget, the introduction of this detailed schedule at this stage of the Bill guarantees that Members are denied the opportunity to scrutinise it properly. It circumvents the Public Bill Committee process, which was created to ensure that technical measures such as this one receive forensic and detailed analysis. This is no way for any Government to conduct legislation. With that in mind, perhaps the Minister could explain why this measure has been included at the final stage of this Bill, denying Members the opportunity to properly scrutinise it. Is it a deliberate decision to once again circumvent parliamentary process? Will he consider withdrawing the schedule and including it in the next Finance Bill later this year, ensuring that it receives the proper parliamentary scrutiny it actually warrants?

It appears that Ministers are hellbent on starting this new year in the same fashion that they ended the last—by treating Members of this House as a peripheral part of the law-making process, bypassing parliamentary processes and breaking long-established conventions. The vast majority of Members in this House are fed up to the back teeth with the Government's attempts to avoid parliamentary scrutiny.

**Simon Hoare** (North Dorset) (Con): Given the heinousness of the charges that the shadow Minister has laid against Her Majesty's Government, I presume that this is further grist to his party's mill for a no-confidence vote. When will that be tabled and debated in this place?

**Lyn Brown** (West Ham) (Lab): I don't think he is taking it seriously.

**Peter Dowd:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We are here debating the Finance Bill and the Government's dreadful performance in bringing legislation to the House for much-needed scrutiny. They seem to be incapable of doing that. They seem to be incapable of doing very much these days.

Has it not occurred to the Government that had they entered this place in a spirit of co-operation, they might not have suffered defeat after defeat on this legislation? This Finance Bill is the product of a Government on the run—a Tory party totally consumed by its Brexit civil war, unable and unwilling to posit even the feeblest domestic agenda here for fear of upsetting its nasty, hard-right faction. The Prime Minister's speech about fighting burning injustices has turned to ash. Her claim that she would end austerity lies in tatters. She occupies our highest public office, and yet the public have no confidence in her—neither do many of her own Back Benchers, for that matter.

Meanwhile, the view is even worse from the Treasury. The Institute for Fiscal Studies said that the Chancellor was gambling with the public finances at this Budget, and it seems that even before the Bill has left this place, he has already lost that bet. The Office for National Statistics recently blew a £12 billion hole in the Chancellor's spreadsheets by returning student debt to the Government's books.

So one has to wonder, what is the point of the Tory party—unable to deliver a competent Brexit deal, unable to secure our economic future, unable to meet its own

fiscal rules, and unable to deliver a domestic policy programme? It is a party still reliant on the old dogmas of neoliberalism and austerity, unable to see the evidence of its failures. An example of this absurd neoliberal dogma came over the break when, as we heard today, the Transport Secretary awarded a ferry contract to a company with no ferries. If he is looking for expertise in this matter, perhaps I can invite him down to Merseyside, where we have been running ferries since 1330, very successfully—and they are publicly run, I have to say. I invite him to have a go on a ferry up the River Mersey and get the feel for how it works, basically. He will have diplomatic immunity and will not be thrown overboard—I can guarantee that as well.

3 pm

The Prime Minister is right that under this Government, nothing has changed, but, worse still, nothing is changing. This is all while families suffer. After nine years of punishing austerity, one in five of our citizens live in poverty, and 4.1 million of those are children. Of those children in poverty, two thirds live in a household where someone is working. That is a stain on this Government and a testament to the total failure of their economic policies over the last nine years. We have seen the longest period of wage stagnation since Napoleonic days, occurring at the same time as deep cuts have been made to the safety net. The Government have taken billions of pounds and channelled them into tax cuts for corporations and already wealthy people.

As we have said before, after so many years of failed austerity, Labour will not stand in the way of any additional income for those on low and middle incomes, but there is another option here, which is to ask the wealthiest to pay their fair share. Under our manifesto plans, all those earning £18,000 or less would be protected from any further tax increases, while the richest few and corporations would reasonably pay more. We would introduce a minimum wage of £10 an hour, to give millions of working parents and their children a living wage. We would invest in childcare under our plans for a national education service, to transition to an affordable, high-quality childcare service. We would stop the roll-out of universal credit and reform the social security system, so that it acts as a proper safety net for all in their time of need.

We believe that new clause 1 will highlight the Government's total inaction on the devastating social crisis that their austerity has brought about. It would force the Government to stare the horrors of UK poverty in the face and review their policies in the light of the very real threat of a major reversal in the prospects of children across this country. Let us not forget that it was this Government who scrapped the child poverty targets that helped the last Labour Government to make enormous progress towards ending child poverty once and for all. That has been reversed by the Tories. They promised a life chances strategy to replace the targets, but sadly that has been pushed on to the Prime Minister's scrapheap.

**Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): Did my hon. Friend notice yesterday that the Government are beginning to backtrack on universal credit? Although they say they will introduce it for 10,000 people, in essence they are backtracking. He may also have noticed

the announcement today by an independent organisation that we need to build something like 3 million social houses, not in the private sector, over a 10-year period. Does he agree that that should be looked at and done through council housing?

**Peter Dowd:** My hon. Friend is right, and the reality is that we are not going to get it from the Conservative party—it is as simple as that. It seems incapable of doing anything that is in any way constructive for the social fabric of our country.

The Government now pick and choose whichever target provides cover for their devastating treatment of children across the UK, including—when it suits them—using the very targets that they themselves scrapped. That is why new clause 1 is so important. The Government can no longer be allowed to ignore the plight of millions of children across the country.

The statistics do not lie. They show quite clearly that, prior to the Conservative Government coming to power in 2010 with their Liberal Democrat partners, child poverty in the UK was falling. The new Social Metrics Commission, which draws on the widest possible set of poverty measures, states concretely that there are now half a million more children living in relative poverty than there were just five years ago. The whole country knows that austerity is to blame, and we all know who introduced austerity—it was the Government.

**Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): I completely agree with the point that the hon. Gentleman is making. Does he agree that the two-child cap, which will apply to all new universal credit claimants from 1 February this year, and other measures that the Government are pushing mean that up to an additional 3 million children will apparently go into poverty?

**Peter Dowd:** The hon. Lady is right. The Government appear to want to put misery upon misery on families and children.

Despite the claims from Conservative Members, austerity was not some necessity nobly chosen by the Government of the day, but a political and ideological choice—it is as simple as that. If it was the only option, why did the United States not embark on a similar venture? Why did the likes of Germany and France not undertake a similar level of spending cuts, or Japan, or, for that matter, Australia? *[Interruption.]* Conservative Members are chuntering, but those are the questions that we need answering.

**Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): The shadow Minister referenced public spending in the United States of America. Is he seriously arguing that we should look to adopt its system of welfare and healthcare spending?

**Peter Dowd:** The hon. Gentleman knows that I am not saying that. He can twist his party's policies if he wants, but he should not twist Labour's policies.

**Mr Jim Cunningham:** We should remind those on the Government Benches that the crash, if we want to call it that, actually started in America with the Lehman Brothers and that the Obama Administration pumped \$80 billion into the motorcar industry. The rest is history, as we say.

**Peter Dowd:** My hon. Friend makes an excellent point and backs up the point that I was making.

Those countries acknowledged a hard economic fact that appears to have stumped this Government: we cannot cut our way to growth. That has failed repeatedly, from its early use under US President Herbert Hoover, which turned the stock market crash into the great depression, to the International Monetary Fund programmes that have been imposed in developing countries and the economic and social devastation inflicted on Greece. This Government's austerity agenda is yet another failure to add to that list. They have missed every economic target they have set, and it is the poorest in society who have paid the price.

**Chris Elmore** (Ogmore) (Lab): It is interesting to listen to my hon. Friend's informed explanation of how austerity has not worked across history. Does he agree that up until the 2010 general election, because of the fiscal stimulus put in place by the Chancellor Alistair Darling and the Prime Minister Gordon Brown, those first two quarters were successive periods of growth, and the economy fell off a cliff because of the austerity introduced by the Conservative party?

**Peter Dowd:** My hon. Friend is right. The economy thereafter, with the help of the Liberal Democrats, started to go down the pan. To this day, we have not recovered, and the Government's own figures indicate that this will go on for many more years. We will have more of the same, and it is not working. When will they learn the lesson? They seem to be incapable. Even the IMF recognises the failure of austerity and has called for increased public spending to offset the negative economic effects of Brexit.

**Simon Hoare:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for this fascinating tour de force on the period since 2010. If the Labour party in government was doing so fantastically well, growth was going so well and its economic management was prized highly by the electorate, why did it lose the general election in 2010 and then in 2015? If all was going so well, why did it lose?

**Peter Dowd:** I am sure the House would be delighted to hear my psephological analysis of the general election, but we are talking about the Finance Bill. You are very generous, Madam Deputy Speaker, but I do not think even you would be sufficiently generous as to hear my psephological comments.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** It gives me great pleasure to agree with the hon. Gentleman. He was doing very well on new clause 1.

**Peter Dowd:** Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The UN special rapporteur has concluded that the rising level of child poverty is a result of political choices, underpinned by the Government's callous austerity agenda. I will draw my comments to a conclusion because I know that lots of Members want to comment on how dreadful the Government are, how they try to stitch up Committees, how they do not allow us to have proper debates and how—for the first time since Winston Churchill introduced the notion—they have circumvented the amendment of the law motion. They talk about



[Peter Dowd]

bringing back control to the House of Commons, but they are bringing back control to about two or three people on the Front Bench, and that does not include the Treasury Ministers.

The Finance Bill before us is yet another Bill of broken promises. It offers further tax reliefs for the rich and for multinational corporations, and it prolongs austerity for yet another year, condemning many families and many children to abject poverty. Labour's new clause 1 would require the Government finally to assess the impact of their economic policies on the most vulnerable in our society. It would require the Government to face up to their responsibility to come and explain to this House why they are not yet changing their economic policies, despite the obvious evidence that they are doing dreadful—I repeat, dreadful—damage to this country and to our communities.

**Vicky Ford** (Chelmsford) (Con): I am grateful, Madam Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to speak at this stage of our proceedings. I am extraordinarily concerned about new clause 1, because it would delay the implementation of clause 5, which is a key part of the Bill because it sets the very level at which people in this country start to pay tax. If we are to address the issues that affect those in our country on the lowest incomes, the best way to help them will be to allow them to keep more of their money in their pockets.

That is why a key part of this Government's economic strategy has been to make sure, year after year, that those on the lowest incomes are able to keep more of what they earn and to help themselves to build their way out of poverty. That means that 34 million people in this country are paying less tax than previously, and many millions of people have been taken out of tax altogether. This was the No. 1 recommendation of the tax reform commission, which I worked on back in 2006, and I am absolutely delighted that it was among the first steps taken first by the coalition Government, then by the 2015 Government and now by the 2017 Government. This Finance Bill means that raising the level before anyone pays tax to £12,500 is being introduced faster than we ever thought possible.

**Mrs Anne Main** (St Albans) (Con): Given the Front-Bench speech that we heard from the Opposition, it is worth noting that the allowance was only £6,475 when Labour left power, but is now £12,500 under this Conservative Government.

**Vicky Ford**: Absolutely. That is exactly the point, because we know that the best way to address poverty is to make sure that more people can earn their way out of poverty. That does not work for everyone, but for those who can do so, this makes a significant difference, and that is exactly why poverty is now at record lows.

**Bob Stewart** (Beckenham) (Con): According to Department for Work and Pensions figures, there are 1 million fewer people in absolute poverty since 2010, with 300,000 fewer children in the same situation.

**Vicky Ford**: Absolutely. That is exactly the point: absolute poverty is now at record lows. That also has an impact on children—my hon. Friend made that point—

because the number of children living in workless homes has fallen to the lowest level since records started.

**Maria Caulfield** (Lewes) (Con): Would not the situation for working families be even worse under a Labour Government, with the proposal announced at the Labour party conference of £500 billion of public spending, which would mean a doubling of VAT, a doubling of national insurance, a doubling of income tax and a doubling of council tax? They are not my words, but those of a Labour MP, the hon. Member for Nottingham East (Mr Leslie).

**Vicky Ford**: I thank my hon. Friend for that precise contribution. I cannot understand why the Labour party has voted against increases to the level at which people start to pay tax, because helping people to keep more of their earnings in their own pockets is fundamental to increasing house ownership and to building a fairer economy.

**Simon Hoare**: I trust that my hon. Friend's question was not a rhetorical one, but perhaps I can try to answer it. As far as socialism is concerned, it is absolutely fine until Labour Members have run out of other people's money to spend. That is why they are opposed to these things.

**Vicky Ford**: I thank my hon. Friend for that point.

I also want to talk about fairness. Yes, it is true that the provision also increases the rate at which people start to pay a slightly higher rate of tax, but the biggest impact is on those on the lowest level of tax. That is why the tax gap—the difference between the highest and lowest levels of income—has actually fallen. The ratio of the average income of the top fifth to that of the bottom fifth of households has fallen, after taking into account all benefits and taxes.

3.15 pm

I was very concerned by what the hon. Member for Bootle (Peter Dowd) said about precedents, somehow suggesting that such a clause should not be in the Bill. I have had a quick look back at previous Finance Bills, and it is absolutely normal to have a clause that looks like clause 5, which sets out the level at which the Exchequer should start taking tax. If such a provision is not in the Finance Bill, where should it be? Of course it should be in the Finance Bill—it is an absolutely fundamental element of it.

**Peter Dowd**: The hon. Lady has got two facts wrong. First, we did not vote against these proposals, as she suggested. Secondly, I was actually talking about the new schedule, not clause 5. If she is going to attack us, she should get her facts right, for goodness' sake.

**Vicky Ford**: Perhaps this should be better drafted on the amendment paper, because the Opposition's explanatory statement clearly refers to the "impact of clause 5".

I agree that one should always take impacts into consideration, but I strongly believe that the issue raised by the hon. Gentleman of needing to address poverty is best addressed by allowing this Bill to go forward today, especially the elements that involve raising the level at which people start to pay tax, so that they can keep

more money in their own pockets. That is fundamental to building a fairer economy, to having a lower gap between those on the highest incomes and those on the lowest incomes, and to encouraging more people in this country to take up the work opportunities available to them under this Conservative Government, with the continuing growth of the economy.

**Debbie Abrahams** (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): It gives me great pleasure to speak to new clause 5, which is in my name and those of colleagues. As I have previously stated, I declare an interest as chair of the all-party group on health in all policies, and as a fellow of the Faculty of Public Health, following 20 or so years of national and international work in this field.

Under new clause 5, the Chancellor

“must review the public health and poverty effects of the provisions of this Act and lay a report of that review before the House of Commons within six months of the passing of this Act...A review...must consider...the effects of the provisions of this Act on the levels of relative and absolute poverty in the UK”.

There has been a lot of talk about absolute poverty levels, and we would of course welcome any reductions in absolute poverty levels. Those are the most severe levels of poverty, when people are unable to meet basic physiological needs, such as for food, water and shelter. However, relative poverty is a really important measure that we must reflect on, so I want to stress that the review would look at both relative and absolute poverty in the UK. I also want the review to assess

“the effects of the provisions of this Act on life expectancy and healthy life expectancy in the UK, and...the implications for the public finances of the public health effects of the provisions of this Act.”

Yesterday, the Government announced their new 10-year plan for the NHS. In his statement to the House, the Health Secretary talked about the importance of reducing health inequalities—absolutely, I could not agree more—and how we need to reduce the demands on health services. I do hope that the Government will take new clause 5 seriously as an opportunity to ensure that their policies actually meet the objectives they have set out, because it will help to do exactly that.

As important as the 10-year NHS plan is to improve our nation’s health, overwhelming evidence shows that the most important thing we can do is to reduce the poverty and inequality that too many of our citizens face today. The most effective way to do that is to focus upstream by assessing policies, as they are developed, for their effects on poverty, inequality and, ultimately, the health of our citizens. That was why I tabled the new clause.

As the UN special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights said recently, the cuts and reforms introduced in the past few years have brought about misery and torn at the social fabric of our country. There are 14 million people living in relative poverty in the UK, 8 million of whom are working. That is the highest level ever—I advise those who may not be familiar with the most recent data to refer to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation report published last month. Two thirds of the 4 million children living in poverty are from working households. How are young people who are living in extreme poverty and who are hungry going to excel at school?

What about disabled people? They are twice as likely to live in poverty as non-disabled people, because of the costs associated with their disability. As we heard from Labour’s Front-Bench spokesman, policies on not just taxation but public spending and particularly social security are having a devastating impact on disabled people, and that includes universal credit. More than 4 million disabled people are living in poverty today. They are increasingly isolated and confined to their homes, and I am afraid that the situation is going to get worse, because we have had no real confirmation from the Government of how they will protect disabled people in relation to universal credit.

As analysis from the Institute for Fiscal Studies and others has shown, the lowest income decile has lost proportionately more income than any other group since 2015 as a consequence of personal taxation and social security changes. Last autumn’s Budget had only marginal impacts on the household income of the poorest, while reducing the number of higher rate taxpayers by 300,000. The Government’s regressive measures have done nothing to reduce the gap between the rich and poor.

Last week’s Fat Cat Friday heralded the fact that top executives now earn 133 times more than their average worker; it was 47 times more in 1998. In the first three days of January, FTSE 100 bosses earned what an average full-time worker will earn in a year. That is the unequal society that this Government have allowed to run rampant.

When cuts to household incomes are combined with the cuts to public spending and services, the impact is even more dramatic. We have seen disproportionate cuts in Government funding to towns and cities across the north. The effects of all this on life expectancy are now being seen, with gains made over decades falling away. Life expectancy has been stalling since 2011 and is now flatlining, particularly in older age groups, for older women and in deprived areas.

The regional differences in how long people live reflect the socioeconomic inequalities across the country. People may be aware of these figures, because I mentioned them when I spoke in November, but life expectancy for men in the Windsor and Maidenhead local authority, which covers the Prime Minister’s constituency, stands at 81.6 years, while in my Oldham and Saddleworth constituency, it is 77 years.

Even within those areas there are differences in how long people will live. In Windsor and Maidenhead, the life expectancy gap is 5.8 years for men and 4.8 years for women, while in my constituency there is an 11.4-year difference for men and a 10.7-year difference for women. We should really concentrate on those figures. Those health inequalities are reflected across the country.

Inequalities in life expectancy are mirrored by inequalities in healthy life expectancy—how long somebody can be expected to live in good health. Healthy life expectancy at birth across local authority areas varies by 21.5 years for women and 15.8 years for men. In addition, according to the Office for National Statistics, women’s healthy life expectancy at birth decreased by three months between 2009 and 2011. How have the Government responded? They have actually increased the state pension age: people are living shorter lives, and living shorter lives in good health, but we are increasing the time they will be expected to work.

[Debbie Abrahams]

The gains Labour made in reducing health inequalities are now being reversed. The recent Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health report showed that infant mortality has started to increase for the first time in 100 years. Four in 1,000 babies will not reach their first birthday in the UK, compared with 2.8 in the EU. Those are the unacceptable consequences of austerity.

Last month's report by Public Health England investigating these inequalities in life expectancy confirmed what many of us have been saying: austerity has wrought misery and poverty, and has ultimately brought an early death for too many. If the Prime Minister is committed to tackling burning injustices and ending austerity, she needs to commit to her policies being independently assessed for their effects on poverty, inequality and public health, as my new clause outlines.

Reducing the gap between rich and poor benefits not just those who are lifted out of poverty. As the International Monetary Fund's report five years ago showed, if we increase inequality, we reduce growth, and if we reduce inequality, we increase growth. Trickle-down economics has been shown not to work. As evidence from totemic reports such as "The Spirit Level" shows, society as a whole benefits from decreased inequality, with increases in life expectancy, educational attainment, social mobility, trust between communities and much more. Fairer, more equal societies benefit everyone. Inequalities are not inevitable; they are socially reproduced. They are about political choice, and they can be changed.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** Order. Before I call the next speaker, I should take the opportunity to inform the House—this is not very exciting; it is just to set the record straight—that some names that were intended for amendments to the Agriculture Bill were added in error to amendments to this Bill. [Interruption.] I did warn the House that it is not very exciting, but it is important to keep the record straight. For the sake of clarity, let me tell the House that the name of Mike Gapes should not appear on new clause 1, and the name of Kerry McCarthy should not appear on new clauses 10, 17, 8 and 18, and amendments 39 to 41. Having got that important matter straight, I will happily call Mr Kevin Foster.

**Kevin Foster:** Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. Hearing your announcement that the hon. Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes) is not in fact a signatory to new clause 1 has, of course, completely changed my view. Clearly that has changed the whole speech I was about to give.

It is useful to be here for this debate on new clauses 1 and 5. I found the speech by the hon. Member for Bootle (Peter Dowd) of interest, as always. I know from one of our previous exchanges in the Chamber he will be very disappointed to hear that I am not going to give that promised talk on unpacking the holy trinity today. Even in the two hours available, that is probably not quite something that I can effectively manage. I am, however, going to go through an issue on which Members across the House generally have strong views and about which they are passionate: how we best tackle equality issues so that our policies are effective in ensuring that those who are in poverty have a route out of it.

It was not in pure jest that I made a comment in my intervention on the shadow Minister about spending levels in the United States. People talk about the US not having gone down the austerity route, but instead having had a spur or fiscal stimulus. To spend the same as the US, we would have had to make significant cuts to the public sector to get down to US levels of social spending, and in particular healthcare spending. The US has bizarre outcomes from its healthcare system: it spends more of its GDP on healthcare while achieving worse outcomes. No one in the House would wish to implement that system in this country given that failing of spending more and, bluntly, getting a lot less. It is therefore bizarre for that spending to be cited as a great stimulus. It most certainly was not. The US was still spending far less than us after our programme of austerity to bring the deficit under control.

3.30 pm

It is interesting to hear the list of Opposition promises and pledges and to contrast them with the comments of the hon. Member for Nottingham East (Mr Leslie), who is probably the last credible shadow Chancellor from the Labour party. He made it very clear what he felt about that list of promises. We have just had the festive season, but some people in this Chamber still want to write their letter to Santa. Anyone can sit in opposition pledging the earth, with truly unbelievable amounts of spending on this, that and the other, while saying "It's alright, someone else is going to pay." There is always a mythical someone else. No one with any credibility believes that the Opposition's tax rises would be limited to those earning over £80,000 a year.

We can see the result of the type of policies the Leader of the Opposition has advocated over the past 20 and 30 years when we take a look at Venezuela. To be fair, I suppose relative poverty might be going down in that country, but that is only because the entire country is being completely impoverished. This is where I have always had a slight concern about using relative measures. An argument is often made about numbers dropping in relative measures between 2009 and 2010, but that was because the economy was declining and the whole country was getting poorer. Therefore, the difference in relative poverty between groups was declining. In theory, collapsing the economy would remove relative poverty, but no one feels that that is the way we should go about delivering policy—well, except perhaps those who are fervent advocates of the approach adopted in Venezuela.

The two new clauses ask the Chancellor to review the impact of certain provisions. They do not ask for an independent review; they ask for the Chancellor to review his own policies. Perhaps that reflects how much confidence the Opposition have in the Chancellor. He might be reassured to know that they feel that if the Chancellor reviews the impact of the provisions it will be an excellent analysis that they will want to follow. Again, this is not about creating something truly independent, but about asking the Government to produce a report on Government policies.

**Kirsty Blackman** (Aberdeen North) (SNP): Is that not a slightly bizarre argument? I think the Opposition are trying to ask the Government to take into account in the review the priorities we have, rather than the Government's priorities. For example, they may be putting



policies in the Finance Bill to raise taxes to do something specific, whereas we are asking them to look at public health impacts.

**Kevin Foster:** New clause 1 says what it says: it asks the Chancellor to produce a review of the impact of provisions and to lay a report of that review before the House. It does not require anything to be done. It does not set out a detailed list of policy changes and how they would be paid for. I do not really see where the hon. Lady is coming from. Members can generally debate all matters that are put before the House, what they believe their impact will be and whether they will make a difference.

I have to say—my Scottish colleagues like to raise this point—that in some areas, for example the Scottish education system, it would be interesting to look at how help is being provided to children so that they have a route out of poverty. In the past, the Scottish education system was one of the highest rated in the world, but I think the Scottish National party has now pulled Scotland out of the global rankings—not because it is going up them, it is safe to say. We can certainly have reviews both ways, and it will be interesting to hear whether comments from SNP Members reflect the impact that aspects of Scotland’s domestic policy, for which it has been responsible for most of the past decade, have had on some of the statistics they wish to complain about.

I welcome the fact that the Bill again increases the earnings that someone can receive before becoming an income tax payer.

**Debbie Abrahams:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Kevin Foster:** In a moment—I did not intervene on the hon. Lady.

Again, those with the lowest incomes will be able to keep more of what they earn. The days when earning £6,500 was considered enough for someone to start paying tax have disappeared. We were actually able to bring forward the increase in tax-free earnings for millions of people. That is a positive measure, which really makes work pay and helps the lowest earners the most.

**Debbie Abrahams:** What will be the effects of the Government’s increase in the personal allowance on the life expectancy of citizens of this country?

**Kevin Foster:** Any policy that encourages people to be in work and keep more of what they earn, and allows them to save, will help improve their overall health. One of the things that most improves someone’s life outcomes is being in employment. *[Interruption.]* It is bizarre to be heckled for saying that.

**Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con):** My hon. Friend is giving an insightful speech. One impact of the Government’s policies is the improvement in our Gini coefficient, which is widely recognised as an objective international measure of inequality. According to that objective international measure, our inequality has reduced since 2009-10. Nothing is perfect, but it seems that the direction of policies is working.

**Kevin Foster:** As always, my hon. Friend makes a well argued and succinct point. He demonstrates the positive difference that Government policies are making for his

constituents and the UK as a whole. It must be said that that difference is being made by a whole package of policies, not just by the Bill. I know that a range of measures will help tackle the health inequalities in my patch, including intervention, better services, better urgent care, ensuring that we realise the benefits of technology in primary care, dealing with things such as rising obesity, ensuring that people have proper diets and continuing the welcome decrease in the smoking rate. It is bizarre that those who can least afford to smoke end up being impacted most by it, worsening already poor health inequalities.

The Bill is welcome. I do not think either new clause brings much to the debate, other than highlighting that people want reviews and statistics. With a genuine review, we think about our policy conclusions at the end, yet we hear Opposition Members say, “We want a review—but by the way, here are all our conclusions about the policies we believe should be adopted, even though we can’t really outline how we would pay for them, other than with a massive borrowing splurge that would need to be paid for by a future generation.”

It is welcome that, as has been pointed out, the number of people in absolute poverty is at a record low—1 million fewer people overall and 300,000 fewer children are in absolute poverty. *[Interruption.]* We hear a groan, but those are the statistics—the sorts of statistics the Opposition seek through their new clauses. The number of children living in workless homes has fallen to its lowest since records began. Being in work makes a positive difference to people’s lives.

**Debbie Abrahams rose—**

**Kevin Foster:** If the hon. Lady wishes to argue with that, I am only too happy to give way.

**Debbie Abrahams:** No, I would like to ask the hon. Gentleman whether he believes in policy-based evidence or evidence-based policy. He seems to be talking about policy-based evidence. His argument is absolutely facile. He has no evidence to support it. It is absolutely ridiculous.

**Kevin Foster:** For policy-based evidence, we need only look to those who continue to argue that the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Chancellor should be leading this country, despite the increasing evidence of what their economic policies would do to this nation. Anyone who takes a trip to Caracas will see the outcome there, and still some argue that we should bring those policies to this country. *[Interruption.]* It is lovely to be heckled all the way through my speech. I sometimes do it myself.

It is somewhat strange for the Government to be accused of not basing their policies on evidence by a party that crashed the UK economy eight years ago, and to continue to hear the excuse that the financial crash merely happened because of bankers in the United States, despite it being a former Labour Prime Minister who, just before the problem with the banks, predicted that a golden era for the City of London was about to start and set up the regulatory system that so badly failed to prevent this country from being exposed to the financial risks and shockwaves. It is somewhat strange to get that lecture on evidence, when there is plenty of evidence of what went wrong a decade ago, when we were left needing to make savings that Labour was planning to make anyway.

**Mrs Main:** My hon. Friend prompted me when he mentioned a golden era. Does he remember when a certain Labour Chancellor thought it an excellent idea to sell off our gold reserves at a record low?

**Kevin Foster:** Absolutely. We could spend a long time analysing the decision to flog the gold reserves. It was the same Chancellor who claimed to have abolished boom and bust—to be fair, he was right: he managed to end the boom at the end of his term, although he did very little to take us away from the bust. The economic cycle is still there, and those who pretended it did not exist were deluding themselves. They kept betting that things would always go up and then things started to go down.

The other thing that has made a difference in Torbay, whose economy has many jobs in the service sector, the hospitality industry and the care sector, is the introduction of the national living wage, because of which many people have had a salary increase. It is easy for an Opposition to pledge all sorts of things, but it is very different to actually deliver in government an income rise for the lowest earners. More people are being paid more than the national living wage—local employers in Torbay are paying beyond that level to attract the staff they need, given the fall in unemployment. We cannot say that the Government's fiscal policies have had nothing to do with that; they have made a positive difference to the lives of people in my community and others across the UK.

**Colin Clark (Gordon) (Con):** Does my hon. Friend agree that it is this Government who are trying to build a fairer economy and that, in my constituency and his, the gap between the highest and the lowest incomes has fallen since 2010?

**Kevin Foster:** Absolutely. It is worth remembering, when we hear how the Opposition want to tax people and what our tax policies are, that the highest earners in this country are paying a higher percentage today than they did for all but the last few weeks of the previous Labour Government. The claim that the Government are being much more generous to the highest earners through income tax is completely false. Sadly, my hon. Friend now represents the highest-taxed part of the United Kingdom. I refer to the work of the SNP in making Northumberland a tax haven from its policies, which have hit a range of people on middle incomes. I am concerned that the impacts in Scotland of that policy will see its representatives here in Westminster blaming those impacts on Bills such as this one, when they are due to policies that the SNP, not this Parliament, has imposed on the Scottish people.

**Kirsty Blackman:** The Scottish Government's Budget ensures that 90% of businesses will pay less in business rates than they would if they were anywhere else in the UK. Does the hon. Gentleman believe that his Government should change their policies to match Scotland's?

**Kevin Foster:** I certainly do not believe that the Westminster Government should change their policies to match the SNP's income tax raid on middle earners and those who drive the economy. On business rates, anyone who has sat through my speeches on the high street will know that I have taken the view for some time

that we need to look at how we tax the high street in future. The era of large corner premises being the most profitable place to sell goods and wares is long gone. I have to say that I do not think I will be looking at the SNP's record for much inspiration when it comes to the question of how to stimulate the economy and boost people's earnings.

**Luke Graham** *rose—*

**Colin Clark** *rose—*

**Kevin Foster:** I will go to Ochil and South Perthshire first.

**Luke Graham:** The hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman) made a point about being able to lower business rates in Scotland. That has been fantastic. Will my hon. Friend join me in thanking the Chancellor for putting more than £40 million into the Scottish budget so that we could fund such a business rate cut?

3.45 pm

**Kevin Foster:** Absolutely. That support was very welcome. However, one of the issues that I am surprised SNP Members do not want to be raised—although perhaps it is not a surprise, when I think about what would be said—is what the impact would be in all these areas if the Bill included a border between England and Scotland, making it harder for business to be done between those two parts of our great United Kingdom. What would be the impact on the economy if Scotland had to experience SNP Members' overall economic and fiscal policies? Surprisingly, I do not think that they want that kind of analysis to be included in the review.

**Colin Clark:** I was quite surprised by what my constituency neighbour the hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman) said. She is well aware that the north-east of Scotland—its very engine room, and the area that she represents—has ended up picking up half the business rates in Scotland. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is dangerous for business rates to damage particular parts of the economy and to unbalance it disproportionately, whether in Scotland or in England?

**Kevin Foster:** I could not have put it better myself. If business rates unbalance the economy, that is clearly a real issue. It is no surprise that two years ago, when voters in the north-east of Scotland—which is, as my hon. Friend says, the powerhouse of Scotland's economy—had to decide which party would be the best to drive forward economic policies and represent their interests, the area, funnily enough, suddenly turned quite a pleasant shade of blue, with only a dot of yellow in the middle. That reflected the confidence of those voters in this Government's policies.

I am conscious that I have been speaking for a little while, and that others wish to contribute. Let me end by saying that I do not believe the two new clauses add anything to the Bill. They were tabled by Members who regularly like to give us policy-based evidence, and who advocate a form of economic management for the country that has failed many times in other countries. There is no reason why it would not fail again here if they were given the chance to implement it. I hope that the House

will not accept the new clauses, but will accept that the Bill will make a difference to working families across the country, will help to drive our economy forward, and will have a positive effect on the country overall.

**Vernon Coaker** (Gedling) (Lab): I support the two new clauses. Unlike the hon. Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster), I think that they are very measured. They simply ask the Government to review the impact of the Bill on poverty and inequality.

I do not know what other Members think, but let me describe what I think the vast majority of people in all our constituencies believe, and what they believe this Parliament should be saying and doing. They believe that the current levels of inequality in our country are simply and utterly unacceptable. They believe that the levels of child poverty are simply and utterly unacceptable. They are not interested in someone being able to tell them that there are 2 million children living in terrible poverty, or 1,850,000 children living in absolute or, indeed, relative poverty. That is what those people are sick of, and what I am sick of, and what this Parliament should be reflecting.

Across the country, people are asking, “Can you not do any better? Can you not do something about the fact that there are still pensioners in one of the richest countries in the world who cannot heat themselves properly in cold weather, including at Christmas?” They are asking, “What is Parliament doing when we see children living in absolute poverty who cannot afford to go to school, with shoes and clothes and food being given to them as an act of charity by people in those schools?” They are not interested in whether the figures have gone up by 0.5% or down by 1%. They are interested in what this Parliament is doing about it, and what we are saying.

All these new clauses do is say to the Government, “If you believe, for example, that clause 5, through allowing people to keep more of their income when in work, addresses some of those issues, let’s have a review to see whether or not that is the case.” That is what people would expect.

I am sick of this myself. When I drive around, not just my constituency but the country, I see enormous wealth. I am not talking about people who have worked hard and done well, which we all want to see; I am talking about massive accumulated wealth—not just income—with people able to afford to pay astronomical sums on different ways of life, while half a mile down the street there is a kid in a household that cannot afford to put any proper food on the table.

**Catherine West** (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is terrible to think of all the many places in the country where there are so many more food banks, and that the year-on-year increase the Trussell Trust has told us about is deeply worrying?

**Vernon Coaker:** That is right. Every Member of this House would no doubt say, “Isn’t it great that there are food banks and so many volunteers at them?” I agree with that; I agree that it is good to see in communities across this country, in every part of the UK, so many people who volunteer their time with others donating to them. What I object to is that food banks, which are there as a charity, are used as an instrument of public

policy—they are used as a way of tackling poverty. What on earth have things come to in 2018 and 2019 when food banks are a public policy mechanism for dealing with poverty? They are supposed to be charitable organisations for people who have somehow slipped through the net, not places where someone at the DWP sends people with tokens. That is an absolute outrage, and this Parliament should be seething about it. In saying that, I do not decry the volunteers; this brings the very best out of people, but—goodness me—is that public policy now?

That is what the Minister should be addressing. The challenge that I think every Member of this House would make to the Government would be to ask what is being done to address these issues. We do not want some academic debate about a bit of research here or there which means that the hon. Member for Torbay can say, “There’s 1,000 fewer here and 2% less there.” The levels of poverty and inequality in our country are a fundamental disgrace; why are the Government not raging about that and doing something about it through their Budget?

**Laura Smith** (Crewe and Nantwich) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that when he speaks to the food bank volunteers they say to him that they do not want to be doing this work as it should not be necessary because people should be able to pay for the food for their families without having to rely on handouts? They do not want to be volunteering for this because this problem should not exist in 2019.

**Vernon Coaker:** I agree with my hon. Friend.

In my relatively brief contribution I just want to ask the Government why there is disagreement about these perfectly reasonable new clauses that ask the Government to review the impact on poverty and inequality. When the Minister responds, will he say whether he refuses to keep under review any of the budgetary measures to be implemented through this Finance Bill to see whether they impact on poverty and inequality? Is that honestly what he is saying? If he is not saying that, why cannot he accept a new clause that is asking him to review this? Who disagrees with looking at whether our Government’s policies are actually tackling poverty and inequality? I find this absolutely incredible.

The Minister can say that this is all rhetorical nonsense, but let us see what he says about how he intends to review the impact of the Government’s policies. For example, he knows that one of the key challenges for Government policy is that, despite what they have tried to do, the number of working people in poverty is increasing. That is a policy challenge. It is not a Labour-Tory thing; it is a policy challenge. If the Minister simply retrenches on this, he is not acting as a Minister of the Crown or a Government Minister responsible for our country; he is acting as a Tory party politician, and that is not what a Minister of the Crown should be doing.

**Martin Whitfield** (East Lothian) (Lab): I find it sad to have to ask this, but does my hon. Friend agree that perhaps the reason why the Government will not accept the new clauses is that they would provide the evidence that these policies are wrong and that they are harming our citizens?



**Vernon Coaker:** I agree. I am not sure if the Minister is listening, but that is the point. Surely the Government would want to know whether their policies were working, so that they could do more of them. And if their policies were not working, all of us would want the Government to change tack.

Poverty and inequality should be at the heart of everything the Government do and of everything this Parliament demands. All that the new clauses and amendments are doing is saying to the Government, “Look at what your policies are doing. Look at the impact out there. What are you doing to tackle the utterly unacceptable inequality, child poverty and increased use of food banks that we see in our country? How are your policies going to address this?” That is the purpose of the new clauses, which I totally support.

**Helen Whately** (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker). In fact, I agree with some of the sentiments that he has expressed. The level of poverty is still unacceptable, and that makes me unhappy. I am also unhappy about the level of inequality across the country and in my own constituency, but I want to support a Government who are doing something about it, not just through words but through actually taking steps to make these things better.

I have enormous respect for the hon. Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Debbie Abrahams), who introduced her new clause 1 earlier. It proposes a review of the impact of clause 5 on child poverty and equality—that is, the impact of raising the level of the personal allowance after which people start paying tax. She also spoke to new clause 5, which proposes a review of the public health and poverty impact of the whole Act. It is enormously tempting to say yes, we should do this. All of us in this Chamber care enormously about poverty and inequality levels. I have a background in healthcare, and I feel very strongly about reducing health inequalities. I am also conscious of the different life expectancies within my own constituency, which are substantial, but we must be careful not to be lured into a sense that reviewing a specific part of an Act will give us an accurate picture of all that is being done and of its impact on, for example, reducing health inequalities.

**Debbie Abrahams:** I want to reciprocate by expressing my respect for the hon. Lady and for the work that she does in this place on mental health. I have huge experience in this area. I spent more than 20 years working on health inequalities and specifically on the assessment of policies to ensure that we get them right. That is part of the reason that I came into Parliament, and I know that this can be done. As my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) said, if we are all so committed to reducing poverty and inequality, let us assess our policies before they are implemented, to ensure that they do just that.

4 pm

**Helen Whately:** I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention, but we should be a little cautious about assessing a particular bit of policy in isolation without considering other policy areas, because that might result in false information. For instance, if we examined a specific bit of Government spending, it may appear to be doing a fantastic job, but if we do not consider the

counter-effect and the money that is being taken away from people elsewhere, it does not provide the whole picture and might lead to poor policy decisions.

I want us to look at the overall impact of Government policy in the round. For example, we should look not only at the impact of raising the personal tax allowance, which is positive because it enables people on low incomes to retain more of what they earn, but at where the Government are investing money. For health inequalities, we should look harder at the extra £20.5 billion going into healthcare and the impact of the NHS long-term plan, published yesterday, which has a particular focus on directing funding to reduce inequalities and increasing funding for primary and community care. Those things will particularly help those in the most deprived areas and those with some of the worst health outcomes.

I know that it is enormously controversial, but universal credit—I will probably get booed by the other side of the Chamber—is helping people into work and is doing so hand in hand with an economy that is strong overall, leading to unemployment in my constituency halving since 2010.

**Dr Philippa Whitford** (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): I totally support what the hon. Lady is saying about importance of inequalities and health inequalities, but does she not recognise that two thirds of children in poverty have a working parent? People are trapped in low-paid work, and they are still poor, and she knows from her time on the Health and Social Care Committee that poverty is the biggest driver of ill health and health inequalities.

**Helen Whately:** I recognise that there is poverty in working families, but I do not agree with her use of the word “trapped”. It is important to ensure that people are in work, because that is the best way out of poverty, and then to ensure that we support people to raise their earnings. One way of doing that is through the support available through the jobcentre when people resume universal credit, which now tends to help people to move up and earn more money, and the other is by looking at the wider economy. As the hon. Lady will know, the minimum wage has risen and is rising, but we are also seeing wages rising independent of the minimum wage as a result of a more productive economy. What is actually key to a better level of wellbeing and fewer people being in poverty is having more people in work, which is the case, and a more productive economy, which means that people earn more. We can achieve that through driving up skills and technology, increasing exports and a swath of other things that would take me into a whole other conversation.

**Mrs Main:** My hon. Friend has mentioned some of the benefits of having a working parent or family member, but it also sets an enormously good example for the children. Children brought up in workless households have low aspirations and ambitions when it comes to obtaining work themselves, so somebody being in work is not just about money, it is about psychological and educative factors, too.

**Helen Whately:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. While education standards are rising in our schools—readings levels, for example, are increasing substantially, leading to better opportunities for children—low levels

of aspiration are still a problem and, as the teacher I was speaking to at a primary school in a deprived area said the other day, raising young people's aspirations is key.

**Laura Smith:** I am completely insulted by the point made by the hon. Member for St Albans (Mrs Main). I grew up in in-work poverty. My parents were working, and I saw them struggle day in, day out, but I assure the House that my aspirations were not stopped. It may do some Members good to understand what people living in such conditions have to go through day in, day out, and Members should not patronise people when they simply do not understand the situation.

**Helen Whately:** I thank the hon. Lady for her contribution and for the example she sets. Although she has described a very tough childhood, she is a role model and is playing her part in Parliament.

To be clear, what I said was from a conversation with a teacher, who is doing a very good job in a very deprived school, about her experience. The hon. Lady's experience might be different but, from this teacher's experience, although there is so much she can do to help children learn to read, write and perform better in their education, what would make the next difference for those children is for their aspirations to be raised and for them to have a sense of the opportunities for them beyond their needs and environment.

**Laura Smith:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Helen Whately:** I have already taken an intervention from the hon. Lady, so she has had a chance to make her point.

**Vicky Ford:** Does my hon. Friend agree that making sure people can keep more of their earnings before they pay tax, introducing the national living wage and reducing the very high taper rate for people on legacy benefits will all contribute to helping people to get out of the in-work poverty trap?

**Helen Whately:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and she reminds me of a constituency case, before universal credit, of a mum who was looking to raise her income but who was coming up against a threshold. If she worked more than 16 hours a week, she would not benefit, so she was trapped in poverty—the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford) used the word “trapped” earlier—because it did not make sense for her to increase her hours of work.

**Luke Graham:** My hon. Friend is making an important point about aspiration. In this House we often get caught on economics and money, but social capital is just as important. In many communities right across the United Kingdom, we need to be helping people to see the true opportunities, both inside and outside their communities, to allow them to realise their true potential. It is important that we consider the social alongside the monetary in all these debates.

**Helen Whately:** I absolutely agree and that is one reason why we have to look at policies in the round. I completely support the policy of taking people out of income tax, but let us look not just at that. Let us look,

for example, at the strong economy, at the opportunities that gives people and, beyond that, at the strength provided by having a family and community around people, which also provides the social capital to be able to make the most of their lives.

**Sir Oliver Heald** (North East Hertfordshire) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that the challenge for Parliament changes over time? In the Labour years we were very concerned in Parliament about the number of workless households—there were 3 million then. There are now a lot more people in work, but there is this issue, which has been rightly raised, of the quality of that work, of the skills involved and of whether it rewards people adequately. That is the new challenge, but we are making progress.

**Helen Whately:** I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for his intervention.

The hon. Member for Gedling spoke earlier of his frustration. He did not want people to talk about changes in percentages and there being perhaps a few fewer people in poverty, but actually the numbers do matter. The numbers tell us what is happening, and the numbers are moving in the right direction, which is really important. The fact that the numbers are moving in the direction of our having fewer workless households should not be sniffed at or dismissed. Achieving that has been a challenging job, and it has involved a significant effort from many people.

**Laura Smith:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Helen Whately:** I think I should conclude my remarks, as I am aware that I have been speaking for a while.

New clauses 1 and 5, which call for reviews on specific aspects, have been advocated in a way that suggests that one side of the House cares more about poverty, for instance, than the other, but that is not the case at all. Members on the Conservative Benches care very deeply about poverty and equality within society.

What really matters is the track record of governing parties in these areas. I would raise these questions with the House. Which party in government oversaw an increase in unemployment from 5% to 8%? Which party left office with nearly 4 million workless households? Which party left office with rising absolute poverty? All of us know that it was Labour.

In contrast, under this Government, we have more than 3 million more people in work, the lowest unemployment since the 1970s, 600,000 fewer children living in workless households, falling absolute poverty and rising wages. When it comes down to it, this is what matters—getting right those policies that improve people's lives, reduce inequality, reduce poverty and make life better for everybody. That is what we should all be backing.

**Simon Hoare:** It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham and Mid Kent (Helen Whately).

I rise to oppose new clause 1, and I do so for these reasons. If any Members were so inclined, they should please come and visit my constituency of North Dorset. If they visited North Dorset, they could easily be forgiven for thinking that everything in the garden was rosy. There are pretty villages, attractive market towns, lush fields,

[*Simon Hoare*]

healthy-looking cattle grazing and a strong local economy where unemployment is virtually zero. If Polly Toynbee or the hon. Member for Bootle (Peter Dowd) were to arrive in North Dorset and say to me, “Simon, would you take me to your most deprived ward?” I could not, because I do not have one, but I know that I have pockets of deprivation and of poverty in each village and market town in my constituency.

One of the big challenges facing any suite of financial policies is recognising that poverty manifests itself in various ways and guises, but right the way across our nation. It is, I would suggest, far easier to identify large pockets of urban deprivation and poverty. The real public policy challenge is also to recognise and address those of rural poverty, often in sparsely populated areas where the instinct—maybe it is part of the rural community DNA—is slightly to shy away from asking the state, either local or national, for support and to demonstrate a strong sense of resilience and smaller communities trying to work together, although that is no excuse for any Government to shy away from focusing like an Exocet on trying to deliver policies that help to address rural poverty.

I am motivated by this every day. I know the figures move around, but the average national salary for the UK is in the region of £24,000 or £24,500 per annum, as I understand it. In North Dorset, when I was first elected in 2015, the figure was £16,500 and it has just risen to about £18,000, but rural jobs always pay less, if people are in the agricultural sector, food production or the hospitality trade. In those rural areas we do not have those big, high-paying employers. That is why we should always focus on trying to deliver support.

**Laura Smith:** I find myself agreeing with what the hon. Gentleman is saying about rural poverty. I am an MP in Cheshire, and our local food bank expresses real concern about the rise in the number of people who live in rural areas having to access the food bank. He is right about pride, and another relevant group is elderly people, who often will not access help and support, so it is important to mention rural poverty.

4.15 pm

**Simon Hoare:** I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her intervention. I am not entirely sure whether her support of me or my support of her has damaged her career more than it has damaged mine. We will leave our respective Whips to adjudicate on that. Nevertheless, she is absolutely right, and she is absolutely right to highlight that often incredibly annoying sense of pride when a retired person comes to an advice surgery. I say, “Look, we can try to help you to get this, that and the other,” and they say, “No, I don’t want to, Mr Hoare. I don’t think it is right. I have never asked the state for anything.” There is some locked-up pride among some of our retired citizens and we must forever say to them that the state in all its manifestations is there to provide. The second duty of the state, after keeping the country safe, is to provide that safety net that delivers self-respect and the opportunity for people to live with some semblance of dignity and happiness, particularly in their later lives.

Those in later life are a group that is often hard to reach. They will never be contacted through the digital economy; they need to be outreached to. I make the

point again—I know the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Laura Smith) will agree with me—that one of the great challenges in sparsely populated rural areas is that outreach is often harder, because there is not that dense concentration such that at almost every door one knocks on in an area one would say “Yes, this is the area that requires most attention.”

**Vicky Ford:** I thank my hon. Friend for painting this clear picture of rural poverty, but pockets of poverty occur in urban constituencies such as mine, too. Does he agree that poverty is about not only how much someone earns but the cost of living? That is why it is so important that we focus not just on the relative poverty measures that the Labour party focuses on, but on reducing absolute poverty, which is the measure that this Government have succeeded in dealing with.

**Simon Hoare:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right to pinpoint the cost of living. Opposition spokesmen sometimes dispute this, but it is more expensive to live in a rural area. It is more expensive to heat one’s home. Travel costs are higher, usually in the absence of public transport, meaning that the running of a car is not a luxury but a necessity if one is to access even the most basic of public or retail services.

**Martin Whitfield:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

**Simon Hoare:** If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I will not, because I want to refer to the speech by the hon. Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker). I hope that he will not think it is untoward for me to say this, but the passion with which he delivered his speech was powerful and incredibly compelling. He struck on a point that I was going to make and on which I had jotted down a note or two, and it is a point I have been making in recent speeches around the place. I often admire the Labour party—

**Thelma Walker** (Colne Valley) (Lab): Stop there. [*Laughter.*]

**Simon Hoare:** There is always a “but”, though. [*Interruption.*] My right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury says that my career has definitely gone now. I did not even know that I had a career, so that is going to be interesting.

There is usually no embarrassment on the Labour side at talking with passion about the burning injustices that we see in all our constituencies and having a clear determination to do something about them. There is no inhibition at all on the Labour side. On my side—I say this as somebody who has been a member of our party since 1985—I occasionally find that we get slightly inhibited about talking from the heart. Other Members have referred to this. We can bandy the statistics about—relative or absolute, percentage this versus percentage that, up, down, more in this, fewer than the other—but it does not matter, because if someone is poor, the statistics do not affect them: they are poor. They want to know that their elected representatives, locally, in this place and those in Whitehall are doing their damndest to make their life just a little better.



I make this plea to my colleagues on the Treasury Bench: we on the Conservative Benches do not talk enough about the whys of politics. We talk a lot about the whats, but we do not say why. We find homelessness gut-wrenchingly upsetting. We find the closing down of hope, aspiration and life expectancy intensely moving, and we burn with the desire to help. It certainly motivates me every morning to get out of bed and to do my best for my constituents in whatever way I can by supporting policies that I fundamentally believe have the power to make our local economy, and therefore my constituents' lives, better. If anybody in this House is not motivated by that fundamental political passion to stir up the soul to go and do something about it, I say to them with the greatest of respect that they should not be here. That, I think, must be our principal function. Members from both sides of the House want to arrive at a place where aspiration, hope and opportunity are available for as great a number of our citizens as we can possibly facilitate.

We also want to make sure that the economy is buoyant. Why? Because warm words butter no parsnips. The emotional speeches may salve our consciences, but we need the economic policies that deliver the taxes and pay for the safety net below which, I am determined, none of my constituents should, or will, ever fall on my watch. We need to be ever vigilant to make sure that our economic policies are delivering that growth.

**Martin Whitfield:** I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. I say with the greatest respect that he is making a very good speech for the two new clauses. The knowledge gained from reviewing policy implementation feeds into the decisions that go forward, so, at this stage, I invite him to support the two new clauses.

**Simon Hoare:** The hon. Gentleman is—what's the phrase?—pushing his luck on that. I think that the divide here will be on the theoretical and the practical. I am always conscious that we can go to any Minister's office, or any Department, or any local council, and find gathering dust, spiders and dead flies on many a window sill reports, reviews and assessments of this, that and the other, and they have a pretty short shelf life. I would much prefer to spend Government time focusing on delivering those policies of hope and growth.

**Laura Smith** *rose*—

**Simon Hoare:** The hon. Lady has winked at me in such a beguiling way that of course I will give way to her.

**Laura Smith:** I would just like to put it on the record that I absolutely did not.

**Simon Hoare:** You winked.

**Laura Smith:** It was just a northern smile; that was all.

Does the hon. Gentleman not see that he has massively contradicted himself? His speech, as my hon. Friend the Member for East Lothian (Martin Whitfield) has said, would indicate that he should really be supporting these new clauses, and yet, when pushed on it, he is not.

Does he not agree that that is why people in the outside world become frustrated with politicians who are very good at speaking in one way, but who act in another?

**Simon Hoare:** It was all going so well, wasn't it? I agree with the hon. Lady that many people become incredibly frustrated when a Minister of any political persuasion delivers a speech that makes them think, "Something good is going to flow from this", but then very little has actually happened when they come to think about it.

I would prefer to do the doing rather than the reviewing. I do not need a whole series of reviews to tell me that there are poor, deprived people who live in North Dorset. I do not need tables of statistics to tell me that I am going to hold the Government to account to ensure that policies are delivered to provide support for those who need it, to encourage a ladder of expectation and aspiration for those who wish to scale it, and to put policies in place to ensure that we remain a civilised and humane society. I do not need a whole bookcase of learned treatises to tell me this. It was strange that the hon. Member for Gedling made exactly that point—that he did not need a whole load of statistics and reviews—when that is actually what new clauses 1 and 5 are calling for.

I do not need these pieces of paper to tell me that it is the first duty of a Government of any colour—even if it were the hon. Member for Bootle (Peter Dowd) sitting on the Government Benches and my right hon. Friend the Minister sitting on the Opposition side—to try to ensure that the economy grows and that opportunities are presented.

**Rachel Maclean** (Redditch) (Con): As well as not needing to do these reviews, does my hon. Friend agree that we should be looking at our track record—at what has actually happened when it comes to getting the deficit and the debt down? Surely that is what people will be looking at. What gives them the most comfort that we will be able to deliver on our promises in the future is that we have delivered on them in the past.

**Simon Hoare:** My hon. Friend is right, but I think people will look at it differently. I think that most people in this country come to an evaluation of an Administration, irrespective of which party happens to be in power, based on whether they and their family group feel more secure, more prosperous and more confident about their opportunities, and on whether they can see that the opportunities for the next generation of their family are going to be deeper and wider than those presented to them when they were making their first choices.

**Victoria Prentis** (Banbury) (Con): If I may say so, my hon. Friend is making the speech of his life. In a finance debate, it is particularly good to hear a speech about burning injustices, and I agree with him that this is the right place to be having this debate. In turn, does he agree with me that employment is at the base of dealing with all those injustices?

**Simon Hoare:** My hon. Friend is right. I think that the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Laura Smith) slightly misheard my hon. Friend the Member for St Albans (Mrs Main). My hon. Friend the Member

[Simon Hoare]

for St Albans said precisely what the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich said, which was that although the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich was in a tight or low-income household, it was a house of work.

**Laura Smith:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Simon Hoare:** Of course, but let me just finish this point with my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis).

Where did we all learn that it was normal and expected to get out of bed in the morning, have a bit of a wash and a tidy-up, get ourselves to school and then on to work, and all the rest of it? It was from our parents. Growing up in Cardiff, I can remember large council estates where worklessness was endemic, and where the welfare state had not been that support, safety net or springboard, but had instead become a way of life for too many people. If that is the case, how on earth can we expect anybody to learn the work ethic?

I chaired the all-party parliamentary group for multiple sclerosis, which two years ago held an inquiry into people with MS who were in work and wanted to stay in work. Without reducing employability to a utilitarian argument, for people to feel that, even with a painful degenerative condition, they could still play an active, productive role in their family's life, in the life of their community and thereby in the life of the economy nationally, had a huge impact on their mental health. I therefore entirely agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury, who speaks with great passion on this issue.

An understanding of employment and the benefits that flow from it has to be rehearsed again and again by Treasury Ministers and other Ministers. We take this for granted, possibly because it is in our DNA and possibly because it is the only thing that we have ever known, but we must be conscious that there are others in our country who have not. We should be advocates, apostles, evangelisers and any other word one could think of in shouting from the rafters the strong benefits of employment.

4.30 pm

**Dr Caroline Johnson** (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that not only has employment benefited but, since 2010, this Government have delivered a reduction of 661,000 in the number of children living in workless households—so over half a million young people are now growing up in a home where they are getting those lessons on the importance of work—and have also reduced the number of children living in absolute poverty by 200,000?

**Simon Hoare:** My hon. Friend helps me and my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury by amplifying the point.

I said earlier that I was born and brought up in Cardiff. One of my abiding memories was of my late grandmother, who was born in 1908, and what motivated her throughout the whole of her life. She was the daughter of Irish immigrants. When she was at school—a Catholic primary school called St Patrick's in Grangetown—a teacher brought a child to the front of the class, theatrically held their nose, and said, "Boy, go home, you smell."

I can remember, in different circumstances in the 1970s, my Catholic primary school in Cardiff called St Mary's. It was the school that my mother had gone to as well. It drew from a mixed economic demographic. There was a family with three children—I can see them now. If I sound emotional on this point, it is because I am. I am emotional because I can remember—although this may sound entirely preposterous and pompous—how I felt as an eight or nine-year-old, as I was, seeing this family. The mother always looked underfed. The father always looked harassed to death. The children, one of whom was in my class, had a colour of poverty. They had a smell of poverty. Poverty has a smell about it. It has a posture about it. It says, "We are beaten." At the age of eight, nine or 10, I can remember looking at my classmate and thinking, "What can I do?" I realised that I could do nothing apart from provide a bit of friendship and support, and I did it as best I could, as I am sure that anybody would.

But that impotence of an eight-year-old has disappeared, and I can now stand here as a 49-year-old—[*Interruption.*] Yes, only 49—I know. I have had a hard life—that is what I tell my wife, anyway. I burn with the sense of injustice that the hon. Member for Gedling expressed. We are all in a position in this place where we are not impotent—we can actually do something about this. If I thought that Her Majesty's Government were not as committed as I am on this issue, I would be in the Lobby with Opposition Members, but I do not think that. I think that the strategy of the Finance Bill is right. Our values and our principles must shine through. I urge Treasury Ministers and other Ministers to talk a little more about the why of what we are doing in our politics and a little less about the percentages and statistics.

**Kirsty Blackman:** I want to talk about a few issues, many of which have been brought up during the debate. The first is the subject of new clauses 1 and 5, both of which I support, and the way in which they have been written. I stress to the Government, and particularly to the hon. Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster), that the reason why the new clauses call for reviews is that we have no amendment of the law resolution, which means that we cannot put forward more robust amendments that ask the Government to do things. If we could have tabled more robust amendments, we would have done so, and I am sure that the Labour party would have done so as well. The Government have chosen to hamstring us and, as I have said before, when Conservative Members are sitting on the Opposition Benches, they will regret this behaviour. The fact that they chose not to move an amendment of the law motion makes it much more difficult for us to table any substantive amendments, but we are doing our best.

The things that we have managed to do during these Finance Bill debates are unparalleled in the Scottish National party's history. We have managed to have two substantive amendments accepted to the Bill. I had two amendments accepted to the previous Finance Bill, but they were particularly minor. These ones are much more substantive and call for reviews. One of those amendments fits nicely in this section of our proceedings, as it relates to the public health effects of gambling. I am pleased that that amendment continues to be in the Bill, and I look forward to the Minister bringing forward that review in the next six months, as we have called for him to do.

There are various reasons why a Government can choose to change or introduce taxes. They can choose to have a tax to raise funds for the Government. They can choose to have a tax relief to encourage positive behaviour, or a tax to discourage negative behaviour. They can choose to have a tax to do one of the things that the Opposition and the hon. Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare) have been keen to talk about. They can choose their priorities. They can choose to have a tax system that aims to reduce child poverty, reduce inequality and increase life expectancy, and we are asking for that to be the Government's focus when they are setting taxes.

The Government should be looking at the life chances of the citizens who live on these islands and doing what they can to improve those life chances. That is the most important thing—it is why these reviews are being asked for. Whether or not the taxes that the Government have set are appropriate, we are asking for a change of focus and a change of priority, and I think the hon. Member for North Dorset was agreeing with that.

**Mhairi Black** (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (SNP): Forgive me if I am stating the obvious, but do we not also need these reviews because we have Brexit coming up, and we have to be able to reflect on and evidence things?

**Kirsty Blackman:** That is correct. One of the difficult things about looking at the potential outcomes of Brexit is that those stats do not exist. It is all well and good to talk about the fact that there are reviews sitting on shelves gathering dust, but we need stats. We need stats to be able to prove that Government policy does what it says on the tin.

The Minister can stand up and say, “This policy will raise £100 million for the Government,” but I would like to see not only the working beforehand, but the review afterwards that proves that the policy did what the Government intended it to do. I have been clear on a number of occasions that I do not think the Government do enough of that evidencing. The reviews being asked for would allow the Government to provide us with that evidence. Evidence written by the Government, rather than an independent individual, is still a legitimate thing that we can look at. The hon. Member for Torbay seemed to suggest that we would doubt information were it to come from the Chancellor of the Exchequer—surely not! It would be good for him to provide that.

I want to talk about a few things that the SNP has been doing in Scotland and the changes we have chosen to make to not only our tax system, but other systems, and particularly those that affect the issues raised in new clauses 1 and 5. We have mitigated the bedroom tax, which has been a major factor in us having the lowest child poverty rate of any country in the UK. We have increased the number of people from disadvantaged areas who are going to university. We are making major changes to the care system for looked-after children. Those young people have had some of the poorest life chances in the past, and what the Scottish Government are doing on that is hugely important for ensuring that their life chances are improved.

We have increased the pregnancy and baby grant to £600. We are improving access to childcare, and we have the baby box scheme. We are the best country in the UK

at paying the living wage—not the pretend living wage, but the real living wage. People working in Scotland are more likely to be paid the living wage than those working in England. About half of taxpayers in England pay more than they would if they lived in Scotland, and that is the half of taxpayers who are earning the least. We think that that is a progressive measure that is assisting people to get out of poverty.

**Luke Graham:** The hon. Lady is bringing out the successes of the SNP Administration in Edinburgh, but does it not still stand that, after a decade in power and with powers over taxation and healthcare, men and women in Scotland live for two years less than other people in the United Kingdom? In fact, we have the lowest life expectancy in the whole United Kingdom. There may be some successes—I support those on care—but certainly on the one thing that matters most, which is keeping people alive the longest, the SNP is an abject failure.

**Kirsty Blackman:** We have not had taxation powers for 10 years, and we do not have the full range of powers. For example, we do not have the full range of powers over public health, so we do not have in Scotland powers such as the public health taxation measures—the sugar tax—that were brought forward in the previous Budget. We do not have the full range of powers, and if Scotland were to be an independent country, with the full range of powers, we would be putting the things we are discussing today at the heart of our Government's agenda. Our Government have done this and we will continue to do this—we are pushing for fairness.

I will wrap up, because I am aware that I am relatively short of time, but I want to talk about the people who are the poorest and, by the way, the most disadvantaged by the way in which this society is set up. Following the changes to universal credit, those in the bottom 30% of incomes will gain less from the work allowance than they will lose in the benefit freeze. The benefit freeze is costing them more than the changes to the work allowance will give them. Those people, who have no recourse to public funds, are the poorest individuals I see coming through my door, and this Government have caused that situation. This Government have caused a situation in which asylum seekers have got absolutely nothing. This is about the very poorest people, who have got the worst life chances as a result, and this Government are completely failing to do anything to support them or to improve their life chances. This is about people on disability benefits, who are really struggling, and at every turn, this Government have made their lives worse, rather than better. This is about lone parents, who are disadvantaged as a result of universal credit. This is about the increases in food bank usage.

The Government talk about people working their way out of poverty. I do not understand how people can have hope when they do not have enough to eat.

**The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mel Stride):** I thank everybody who has made a contribution in this very important debate. There have been some extremely passionate and well-argued speeches.

Part of the debate has been exemplified by the hon. Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) and my hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare),



[*Mel Stride*]

who spoke in effect about who cares about these issues. We need to recognise that Members on both sides of this House—I include the Opposition in my remarks—care very deeply about whether our fellow citizens in our great nation are impoverished, are in dire straits, do not have enough to make ends meet, do not have enough to feed their children, or have children who do not have the opportunities in life that we wish for our children in turn. Those things matter considerably, and I congratulate my hon. Friend on the quality of the speech he delivered, particularly in that respect.

Something else that lay at the heart of the debate between the hon. Member for Gedling and my hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset, is whether the numbers matter. Do the figures matter? I think it was the contention of the hon. Member for Gedling that, in a sense, the figures do not matter. In a curious way, that is rather at odds with the notion of supporting new clause 1, because it calls for more figures to inform our decisions. In one sense, of course, the figures do not matter, because what matters is the condition of the people who live in our country. However, figures do matter when it comes to formulating the policy responses we need to address the situation, and if we are, in any meaningful way, to chart the progress, or otherwise, that Governments—ours and the Labour Governments who preceded us—have made on this extremely important issue.

4.45 pm

The crux of the argument against new clauses 1 and 5 is that the figures that are being asked for by way of review are either difficult to establish and disproportionately expensive to corral together, or do not lend themselves—even if we did manage to get them—to any meaningful form of analysis. That is the context in which we should consider new clauses 1 and 5. If I may, I will turn now to their specifics.

**Debbie Abrahams:** I do not know whether the Minister is aware of this, but the European Commission does this sort of analysis every year on its programme of policies, so it is not that this cannot be done. Its work covers not just quantitative but qualitative data, which relates to the points my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) made. There needs to be more than what the Government are doing—they do not know what the impacts of their policies will be.

**Mel Stride:** I think I have been misunderstood, and I apologise to the hon. Lady if I was not clear enough. I am certainly not saying that data does not matter—quite the opposite. What I am saying is that we need to have the right kind of data for the exercise to be meaningful and worth while.

New clause 1 would require the Chancellor to report on the impact of changes to the personal allowance and the higher rate threshold on households of different levels of income, on child poverty, on equality and on those individuals with protected characteristics. New clause 5 would require the Chancellor to report on the Bill's effect on child poverty, life expectancy and public health.

Let me first address the question of the Treasury's compliance with its public sector equality duty, as referenced in new clause 1(2)(c). Equality and fairness continue to

lie right at the heart of the Government's agenda, and we take our compliance with this duty deeply seriously while deciding policy. That means that Government decisions are explicitly informed by the evidence available of the implications of those decisions for those sharing protected characteristics. I have no hesitation in saying that the Treasury complies with the public sector equality duty.

Further provisions in new clauses 1 and 5 call for the publication of different forms of analysis for clause 5 and for the whole Bill in turn. The Government have been, and continue to be, transparent—more transparent than any other. Changes to the tax system are always accompanied by a tax information and impact note, and each Budget is accompanied by detailed distributional analysis.

TIINs, in particular, are relevant to the questions discussed today. These notes provide Parliament and taxpayers with information on the expected effects of changes to the tax system, and form a vital part of the Government's commitment to transparency and accountability around tax decisions. In the context of clause 5, for example, the TIIN already sets out the impact on groups of taxpayers according to their age, gender and income tax band, and this data is readily available to HMRC through tax returns.

**Vernon Coaker:** That is the point: the assumptions on distributional analysis are assumptions. What we want is to see whether those assumptions turn into reality.

**Mel Stride:** I will come to the very issue that the hon. Gentleman rightly raises.

Clause 5 will benefit households across the UK. Due to the information collected by HMRC through tax returns, we have various pieces of information on geographical distribution, as sought under new clause 1(2)(d). That is an important point, because much of the information being requested is actually already available.

In addition, the distributional analysis published by the Treasury already sets out the impact of tax changes on households with different levels of income. To be completely clear, the analysis shows how the living standards of households in each tenth of the income distribution will be affected by the decisions the Chancellor and Prime Minister have taken since they took office in 2016. Not only does the analysis meet the intention of new clause 5(2)(a) regarding the effects of the Government's tax changes on different households, it actually goes beyond that by including changes to welfare and spending on public services, and by considering changes in addition to those announced at each fiscal event since the autumn statement in 2016.

There is, as I suggested at the outset of my remarks, much that we can agree on across the House. Child poverty, public health, life expectancy and inequality are among the greatest issues of our age. We have got on with the job. Absolute poverty rates are at record lows. One million fewer people are in poverty now than under Labour. I say to the hon. Member for Gedling that 1 million is indeed a number, but for every one of those million, their lives have been enhanced. That includes 300,000 fewer children in poverty than under Labour. As we know, the best route out of poverty is through work. There are 3 million more people in work now

than in 2010, with 637,000 fewer children in workless households. That is a record of which we should be proud. I urge the House to reject the new clauses.

**Peter Dowd:** If I may rephrase St Augustine, who said “O Lord, make me chaste, but not yet,” what we have here is a Government saying, “O Lord, make me charitable and compassionate, but not just now. Let’s do it in the future.” It comes to something when the British Government, with an expenditure of approximately £840 billion a year, say that it will be difficult to get statistics, either qualitative or quantitative, from which they can make policy. That is how it seems to me, but I tell you what: every day when I am in my constituency I see people who are homeless. What have the Government done about that? Nothing. I see food banks opening up all the time. What are the Government doing about that? Absolutely nothing. What are the Government doing about the 24% of homeless people who are from the LGBT community? Absolutely nothing. And then we heard the dross coming out—that is what it is, dross—about intergenerational worklessness. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation—through evidence, through statistics, through analysis—found that that was not a significant factor in homelessness. So we hear all this talk about charity, compassion and working together, but I am afraid it does not wash when it comes from the mouths of Tories.

*Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.*

*The House divided: Ayes 294, Noes 312.*

#### Division No. 285]

[4.52 pm

#### AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane  
Abrahams, Debbie  
Ali, Rushanara  
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena  
Amesbury, Mike  
Antoniazzi, Tonia  
Ashworth, Jonathan  
Austin, Ian  
Bailey, Mr Adrian  
Bardell, Hannah  
Barron, rh Sir Kevin  
Beckett, rh Margaret  
Benn, rh Hilary  
Berger, Luciana  
Betts, Mr Clive  
Black, Mhairi  
Blackford, rh Ian  
Blackman, Kirsty  
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta  
Blomfield, Paul  
Brabin, Tracy  
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben  
Brake, rh Tom  
Brennan, Kevin  
Brock, Deidre  
Brown, Alan  
Brown, Lyn  
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas  
Bryant, Chris  
Buck, Ms Karen  
Burden, Richard  
Burgon, Richard  
Butler, Dawn  
Byrne, rh Liam  
Cable, rh Sir Vince

Cadbury, Ruth  
Cameron, Dr Lisa  
Campbell, rh Sir Alan  
Campbell, Mr Ronnie  
Carden, Dan  
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair  
Champion, Sarah  
Chapman, Douglas  
Chapman, Jenny  
Charalambous, Bambos  
Cherry, Joanna  
Clwyd, rh Ann  
Coaker, Vernon  
Coffey, Ann  
Cooper, Julie  
Cooper, Rosie  
Cooper, rh Yvette  
Corbyn, rh Jeremy  
Cowan, Ronnie  
Coyle, Neil  
Crawley, Angela  
Creagh, Mary  
Creasy, Stella  
Cruddas, Jon  
Cummins, Judith  
Cunningham, Alex  
Cunningham, Mr Jim  
Daby, Janet  
Dakin, Nic  
Davey, rh Sir Edward  
David, Wayne  
Davies, Geraint  
Day, Martyn  
De Cordova, Marsha  
De Piero, Gloria

Dent Coad, Emma  
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh  
Docherty-Hughes, Martin  
Dodds, Anneliese  
Doughty, Stephen  
Dowd, Peter  
Drew, Dr David  
Dromey, Jack  
Duffield, Rosie  
Eagle, Ms Angela  
Eagle, Maria  
Edwards, Jonathan  
Efford, Clive  
Elliott, Julie  
Ellman, Dame Louise  
Elmore, Chris  
Esterson, Bill  
Evans, Chris  
Farrelly, Paul  
Farron, Tim  
Fellows, Marion  
Field, rh Frank  
Fitzpatrick, Jim  
Flint, rh Caroline  
Fovargue, Yvonne  
Foxcroft, Vicky  
Frith, James  
Furniss, Gill  
Gaffney, Hugh  
Gapes, Mike  
Gardiner, Barry  
George, Ruth  
Gethins, Stephen  
Gibson, Patricia  
Gill, Preet Kaur  
Glindon, Mary  
Godsiff, Mr Roger  
Goodman, Helen  
Grady, Patrick  
Grant, Peter  
Gray, Neil  
Green, Kate  
Greenwood, Lilian  
Greenwood, Margaret  
Griffith, Nia  
Grogan, John  
Gwynne, Andrew  
Haigh, Louise  
Hamilton, Fabian  
Hanson, rh David  
Hardy, Emma  
Harman, rh Ms Harriet  
Harris, Carolyn  
Hayes, Helen  
Hayman, Sue  
Healey, rh John  
Hendrick, Sir Mark  
Hendry, Drew  
Hepburn, Mr Stephen  
Hermon, Lady  
Hill, Mike  
Hillier, Meg  
Hobhouse, Wera  
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon  
Hoey, Kate  
Hollern, Kate  
Hopkins, Kelvin  
Hosie, Stewart  
Huq, Dr Rupa  
Hussain, Imran  
Jardine, Christine  
Johnson, Diana  
Jones, Darren  
Jones, Gerald  
Jones, Helen  
Jones, rh Mr Kevan  
Jones, Sarah  
Jones, Susan Elan  
Kane, Mike  
Keeley, Barbara  
Kendall, Liz  
Khan, Afzal  
Killen, Ged  
Kinnock, Stephen  
Kyle, Peter  
Laird, Lesley  
Lake, Ben  
Lamb, rh Norman  
Lammy, rh Mr David  
Lavery, Ian  
Law, Chris  
Lee, Karen  
Leslie, Mr Chris  
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma  
Lewis, Clive  
Linden, David  
Lloyd, Stephen  
Lloyd, Tony  
Long Bailey, Rebecca  
Lucas, Caroline  
Lucas, Ian C.  
MacNeil, Angus Brendan  
Madders, Justin  
Mahmood, Shabana  
Malhotra, Seema  
Mann, John  
Marsden, Gordon  
Martin, Sandy  
Maskell, Rachael  
Matheson, Christian  
Mc Nally, John  
McCabe, Steve  
McCarthy, Kerry  
McDonagh, Siobhain  
McDonald, Andy  
McDonald, Stewart Malcolm  
McDonald, Stuart C.  
McDonnell, rh John  
McFadden, rh Mr Pat  
McGinn, Conor  
McGovern, Alison  
McInnes, Liz  
McKinnell, Catherine  
McMahon, Jim  
McMorrin, Anna  
Mearns, Ian  
Miliband, rh Edward  
Monaghan, Carol  
Moran, Layla  
Morden, Jessica  
Morgan, Stephen  
Morris, Grahame  
Murray, Ian  
Nandy, Lisa  
Newlands, Gavin  
Norris, Alex  
O’Hara, Brendan  
O’Mara, Jared  
Onn, Melanie  
Onwurah, Chi  
Osamor, Kate  
Owen, Albert  
Peacock, Stephanie  
Pearce, Teresa

Pennycook, Matthew  
 Perkins, Toby  
 Phillips, Jess  
 Phillipson, Bridget  
 Pidcock, Laura  
 Platt, Jo  
 Pollard, Luke  
 Pound, Stephen  
 Powell, Lucy  
 Qureshi, Yasmin  
 Rashid, Faisal  
 Rayner, Angela  
 Reed, Mr Steve  
 Rees, Christina  
 Reeves, Ellie  
 Reeves, Rachel  
 Reynolds, Emma  
 Reynolds, Jonathan  
 Rimmer, Ms Marie  
 Rodda, Matt  
 Rowley, Danielle  
 Ruane, Chris  
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd  
 Ryan, rh Joan  
 Saville Roberts, Liz  
 Sharma, Mr Virendra  
 Sheerman, Mr Barry  
 Sheppard, Tommy  
 Sherriff, Paula  
 Shuker, Mr Gavin  
 Skinner, Mr Dennis  
 Slaughter, Andy  
 Smeeth, Ruth  
 Smith, Angela  
 Smith, Cat  
 Smith, Eleanor  
 Smith, Jeff  
 Smith, Laura  
 Smith, Nick  
 Smith, Owen  
 Smyth, Karin  
 Snell, Gareth

Sobel, Alex  
 Spellar, rh John  
 Starmar, rh Keir  
 Stephens, Chris  
 Stevens, Jo  
 Stone, Jamie  
 Streeting, Wes  
 Stringer, Graham  
 Sweeney, Mr Paul  
 Swinson, Jo  
 Tami, rh Mark  
 Thewliss, Alison  
 Thomas, Gareth  
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick  
 Thornberry, rh Emily  
 Timms, rh Stephen  
 Trickett, Jon  
 Turley, Anna  
 Turner, Karl  
 Twigg, Derek  
 Twigg, Stephen  
 Twist, Liz  
 Umunna, Chuka  
 Vaz, Valerie  
 Walker, Thelma  
 Watson, Tom  
 West, Catherine  
 Western, Matt  
 Whitehead, Dr Alan  
 Whitfield, Martin  
 Whitford, Dr Philippa  
 Williams, Hywel  
 Williams, Dr Paul  
 Williamson, Chris  
 Wilson, Phil  
 Wishart, Pete  
 Yasin, Mohammad  
 Zeichner, Daniel

**Tellers for the Ayes:**  
**Colleen Fletcher and**  
**Thangam Debbonaire**

#### NOES

Adams, Nigel  
 Afolami, Bim  
 Afriyie, Adam  
 Aldous, Peter  
 Allan, Lucy  
 Allen, Heidi  
 Amess, Sir David  
 Andrew, Stuart  
 Argar, Edward  
 Atkins, Victoria  
 Bacon, Mr Richard  
 Badenoch, Mrs Kemi  
 Baker, Mr Steve  
 Baldwin, Harriett  
 Barclay, rh Stephen  
 Baron, Mr John  
 Bebb, Guto  
 Bellingham, Sir Henry  
 Benyon, rh Richard  
 Beresford, Sir Paul  
 Berry, Jake  
 Blackman, Bob  
 Blunt, Crispin  
 Boles, Nick  
 Bone, Mr Peter  
 Bottomley, Sir Peter  
 Bowie, Andrew

Bradley, Ben  
 Bradley, rh Karen  
 Brady, Sir Graham  
 Braverman, Suella  
 Brereton, Jack  
 Bridgen, Andrew  
 Brine, Steve  
 Brokenshire, rh James  
 Bruce, Fiona  
 Buckland, Robert  
 Burghart, Alex  
 Burns, Conor  
 Burt, rh Alistair  
 Cairns, rh Alun  
 Campbell, Mr Gregory  
 Cartledge, James  
 Cash, Sir William  
 Caulfield, Maria  
 Chalk, Alex  
 Chishti, Rehman  
 Churchill, Jo  
 Clark, Colin  
 Clark, rh Greg  
 Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth  
 Clarke, Mr Simon  
 Cleverly, James  
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey

Coffey, Dr Thérèse  
 Collins, Damian  
 Costa, Alberto  
 Courts, Robert  
 Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey  
 Crabb, rh Stephen  
 Crouch, Tracey  
 Davies, Chris  
 Davies, David T. C.  
 Davies, Glyn  
 Davies, Mims  
 Davies, Philip  
 Davis, rh Mr David  
 Dinenage, Caroline  
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan  
 Docherty, Leo  
 Dodds, rh Nigel  
 Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.  
 Donelan, Michelle  
 Double, Steve  
 Dowden, Oliver  
 Doyle-Price, Jackie  
 Drax, Richard  
 Duddridge, James  
 Duguid, David  
 Duncan, rh Sir Alan  
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain  
 Dunne, rh Mr Philip  
 Ellis, Michael  
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias  
 Elphicke, Charlie  
 Eustice, George  
 Evans, Mr Nigel  
 Evennett, rh Sir David  
 Fabricant, Michael  
 Fallon, rh Sir Michael  
 Field, rh Mark  
 Ford, Vicky  
 Foster, Kevin  
 Francois, rh Mr Mark  
 Frazer, Lucy  
 Freeman, George  
 Freer, Mike  
 Fysh, Mr Marcus  
 Gale, rh Sir Roger  
 Garnier, Mark  
 Gauke, rh Mr David  
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat  
 Gibb, rh Nick  
 Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl  
 Girvan, Paul  
 Glen, John  
 Goldsmith, Zac  
 Goodwill, rh Mr Robert  
 Gove, rh Michael  
 Graham, Luke  
 Graham, Richard  
 Grant, Bill  
 Grant, Mrs Helen  
 Gray, James  
 Grayling, rh Chris  
 Green, Chris  
 Green, rh Damian  
 Greening, rh Justine  
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic  
 Griffiths, Andrew  
 Gyimah, Mr Sam  
 Hair, Kirstene  
 Halfon, rh Robert  
 Hammond, rh Mr Philip  
 Hammond, Stephen  
 Hancock, rh Matt

Hands, rh Greg  
 Harper, rh Mr Mark  
 Harrington, Richard  
 Harris, Rebecca  
 Harrison, Trudy  
 Hart, Simon  
 Hayes, rh Sir John  
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver  
 Heapey, James  
 Heaton-Harris, Chris  
 Heaton-Jones, Peter  
 Henderson, Gordon  
 Herbert, rh Nick  
 Hoare, Simon  
 Hollinrake, Kevin  
 Hollobone, Mr Philip  
 Holloway, Adam  
 Howell, John  
 Huddleston, Nigel  
 Hughes, Eddie  
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy  
 Hurd, rh Mr Nick  
 Jack, Mr Alister  
 James, Margot  
 Javid, rh Sajid  
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil  
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard  
 Jenkins, Andrea  
 Jenrick, Robert  
 Johnson, rh Boris  
 Johnson, Dr Caroline  
 Johnson, Gareth  
 Johnson, Joseph  
 Jones, Andrew  
 Jones, rh Mr David  
 Jones, Mr Marcus  
 Kawczynski, Daniel  
 Keegan, Gillian  
 Kennedy, Seema  
 Kerr, Stephen  
 Knight, rh Sir Greg  
 Knight, Julian  
 Kwarteng, Kwasi  
 Lamont, John  
 Lancaster, rh Mark  
 Latham, Mrs Pauline  
 Leadsom, rh Andrea  
 Lee, Dr Phillip  
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward  
 Letwin, rh Sir Oliver  
 Lewer, Andrew  
 Lewis, rh Brandon  
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian  
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian  
 Lidington, rh Mr David  
 Little Pengelly, Emma  
 Lopez, Julia  
 Lopresti, Jack  
 Lord, Mr Jonathan  
 Loughton, Tim  
 Mackinlay, Craig  
 Maclean, Rachel  
 Main, Mrs Anne  
 Mak, Alan  
 Malthouse, Kit  
 Mann, Scott  
 Masterton, Paul  
 Maynard, Paul  
 McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick  
 McPartland, Stephen  
 McVey, rh Ms Esther  
 Menzies, Mark



Mercer, Johnny	Shelbrooke, Alec
Merriman, Huw	Simpson, David
Metcalfe, Stephen	Simpson, rh Mr Keith
Miller, rh Mrs Maria	Skidmore, Chris
Milling, Amanda	Smith, Chloe
Mills, Nigel	Smith, rh Julian
Milton, rh Anne	Smith, Royston
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew	Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
Moore, Damien	Soubry, rh Anna
Mordaunt, rh Penny	Spencer, Mark
Morgan, rh Nicky	Stephenson, Andrew
Morris, Anne Marie	Stevenson, John
Morris, David	Stewart, Bob
Morris, James	Stewart, Rory
Mundell, rh David	Streeter, Sir Gary
Murray, Mrs Sheryll	Stride, rh Mel
Murrison, Dr Andrew	Stuart, Graham
Neill, Robert	Sturdy, Julian
Newton, Sarah	Sunak, Rishi
Nokes, rh Caroline	Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Norman, Jesse	Swire, rh Sir Hugo
O'Brien, Neil	Syms, Sir Robert
Offord, Dr Matthew	Thomas, Derek
Opperman, Guy	Thomson, Ross
Paisley, Ian	Throup, Maggie
Parish, Neil	Tolhurst, Kelly
Patel, rh Priti	Tomlinson, Justin
Paterson, rh Mr Owen	Tomlinson, Michael
Pawsey, Mark	Tracey, Craig
Penning, rh Sir Mike	Tredinnick, David
Penrose, John	Trevelyan, Anne-Marie
Percy, Andrew	Truss, rh Elizabeth
Perry, rh Claire	Tugendhat, Tom
Philp, Chris	Vaizey, rh Mr Edward
Pincher, rh Christopher	Vara, Mr Shailesh
Poulter, Dr Dan	Vickers, Martin
Prentis, Victoria	Villiers, rh Theresa
Prisk, Mr Mark	Walker, Mr Charles
Pritchard, Mark	Walker, Mr Robin
Pursglove, Tom	Wallace, rh Mr Ben
Quin, Jeremy	Warburton, David
Raab, rh Dominic	Warman, Matt
Redwood, rh John	Watling, Giles
Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob	Whately, Helen
Robertson, Mr Laurence	Wheeler, Mrs Heather
Robinson, Gavin	Whittaker, Craig
Robinson, Mary	Whittingdale, rh Mr John
Rosindell, Andrew	Wiggin, Bill
Ross, Douglas	Williamson, rh Gavin
Rowley, Lee	Wilson, rh Sammy
Rudd, rh Amber	Wollaston, Dr Sarah
Rutley, David	Wood, Mike
Sandbach, Antoinette	Wragg, Mr William
Scully, Paul	Wright, rh Jeremy
Seely, Mr Bob	Zahawi, Nadhim
Selous, Andrew	
Shannon, Jim	
Shapps, rh Grant	
Sharma, Alok	

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
**Wendy Morton and**  
**Iain Stewart**

*Question accordingly negatived.*

### New Clause 3

#### REVIEW OF POWERS IN CONSEQUENCE OF EU WITHDRAWAL

“The Chancellor of the Exchequer must, no later than a week after the passing of this Act and before exercising the power in section 89(1), lay before the House of Commons a review of the following matters—

- (a) the fiscal and economic effects of the exercise of the powers in section 89(1) and of the outcome of negotiations for the United Kingdom’s withdrawal from the European Union giving rise to their exercise;
- (b) a comparison of those fiscal and economic effects with the effects if a negotiated withdrawal agreement and a framework for a future relationship with the EU had been agreed to;
- (c) any differences in the exercise of those powers in respect of—
  - (i) Great Britain, and
  - (ii) Northern Ireland;
- (d) any differential effects in relation to the matters specified in paragraphs (a) and (b) in relation between—
  - (i) Great Britain, and
  - (ii) Northern Ireland.”—(*Jonathan Reynolds.*)

*This new clause would require the Chancellor of the Exchequer to review the fiscal and economic effects of the exercise of the powers in clause 89(1) before exercising those powers.*

*Brought up, and read the First time.*

**Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op):** I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle):** With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

*New clause 7—Review of effect of carbon emissions tax on climate targets—*

“The Chancellor of the Exchequer must review the expected effect of the carbon emissions tax on the United Kingdom’s ability to meet its internationally agreed climate targets and lay a report of that review before the House within six months of the passing of this Act.”

*New clause 12—Review of expenditure implications of Part 3—*

“(1) The Chancellor of the Exchequer must review the expenditure implications of commencing Part 3 of this Act and lay a report of that review before the House of Commons within six months of the passing of this Act.

(2) No regulations may be made by the Commissioners under section 78(1) unless the review under subsection (1) has been laid before the House of Commons.”

*This new clause would require a review within 6 months of the expenditure implications of introducing a carbon emissions tax. It would prevent part 3 (carbon emissions tax) coming into effect until such a review had been laid before the House of Commons.*

*New clause 13—Report on consultation on certain provisions of this Act (No. 2)—*

“(1) No later than two months after the passing of this Act, the Chancellor of the Exchequer must lay before the House of Commons a report on the consultation undertaken on the provisions in subsection (2).

(2) Those provisions are—

- (a) sections 68 to 78,
- (b) section 89, and
- (c) section 90.

(3) A report under this section must specify in respect of each provision listed in subsection (2)—

- (a) whether a version of the provision was published in draft,
- (b) if so, whether changes were made as a result of consultation on the draft,
- (c) if not, the reasons why the provision was not published in draft and any consultation which took place on the proposed provision in the absence of such a draft.”

*This new clause would require a report on the consultation undertaken on certain provisions of the Bill – alongside New Clause 11, New Clause 14 and New Clause 15.*

New clause 19—*Review of powers in consequence of EU withdrawal (No. 2)*—

“(1) The Chancellor of the Exchequer must, no later than a week after the passing of this Act and before exercising the power in section 89(1), lay before the House of Commons a review of the following matters—

- (a) the fiscal and economic effects of the exercise of the powers in section 89(1) and of the outcome of negotiations for the United Kingdom’s withdrawal from the European Union giving rise to their exercise;
- (b) a comparison of those fiscal and economic effects with the effects if a negotiated withdrawal agreement and a framework for a future relationship with the EU had been agreed to;
- (c) any differences in the exercise of those powers in respect of—
  - (i) England,
  - (ii) Scotland,
  - (iii) Wales, and
  - (iv) Northern Ireland;
- (d) any differential effects in relation to the matters specified in paragraphs (a) and (b) in relation between—
  - (i) England,
  - (ii) Scotland,
  - (iii) Wales, and
  - (iv) Northern Ireland.”

*This new clause would require a review of the economic and fiscal impact of the use of the powers in section 89 in the event of no deal and in event of a withdrawal agreement passing.*

Amendment 16, in clause 78, page 51, line 32, after “may” insert

“(subject to section (Review of expenditure implications of Part 3))”.  
See *New Clause 12*.

Amendment 1, in clause 89, page 66, line 38, at end insert—

“(1A) The Chancellor of the Exchequer must, no later than a week after the passing of this Act and before exercising the power in subsection (1), lay before the House of Commons a review of the following matters—

- (a) the fiscal and economic effects of the exercise of those powers and of the outcome of negotiations for the United Kingdom’s withdrawal from the European Union giving rise to their exercise;
- (b) a comparison of those fiscal and economic effects with the effects if a negotiated withdrawal agreement and a framework for a future relationship with the EU had been agreed to;
- (c) any differences in the exercise of those powers in respect of—
  - (i) Great Britain, and
  - (ii) Northern Ireland;
- (d) any differential effects in relation to the matters specified in paragraphs (a) and (b) in relation between
  - (i) Great Britain, and
  - (ii) Northern Ireland.”

*This amendment would require the Chancellor of the Exchequer to review the fiscal and economic effects of the exercise of the powers in subsection (1) before exercising those powers.*

Amendment 13, page 67, line 7, leave out subsection (5) and insert—

“(5) No statutory instrument containing regulations under this section may be made unless a draft has been laid before and approved by a resolution of the House of Commons.”

*This amendment would make Clause 89 (Minor amendments in consequence of EU withdrawal) subject to the affirmative procedure.*

Amendment 7, page 67, line 19, at end insert—

“(7) The provisions of this section only come into force if—

- (a) a negotiated withdrawal agreement and a framework for the future relationship have been approved by a resolution of the House of Commons on a motion moved by a Minister of the Crown for the purposes of section 13(1)(b) of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, or
- (b) the Prime Minister has notified the President of the European Council, in accordance with Article 50(3) of the Treaty on European Union, of the United Kingdom’s request to extend the period in which the Treaties shall still apply to the United Kingdom, or
- (c) leaving the European Union without a withdrawal agreement and a framework for the future relationship has been approved by a resolution of the House of Commons on a motion moved by a Minister of the Crown.”

*This amendment would prevent the Government implementing the “no deal” provisions of Clause 89 without the explicit consent of Parliament for such an outcome. It would provide three options for the provisions of Clause 89 to come into force: if the House of Commons has approved a negotiated withdrawal agreement and a framework for the future relationship; if the Government has sought an extension of the Article 50 period; or the House of Commons has approved leaving the European Union without a withdrawal agreement and framework for the future relationship.*

Amendment 8, page 67, line 19, at end insert—

“(7) The provisions of this section shall not come into force until the House of Commons has come to a resolution on a motion made by a Minister of the Crown agreeing its commencement.”

Amendment 14, in clause 90, page 67, line 22, after “may” insert

“(subject to subsections (1A) and (1B))”.

See *Amendment 15*

Amendment 15, page 67, line 24, at end insert—

“(1A) Before proposing to incur expenditure under subsection (1), the Secretary of State must lay before the House of Commons—

- (a) a statement of the circumstances (in relation to negotiations relating to the United Kingdom’s withdrawal from the European Union) that give rise to the need for such preparatory expenditure, and
- (b) an estimate of the expenditure to be incurred.

(1B) No expenditure may be incurred under subsection (1) unless the House of Commons comes to a resolution that it has considered the statement and estimate under subsection (1A) and approves the proposed expenditure.”

*This amendment would require a statement on the circumstances (in relation to negotiations) giving rise to the need for, as well as an estimate of the cost of, preparatory expenditure to introduce a charging scheme for greenhouse gas allowances. The amendment would require a Commons resolution before expenditure could be incurred.*

New clause 18—*Review of effects on measures in Act of certain changes in migration levels*—

“(1) The Chancellor of the Exchequer must review the effects on the provisions of this Act of migration in the scenarios in subsection (2) and lay a report of that review before the House of Commons within one month of the passing of this Act.

(2) Those scenarios are that—

- (a) the United Kingdom does not leave the European Union,
- (b) the United Kingdom leaves the European Union without a negotiated withdrawal agreement,
- (c) the United Kingdom leaves the European Union following a negotiated withdrawal agreement, and remains in the single market and customs union,

(d) the United Kingdom leaves the United Kingdom on the terms of the draft withdrawal agreement of 14 November 2018.

(3) In respect of each of those scenarios the review must consider separately the effects of—

- (a) migration by EU nationals, and
- (b) migration by non-EU nationals.

(4) In respect of each of those scenarios the review must consider separately the effects on the measures in each part of the United Kingdom and each region of England.

(5) In this section—

“parts of the United Kingdom” means—

- (a) England,
- (b) Scotland,
- (c) Wales, and
- (d) Northern Ireland;

“regions of England” has the same meaning as that used by the Office for National Statistics.”

*This new clause would require a review of effects on measures in the Bill of certain changes in migration levels.*

**Jonathan Reynolds:** This group of amendments relates to the tax and fiscal implications of the UK’s withdrawal from the EU.

Throughout the last year Parliament has been asked to approve a series of Bills giving the Government the power to deliver every type of Brexit deal conceivable, and this Finance Bill is no different. I said when closing the Second Reading debate on the Bill for the Opposition that this approach was one of “give us the powers now and we will make the decisions later,” and as it currently stands Brexit represents the biggest transfer of power to the Executive in modern constitutional history. That is disappointing for anyone who thought Brexit would see greater powers for this Parliament, but it is also a recipe for very bad decisions, and there is a classic culprit in this Finance Bill in the form of clause 89. Innocently named “Minor amendments in consequence of EU withdrawal”, it gives the Government power to amend tax legislation without any of the usual due process in the event that the UK leaves the EU without a deal.

The Government always tell us—I am sure they will do so again—that this is simply a safeguarding provision that we will never have to use, but all of us here today know that as it stands the Government have absolutely no chance of getting their deal through, because that deal does not deliver the basics of what this country needs. It does not deliver smooth, low-friction borders for manufacturing and supply chains, nor does it deliver market access for financial services. It also fails to resolve the big question: after we leave the EU, will we prioritise market access or trade autonomy? Because of that, we will almost certainly end up in the backstop arrangements, a halfway house without any say for the UK—the very worst of all worlds.

The new clauses and amendments are therefore of seminal importance, and I am extremely grateful to the Chair of the Home Affairs Committee, my right hon. Friend the Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), for laying amendment 7 before the House today. It is clearly a cross-party amendment, supported by the Chairs of the Treasury, Exiting the European Union and Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committees, but it has the Opposition’s support because it offers Parliament a chance to make a clear statement rejecting a no-deal outcome—a statement that cannot come soon enough.

Anyone pretending that crashing out without a deal is simply about resorting to World Trade Organisation schedules is dangerously misinformed. As *The Economist* magazine said last month:

“A no-deal Brexit is about a lot more than trade—it would see many legal obligations and definitions lapse immediately, potentially putting at risk air travel, electricity interconnections and a raft of financial services”.

It would mean tariffs on trade with the EU, but it would also affect trade beyond the EU as all our current trade agreements negotiated as an EU member would immediately cease to apply. Agriculture, aerospace, the automotive sector—all these major sectors of our economy—would face potentially irreparable damage, and while tariffs may be reduced over time, excise duties and health checks on food, plants and livestock cannot be reduced so easily. Researchers at Imperial College London have calculated that just two minutes more transit time per lorry at Dover and the Channel tunnel translates into a 47 km traffic jam, and for perishable items like food, delays of that magnitude simply could not be sustained. When we add to that higher prices through tariffs and further inflationary pressure from another inevitable fall in the value of the pound, it is a recipe for significant pressure on living standards. That is why the Opposition say that no deal is not a real option.

There has been some suggestion that the Government might accept amendment 7.

**Mr John Baron** (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): Does the hon. Gentleman not acknowledge that by ruling out preparations for no deal one is in effect tying the hands of one’s negotiating team, which in effect makes a trade deal—which we all, I think, would prefer to leaving on WTO terms—more difficult to achieve and therefore makes leaving on WTO terms more likely?

**Jonathan Reynolds:** The facts are as they are. It is far too late for that. Everyone knows the position that this country is in. The Government have run down the clock. They lost their majority through a general election that they did not need to call, and it is far too late to start applying the logic that might have applied several years ago. Because of that, our vulnerability is evident for everyone to see. No one should underestimate the likelihood of a no-deal outcome at this stage. No one should be pretending, through semantics or parliamentary chicanery, that we might be able to present no deal as a way of giving us greater leverage in negotiations. I am afraid that the Government have got us to the point of ruin if that is the strategy that Conservative Members wish to pursue.

5.15 pm

There has been some suggestion that the Government might accept amendment 7 at some point today in order to avoid defeat. Usually the Opposition would welcome that, but unfortunately, if that capitulation comes, it will show that the Government have absolutely no strategy for anything other than surviving until the end of each day. I have begun to think that they will accept almost any amendment to a Finance Bill to avoid defeat, regardless of what it proposes or of how incoherent it would make the legislation, because that is the only objective they seem able to pursue. That is no strategy



for delivering the most important decision this country has taken for 70 years. That is why the Opposition have tabled new clauses 3 and 7 and amendment 1 to address some other serious issues in the Bill.

**Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab): Given that the Business Secretary said in the House earlier that no deal should not be contemplated, and that my hon. Friend is outlining the possibility of the Government accepting amendment 7, would it not be right for the Government to say clearly at the end of business today that they are ruling out no deal because it would be so damaging to this country?

**Jonathan Reynolds:** I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. We all know that several members of the Government take that view, even though they may not be able to say it on the record. They are quite clear as to what no deal would mean, and they would not contemplate going down that route. It would be far simpler and far better to get to a position where ruling out no deal was clearly the Government's intent.

New clause 3 would oblige the Government to publish a review of the fiscal and economic effects of the exercise of the powers in clause 89, as well as the differences between exercising those powers in Great Britain and in Northern Ireland. As we edge closer to the reality of crashing out without a deal, clause 89 is not simply hypothetical. We are now just two and a half months away from the UK's exit without an agreement. It is therefore of critical importance that we have a full and transparent view of the implications of a clause of this kind.

**Crispin Blunt** (Reigate) (Con): I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman is going to have to do a bit better than this. He talks about crashing out without a deal, but he needs to get into the detail of the implications. Perhaps he is going to start talking about planes, but amazingly, the planes are going to keep flying. Amazingly, we are still going to have drugs supplied into the United Kingdom. He needs to get down into the detail of exactly what the implications will be, because if we are faced with the reality of no overall agreement, there will be a barrow-load of minor agreements to ensure that the common interests of the United Kingdom and the European Union survive the transfer to WTO terms on 29 March with minimum impact on the citizens of the EU and the UK. It is time he got real and stopped this nonsense—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle):** Order.

**Jonathan Reynolds:** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

I have just talked about some of the consequences of crashing out without a deal. I have talked about relationships, about tariffs on products and about the legal definitions under the common agreements that this country has undertaken with other European countries. We all know this—the information is readily available—so I am not quite sure what point the hon. Gentleman is making. I think he is aware of the dangers of taking this course of action.

**Lyn Brown:** He is frustrated with his own Government.

**Jonathan Reynolds:** And yes, people are frustrated with the Government.

**Mr Kenneth Clarke** (Rushcliffe) (Con): With respect, it is quite right to concede that some of the fears being raised about no deal are grossly exaggerated, but the problems are quite real enough. If we leave with no deal, we will be the only developed country in the world that has no trade agreement at all with anybody and that is having to fall back on WTO rules, which are made to sound marvellous by the Brexiteers but which do not actually amount to very much. We will also be erecting new barriers to trade and investment around the borders of the United Kingdom, including along the Irish border, and that is bound to disadvantage our economy very seriously indeed.

**Jonathan Reynolds:** The Father of the House is as accurate as ever. Some colleagues are pursuing a dangerous argument that all our trading relationships with countries that are not in the EU are somehow currently under WTO terms, which is an absurd misconception. We have entered into trade agreements as a member of the EU that account for something like 16% of our goods exports.

Regardless of the significant impacts of a no-deal outcome, we could go further and say that to leave the EU having not secured a deal—an acrimonious departure—would damage our relationship with our most important trading partner for years to come and fundamentally undermine our credibility on the world stage. I cannot see how any serious-minded Member of this House could understand that that would not be of severe consequence for the United Kingdom, which is why it is so important that this House makes a clear statement today about the dangers of no deal.

**John Redwood** (Wokingham) (Con): Can the hon. Gentleman name a single country that has a free trade agreement with the EU that will not transfer it to the UK under the novation procedures?

**Jonathan Reynolds:** We simply do not know the answer to that question. I always listen to what the right hon. Gentleman has to say in Treasury and Finance Bill debates, but he is one of the archetypal Members who come to the House and pursues what I call the BMW argument: "Everything will be fine because we buy BMWs and everyone will give us what we want." That argument is still being pursued in these debates, but it has been proved completely untrue by the stage of the negotiations that we are at. It is simply not good enough to say, "It will all be alright on the night. Everyone will transfer over the benefits we currently have. It will be as straightforward as that." If that were case, the Government would not be in this morass and the country would be in a far better position.

**Chris Philp** (Croydon South) (Con): First, is it not the case that the UK and, indeed, the entire EU currently trade with major economies, such as the USA and China, under WTO terms? Therefore, while not desirable, they can be made to work. Secondly, if we adopt the shadow Minister's approach and rule out no deal, we have no choice but to remain in the EU or to accept whatever the EU sees fit to give us, which is not a great negotiating position.

**Jonathan Reynolds:** I thoroughly agree that what the Government have got us into is not a great negotiating position, but that is because the negotiations have been

driven by the best interests of the internal politics of the Conservative party. If the national interest had been considered, we would be in a completely different place.

Trade can exist on WTO terms. It is not that the UK would somehow no longer be a trading nation, but that is not the test of good Government policy. The test is to consider the ramifications of that decision and to decide whether it is in the UK's best interests, but I cannot believe that anyone would look rationally at what a no-deal outcome means and say, "I would find that acceptable for this country."

**Kate Hoey** (Vauxhall) (Lab): Does not my hon. Friend think that it would be irresponsible for any Government not to be making contingency plans for WTO rules in these circumstances? Does he also agree that the Irish Taoiseach has in the past few days looked for the first time at making some changes to his intransigent approach to the backstop, precisely because the Republic of Ireland would suffer so much more from WTO terms than the United Kingdom?

**Jonathan Reynolds:** The merits of the Government undertaking contingency measures are different from the political case that we must consider, which is whether we would find it desirable to undertake a course of action that would mean that we had to use those contingency measures. The focus of the debate in this Finance Bill should be a seriously hard-headed look at the consequences of no deal, and there should be a statement from Members on both sides of the House that that is not what we seek for the UK and that we do not believe that it is possible.

**Charlie Elphicke** (Dover) (Con) *rose—*

**Daniel Kawczynski** (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con) *rose—*

**Jonathan Reynolds:** I will take an intervention from the hon. Member for Dover (Charlie Elphicke), and I may come to the hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Daniel Kawczynski) if the intervention is good enough.

**Charlie Elphicke:** The hon. Gentleman is making an interesting speech. My concern is with how he can support undermining the making of contingency preparations that are in the national interest, which is the effect of amendment 7. It is just the wrong thing to do, and the Labour party ought to be more responsible than that.

**Jonathan Reynolds:** I completely disagree with the hon. Gentleman, and a little humility from Conservative Members on the point about responsibility for the Brexit negotiations would be appreciated. For my entire lifetime, this country's European policy has been dictated by the internal politics of the Conservative party. Every Conservative Prime Minister in my lifetime has been brought down by the issue of Europe. To suggest that any other political party or actor in this country needs to have more regard for the national interest, when it is the Conservative party that has never been able to do so, is not something I will take.

**Daniel Kawczynski:** Bearing in mind that 95% of the world's growth over the coming decades will come from outside the European Union, what assessment has he

made of the opportunities that will be afforded to the United Kingdom by our being able to tailor-make bilateral trading agreements?

**Jonathan Reynolds:** I am extremely glad that that issue has come up, because the opportunities created by growth outside the EU have no relationship to our membership of the EU, and could possibly be undermined by our leaving the EU. If we want to compete in competitive emerging markets around the world, what better way is there to do so than from within the single market? I would wager with the hon. Gentleman that a country like Germany will do far better from that growth around the world through its continued membership of the European Union than we will. I am afraid that it is because of such statistics, which have no bearing on serious Government policy or reality, that this debate has got to where it is, but I will move away from a wider debate on Brexit and return to the Finance Bill before you tell me to do so, Mr Deputy Speaker.

I will now come to clause 89 and the relationship between Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Under the draft withdrawal agreement it is widely accepted that, under the backstop arrangements, Northern Ireland will remain in regulatory alignment with the European Union, which would be particularly the case for EU customs law but it would also apply to compliance with elements of EU single market regulation in the technical regulation of goods, state aid and other areas of north-south co-operation between Northern Ireland and the Republic. Of course, Northern Ireland would be included in parts of the EU VAT and excise regimes and in the single electricity market.

With that in mind, it is clear that the powers handed to the Treasury by this Bill may not be applicable in Northern Ireland in the legal and regulatory areas under which EU authority would remain. We are therefore seeking a review that clearly sets out any difference in application of these powers in respect of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and I urge Members on both sides of the House to support new clause 3.

New clause 7 relates to clause 90 on establishing an emissions reduction trading regime. It would require the Government to review the expected effect of the carbon emissions tax on the UK's capacity to meet internationally agreed climate targets. There has never been a more critical time to take urgent action on climate change to avoid environmental catastrophe. The report from the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, published in October 2018, shows that we have just 12 years left to make unprecedented changes to prevent global warming increases above 1.5° C. Our exit from the European Union must not be used as an excuse to step back from action on climate change. Worryingly, clause 90 contains one of the Bill's very few passing references to environmental issues, and our review, proposed in new clause 7, would ensure that the Government are held accountable for making progress on reducing emissions without using Brexit as an excuse for stalling.

This is evidently a Government in chaos, seemingly without any plan or strategy at all. The new clauses and amendments in this group would improve both the Finance Bill and the process by which we leave the European Union. They are sensible, proportionate and timely, and I commend them to the House.

**Nicky Morgan** (Loughborough) (Con): I realise that time is short and that many hon. and right hon. Members want to speak on this group, which shows the appetite of Members on both sides of the House to have their say on this critical issue. There is a deep frustration that debate was curtailed last month before we got to the meaningful vote on the Prime Minister's draft withdrawal agreement.

I rise to support amendment 7, which was tabled by the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) and to which I have added my name, and amendment 8.

5.30 pm

It is clear that Brexit can happen without this country, or this Government, having to undermine our economy, our constitution and our values as a country. Those who have signed amendment 7 represent different parties. We have different views on Brexit and the way forward. We have different views on the 2016 referendum and how we voted in it, but it is right that parliamentarians from all parts of the House should rule out the most damaging option that could happen on 29 March.

**Mr Baron:** My right hon. Friend is very gracious in giving way. Does she accept that the UK trades profitably with the majority of the world's GDP on World Trade Organisation terms? Therefore, this is not the cliff edge or crashing out that many people paint.

**Nicky Morgan:** I have great respect for my hon. Friend, but I think that it would have been better to have had this debate in 2016 rather than in 2019, because the honest truth is that the Brexit that some Members on these Benches and some people out in the country say that they want was not outlined in any way, shape or form in the 2016 referendum. I refer to one Member, who said at the time, "Only a madman would leave the single market." Yet now, that is exactly what he is proposing should happen.

I do not agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron) about the advantages of WTO, and I will tell him why: if it was so good, Members who are backing the WTO option—a no-deal option—would not be so keen to get into negotiating free trade agreements so quickly with countries around the world. I do not know whether it was my hon. Friend, but one Member just now talked about trading with America and China, yet free trade agreements with America and China are touted all the time by those in favour of Brexit as agreements that need to be negotiated as quickly as possible.

The honest truth is that to make trade work around the world, all countries will seek to enter into agreements with countries they want to trade with in order to lift or to lower tariffs and non-tariff barriers. That is what we have done, very successfully, in our relationship with the European Union since we joined over 40 years ago.

**Mr Baron:** May I intervene?

**Nicky Morgan:** Very briefly.

**Mr Baron:** My right hon. Friend is being very gracious and I very much appreciate that.

Many of us in this place—I would like to think the majority of us—would prefer a good trade deal to WTO. That is not inconsistent, but I think what my right hon. Friend misses is that on a bad deal versus WTO we have got to get the balance right, because the EU has had such a bad track record on negotiating trade deals. We trade with the rest of the world on WTO terms very profitably and very successfully, even though many of us would prefer a good trade deal.

**Nicky Morgan:** Trade deals are immensely complicated. While Members know how I voted in 2016, I accept that this country will be leaving the European Union on 29 March—with regret, I have to say, but I do accept it—but one of the debates that we have not even started to have is how the House is going to approach the approval of trade deals. I can tell my hon. Friend that this is a real worry to those who are going to be negotiating those agreements. We saw with the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership just how politically contentious that agreement was, even though it did not even reach the House as an agreement. We are going to spend the next few decades in the House negotiating and approving trade deals, which everybody, for various constituency reasons, will have problems with.

**Sir Nicholas Soames** (Mid Sussex) (Con): My right hon. Friend is making an extremely powerful argument. Does she recall that the trade deal between America and Canada, which was a "willing buyer, willing seller" trade deal, took many, many years? The idea that this is some wonderfully easy, smooth, simple process is, frankly, rubbish.

**Nicky Morgan:** I have great respect for my right hon. Friend, and on this issue he speaks much good sense, as always. I hope that right hon. and hon. Members will listen to what he has to say. I am conscious of the time, so shall move on.

Over the past two years, we have heard it said in the House that no deal is better than a bad deal. I have to say that no deal is a terrible deal and it would be a gross dereliction of the responsibility of Members of this House to inflict no-deal on our constituents.

**Sir Bernard Jenkin** (Harwich and North Essex) (Con)  
*rose—*

**Nicky Morgan:** I am afraid I am going to make some progress. My hon. Friend will be able to intervene on other Members.

Those who wanted Brexit talked often about the taking back of control. I have not had time to watch the film broadcast on Channel 4 last night, but I understand that that was a key part of it. As I have said before, it is right that control should come back to this Parliament, and it is right and it is time for Members of Parliament on all sides to make it clear to the Government that a no-deal Brexit outcome is absolutely unacceptable.

It will have been noticed that many of those who have put their names to amendment 7 are Chairs of Select Committees. The Treasury Committee took evidence in December—I am grateful to all Committee members, who have varying views on Brexit—and we produced a unanimous report. One thing that was made very clear is that, compared with today's trading arrangements, and assuming no change to migration arrangements, our GDP would take a 7.7% hit on a modelled no-deal



scenario. That is greater than the impact of the 2008 financial crisis. Members who have been in the House since 2010, and perhaps just before, will know the impact of the financial crisis on our constituents.

Finally, as a wise general said to me a few weeks ago, Britain is renowned for its confidence and competence. Currently, we are demonstrating neither. A no-deal Brexit will completely destroy any reputation we have for confidence and competence. The Government decided to put off the meaningful vote, although hopefully we will get it either this week or next. It is time for Members of Parliament on all sides to start ruling out options that would be deeply damaging to our country. That is what amendment 7 and 8 are about, and I will be delighted to support them both, should they be voted on.

**Yvette Cooper** (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Loughborough (Nicky Morgan), because although we represent different parties and disagree on many issues, and although we will take different positions on the Prime Minister's deal when it comes to a vote, on this issue we agree. I rise to speak to amendment 7 and to support amendment 8.

We agree on the dangers of no deal to the country. I tabled amendment 7 because I am really worried that delays, drift or brinkmanship mean that there is now a serious risk that we will end up crashing out of the EU with no deal in just 80 days' time. I am worried that we could come to the crunch and Parliament would not have the powers to stop it happening. We have a responsibility not just to stand by. I believe that the Government should rule out no deal but, if they will not, Parliament must make sure that it has the powers to do so if it comes to the crunch.

Amendment 7 has support from across the House. It has been signed by Chairs of cross-party Committees—it has the support of the Chairs of the Treasury Committee, the Exiting the European Union Committee, the Liaison Committee and the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee and others, too—and it is supported by those with a wide range of views on the best way forward. It is supported by those who support the Prime Minister's deal and those, like me, who do not, and it shows that those who take a wide range of views on the best way forward have come together to say that we should rule out the worst way forward.

**Charlie Elphicke:** Just to clarify, does the right hon. Lady herself intend to support or oppose the Prime Minister's deal?

**Yvette Cooper:** As I just said, and as I said when I spoke in the debate before Christmas, I am opposed to the Prime Minister's deal. It is a blindfold deal that does not address some of the policing and security challenges, as well as customs union issues for manufacturing. I accept, though, that we take different views on that throughout the House. There are very different perspectives and views, which is why the opportunity to come together and rule out no deal is such an important one.

**Mr Marcus Fysh** (Yeovil) (Con) *rose*—

**Yvette Cooper:** I will give way in a second. I am conscious of the time, so let me set out what the amendment would do and I will then of course give way to the hon. Gentleman.

The amendment applies to clause 89 of the Bill, which the Government say they need for minor amendments to tax-raising powers in the event of no deal. In practice, clause 89 is drafted much more widely than that, but that is the point that the Government have made. The amendment says that, if the Government want to use clause 89 powers to implement no deal, they first need to give Parliament a vote on no deal and to have Parliament's support for no deal. The amendment provides a safeguard to make it harder for the Government to go ahead with no deal without even going back to Parliament.

**Mr Fysh:** I am still not clear. What could the Government do under clause 89 that this amendment deals with to rule out no deal? Can she say how exactly the amendment rules out no deal?

**Yvette Cooper:** The amendment provides a parliamentary safeguard. It does not, in itself, solve any of the many Brexit issues that we have, but it does provide an additional parliamentary safeguard that says that the Government cannot use the powers in clause 89 to implement no deal without first coming back to Parliament to ask for permission and support for a no deal. The hon. Gentleman is right that there may be other powers that the Government may choose to use. There may be other issues that they may choose to pursue, but this is our opportunity within this Bill to address these powers. That is why it is an important one to come around.

I have heard four sets of objections to the amendment. Some say that it is irresponsible; that it is somehow holding the Government to ransom on powers that they need. Some say that it is undesirable and perhaps even unpatriotic because they think that no deal is a good outcome and should not be ruled out. Some say that it is unnecessary because the Prime Minister's deal is the best way forward. Some suggest that it is unstrategic because we need the threat of no deal to force a decision one way or another. I want to take each of those objections in turn because each of them is wrong.

First, on the charge that this is an irresponsible amendment, the amendment does not affect the normal Treasury and Government operations; those carry on as normal. It simply requires the Government to get Parliament's permission if they want to use these powers to pursue no deal. Even if there is deadlock, the amendment provides a way forward. Let us suppose that Parliament votes against any deal that is put and also votes against no deal, and the Government still desperately want to use the clause 89 powers. In that event, they could follow paragraph (b) of the amendment if they still want to use the powers they need to apply to extend article 50. So in fact, this is an extremely responsible amendment. The irresponsible thing to do would be just to stand back and hope for the best, or to stand back and allow the Government to drift towards no deal without any attempt to put the safeguards in place to prevent that from happening.

The second objection is from those who think that no deal is a good option, or at least a good enough option not to rule it out. That is reckless. The damage to manufacturing industry, on which many of our constituencies rely, would be too serious. One local factory has said to me that the cost of its imports will double in price if we go to WTO tariffs. Another has

[Yvette Cooper]

told me that its European parent company would be under pressure to switch production to continental factories to avoid delays. Burberry has hundreds of jobs in my constituency, making clothing that is sold all over the world. It has written to me about the risks and concerns about delays to its supply chain. Its letter says:

“My hope in writing to you is that you will work with your colleagues across Parliament to ensure that there is no scenario possible where a No-Deal Brexit is a possibility.”

That is what I am doing.

**Rachel Reeves** (Leeds West) (Lab): I thank my right hon. Friend for for tabling this amendment, which is so important. The Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee has taken evidence from a number of businesses in the past few weeks, including Nestlé, Toyota and Airbus. Each one of them, and many others too, have said that the most dangerous thing would be to leave the European Union without a deal, which would have catastrophic impacts on their businesses and on the people who work for them. For that reason alone, anything that we can do to avoid a hard Brexit and going on to WTO rules, as some Members suggest, is the most important thing. This amendment at least helps to provide some safeguards to stop that from happening.

5.45 pm

**Yvette Cooper:** My hon. Friend is exactly right. This is about dealing with risk, delays and increased costs. There is the risk that border delays will hit tight cross-border supply chains, but the CBI also estimates that the impact of WTO tariffs will mean a £4 billion to £6 billion increase in costs on our exports. The Environment Secretary—the leave campaigner himself—has said that WTO tariffs on beef and sheepmeat will increase by over 40%.

**Mr Baron:** The right hon. Lady is being very generous in giving way, but may I encourage her to temper her dire warnings about WTO terms? There were many forecasts and predictions from business organisations, the Bank of England and the International Monetary Fund about the disastrous consequences if we voted to leave the EU in 2016, including predictions of 500,000 extra unemployed by Christmas 2016. Those predictions did not materialise because investment is about comparative advantage such as low taxes and more flexible labour market practices. That is what determines investment at the end of the day.

**Yvette Cooper:** I am not drawing on macroeconomic predictions about the overall impact on the economy, although I note that there are predictions of a 9% reduction compared with the level at which we might otherwise be. I am actually focusing on the microeconomic impact on individual businesses across the country of simply seeing those costs go up. That is a real impact of the tariffs. It is not about confidence, levels of investment and so on; it is about the real impact of those costs on consumers, manufacturers, exporters and importers that is the real consequence of WTO tariffs.

**Ms Angela Eagle** (Wallasey) (Lab): I am sure my right hon. Friend has noticed that the Office for Budget Responsibility said in its report on the recent Budget that there has been a loss of 1.5% of GDP since the

referendum, and that the uncertainty was likely to make that worse, at least in the medium term. This Parliament has a duty to ensure that we mitigate that as much as possible, which is why I will be supporting her amendment.

**Yvette Cooper:** My hon. Friend is right that we have a responsibility not to make life harder for our manufacturers, which face huge pressure and huge international competition. We also have a responsibility not to make life harder for our consumers, who could see significant increases in prices. The British Food Importers & Distributors Association warns that WTO rules could mean that food prices go up by over 20%.

**Crispin Blunt:** The hon. Member for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves) has just cited Nestlé, which is a Swiss company. The right hon. Lady will be aware that Britain and Switzerland, which is able to make arrangements for the future, negotiated an agreement on 14 December 2018 to be able to continue trade, even if there is no agreement between the UK and the EU. Once this House has rejected the withdrawal agreement, that is exactly where the European Union and the United Kingdom will be. We will need to make the best of the situation in which we find ourselves. That is precisely why both sides will, under article 24 of the general agreement on tariffs and trade, move towards a free trade agreement to ensure that we do not put tariffs in place at all after 29 March. That is where we should be and those are the realities that are going to descend once we are through the “Project Fear” phase.

**Yvette Cooper:** The same cheery optimism that the hon. Gentleman and others have expressed that everybody will suddenly magically come to an agreement once we are through this phase and if we are on WTO terms is exactly the same cheery optimism they had that we were going to end up with a deal by now—and we have not, because it is actually a lot tougher than hon. Members suggest. The reality is that we are going to have a big hike in prices in April if we have no deal, and that has consequences for our manufacturers, businesses and consumers right across the country.

**Anna Soubry** (Broxtowe) (Con): I shall be supporting the right hon. Lady’s amendment. She talks about the manufacturing sector and I believe that there are a number of manufacturing jobs in her constituency. Has she heard any argument that falling back on WTO rules would ensure that those critical, just-in-time supply chains are able to continue, and does she agree that this issue is very important to the many millions of people across the country who rely on those just-in-time supply chains, because if we fall back on WTO rules, it is they who will be losing their jobs, not hon. Members?

**Yvette Cooper:** I completely agree with the right hon. Lady. What I am saying just comes from listening to employers in my constituency who have told me that they have bought all the storage capacity they can find in order to stockpile, but they cannot stockpile more than 10 days’ worth of some of their products, and they are really concerned about the impact of the delays on just-in-time technology.

**John Redwood:** Does the right hon. Lady agree, in wanting to promote stronger and better industry once we have left, that the Government should set zero tariffs

on all imported components, which we would be free to do, which would make them cheaper from non-EU countries and preserve zero tariffs for EU components?

**Yvette Cooper:** It is not clear to me how that strengthens our negotiating position with countries all over the world that might then keep their tariffs extremely high on our goods. The whole point is that, if we crash out on WTO terms, it undermines our negotiating power. Whether one thinks that is about negotiating with the EU or negotiating with other countries, we are weakening our position abroad.

We also have the impact on the NHS, which is spending £10 million on fridges: it will have to put more money into this which could be put into patient care. The police have warned that we will be less safe. They and the Border Force would immediately lose access to crucial information that they check 500 million times a year to find wanted criminals, dangerous weapons, sex offenders and terror suspects. We will not be able to use European arrest warrants to catch wanted criminals who fled here having committed serious crimes abroad. We use those warrants 1,000 times a year to send people back to face justice in the countries where those crimes have been committed. If those 1,000 suspects commit more crimes here, MPs will need to explain to the victims why we took away the power from the police to arrest and extradite them by tumbling into no deal.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I am listening to the right hon. Lady, as always, with great interest and enormous respect, but may I just very gently point out that we need to hear from other Members with amendments in the group and from the Minister? I am not certain how many more Members we need to hear, but my guesstimate is at least four, and we have 31 and a half minutes.

**Yvette Cooper:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. I apologise to anybody else who wants to intervene, but I will not take any further interventions and try to conclude my remarks.

Some of those who say they support no deal have said that it is unpatriotic to rule it out. I understand that there are strong emotions, but I hope we could be more respectful of each other than that, because I believe that it is patriotic to stand up for manufacturing, for families who may be on the breadline and face increases in food prices, for our NHS, and for British citizens abroad who could lose their rights.

The other objection that people have raised is that this is unnecessary because the Prime Minister's deal is the one they want as the way forward. I simply disagree, but I think the reality is not about my view but the view in the House: there is not, at this stage, support for the Prime Minister's deal, and I do not think there could be. We have to be able to respond to what happens next.

Finally, I have heard some say that they want the imminent threat of no deal to persuade people to back the Prime Minister's deal, if not now, then later. But brinkmanship in Parliament is not the way to resolve this and get the best deal for the country. This is too serious for us to play a massive Brexit game of chicken. The country cannot afford to wait to see who blinks first.

I hope that Ministers, as may have been rumoured, will accept this amendment and accept the principle behind it. The Government should get agreement on a

deal before 29 March, get explicit agreement on no deal before 29 March, or, if that fails, commit to seeking an extension of article 50, so that there is time to sort this out. The amendment does not solve the Brexit challenges that we have ahead and the many intense debates that we will no doubt have about the best way forward, but it gives us an opportunity to rule out the worst way forward and to do so in a way that is calm, measured and sensible. That is why I hope that amendment 7 will have support from across this House.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** An extremely brief speech, I feel sure, from Sir Oliver Letwin.

**Sir Oliver Letwin** (West Dorset) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I rise to support amendment 7, to which I am a signatory.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex (Sir Nicholas Soames), who is sitting next to me, and I have calculated that we have been in the House, collectively, for 56 years, and we have only ever, either of us, voted once against the Conservative Whip. This will be the second time that we will both be voting against the Conservative Whip, and I want to explain why. First, I want to say one thing about what this amendment is not. The right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough (Nicky Morgan) gave eloquent expositions, but what they did not mention is that, in contrast to some things that have been suggested, it has no impact whatsoever on the Government's ability to prepare for Brexit—it is about what the Government do after Brexit.

Secondly, clause 89 is an item that those of us who have been Ministers for a number of years will recognise as an “abundance of caution” clause. Some group of lawyers somewhere stuck in the bureaucracy clearly alerted Ministers to the possibility that they did not have certain unspecified powers and said it would be a good idea to have some unspecified powers in case the lack of unspecified powers turned out to be important. I do not think therefore that this amendment, in itself, will be likely to have a huge impact, if any, on the Government of this country.

That brings me to the question of why I am supporting this amendment. The answer is that it is most extraordinarily important to make it clear to the Government that it is not just this amendment. It is the precedent that this amendment sets, which is that on any power taken in any Bill in relation to the exit of the UK from the EU, if there is a majority in the House today and there continues to be a majority against no deal, it will be possible to bring forward similar amendments. It is my proposal that we should indeed do that. I want to make it abundantly clear to those of my hon. Friends who are thinking of voting against the Prime Minister's deal, which I shall be supporting, that the majority in this House, if it is expressed tonight, will sustain itself, and we will not allow a no-deal exit to occur at the end of March.

My last point is on why I am so passionate about not allowing such an exit. Many Members, including the Father of the House, have spoken eloquently about the long-term dangers to our economy of WTO trading



[*Sir Oliver Letwin*]

and so on. My right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (John Redwood), for example, very much disagrees with that. I do not take a particular view about that. My preference is for a continued free trade deal with the EU, which is by far our largest trading partner, but in contrast to some, I do not want to argue that there would be a disaster in principle if we were on WTO terms. I do not believe it would be disastrous. I think it is suboptimal but not disastrous.

For five long years, I was in charge of the resilience of this country. During that period, I saw many examples of our civil service, military and security apparatus being prepared or not being prepared for certain issues that closely affected the wellbeing of our country. That is one reason why two years ago I passionately argued—my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham will recall an occasion a year ago when I made that argument even more forcefully—that the Government should undertake serious preparation for a no-deal exit. That would have had the effect that some of my hon. Friends mentioned. It would have altered our negotiating position. It was not done.

I have been in awesome detail through the papers produced. I have listened to the briefing for Privy Counsellors. I have consulted senior officials across Whitehall. I know what the RAG ratings of red, yellow and green mean—nothing. I know what it is actually to have prepared for dealing with the gas interconnectors, the electricity interconnectors and the many other details concerned.

Some of my hon. Friends and others in the country believe they can assure that under circumstances where we wreck the deal, refuse to make all the payments that the EU is expecting and falsify its expectations of a reasonable departure, the EU will then reasonably set out to work with us in a calm and grown-up way to ensure a smooth departure. It may be so. I am in no position to deny that it will be. I do not make lurid projections. Anybody who believes that they know it will be so is deluded.

I do not believe that we in this House can responsibly impose on our country a risk that may be severe or serious short-term disruption, for the sole purpose of gratifying the possibility that we avoid certain eventualities that certain Members of Parliament would prefer to see avoided and on which nobody in this country ever voted because they were never asked to vote on it. Under those circumstances, I will be voting with the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford against my own Government and very much against my own will, and I will continue to do so right up to the end of March, in the hope that we can put paid to this disastrous proposal.

**Mr Speaker:** The right hon. Gentleman's succinctness is a textbook of how to help the House, and I hope it will now be closely studied.

**Kirsty Blackman:** In the interests of time, I will be very brief. I want to make it clear to the House that the SNP intends to push new clause 18 to a vote. I will briefly speak to some of the other new clauses and amendments that we have put forward. A couple of them relate to the expenditure implications of the UK

now having to take charge of carbon and greenhouse gas taxes. They are about making sure that the Government are clear with the House about why they are spending this money and about the money they intend to spend before they do so. This is an additional cost that would be associated with the UK leaving the EU, which is a concern of ours. Obviously, we would not have to spend this money if we remained in the EU.

6 pm

New clause 13 relates to a report on consultations. The Government have not consulted on nearly as many of the measures in this Finance Bill as we would like to see them consult on. Usually, they are produced in draft format, but many of them were not produced in draft format this year. Concerns have been raised by various external agencies about this, and new clause 13 relates to that. I think the Government could do a better job next year; they have done a better job in some previous years. They could pull together the notices in draft form, and we would therefore have better legislation that had been more properly scrutinised by external organisations in advance of being part of the Finance Bill.

Finally, new clause 18 relates to migration levels. The political declaration confirms the intention to end free movement. This is a significant problem, and something the SNP has argued against at every possible opportunity. We do not think we should leave the EU, but if the UK is determined to leave the EU and have an immigration policy of its own creation, it needs one that does not have a £30,000 limit and it needs one that allows people to come to live and work in Scotland. If the UK Government are not willing to do that, they should devolve the powers to Scotland so that we can do that, or Scotland should have the chance to become an independent country again so, again, that we can have a better immigration policy.

The Scottish population is ageing faster than the population in the rest of the UK. In the UK, 15% of the agriculture and food sector is staffed by EU nationals. However, I have spoken to a local company in my area in which over 50% of the staff are EU nationals. In Scotland as a whole, 7% of our citizens are international migrants, and the percentage of people born outside the UK is far higher in Aberdeen.

It is incredibly important for Scotland to have a migration system that works. We have tabled new clause 18 so that we can push the Government on looking at the migration system. We want a migration system that is not about saying, "We're just going to stop migration", but one that is evidence-led. It should be done by asking: what will be the impact to the Exchequer of reducing migration, and what will be the impact on public services continuing to run if migration is reduced? The Government have failed to do so.

That is why we are incredibly keen that new clause 18 is accepted by the Government and, more widely, that the Government make changes to migration policy. If they are not willing to concede some of the points we are putting forward about migration, they should at least be honest with people about the cost to the country of reducing migration, and about the fact that those who come to live and work here are net contributors to our economy and that the Exchequer benefits as a result of those people choosing to live and work here. If the

Government are planning to change that and to reduce migration, they need to be clear that they will have less money to spend as a result.

In pushing this, we want to make it clear that our position is very different from the Government's: we would like to protect the right of people who live and work in Scotland to continue to do so.

**Nick Boles** (Grantham and Stamford) (Con): I will be very brief, not least because my right hon. Friends the Members for Loughborough (Nicky Morgan) and for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin) have described much better than I ever could why I am going to support amendment 7, which I signed almost while it was hot off the presses before Christmas. The one point I want to address is the question that has been raised, and indeed the accusation that has been made, that in doing so I and other Conservative Members are breaking faith with our constituents and somehow breaking a manifesto commitment. I believe this to be utterly wrong, and also a rather disgraceful suggestion to make.

In the referendum campaign on our membership of the European Union, I supported and indeed voted remain. However, the argument of my colleagues who voted and campaigned for leave that I found most powerful and most emotionally impactful was that Parliament is sovereign and should take control of all the decisions that affect the lives of my constituents. That was the argument that the leave campaign made that I found the most difficult to resist and the most difficult to say was worth compromising for the sake of our membership of the European Union. It is therefore somewhat extraordinary that the very same people who made that argument so eloquently and effectively during the referendum campaign should somehow have the temerity to criticise me or other hon. and right hon. Members for doing what we believe is right in the interests of our constituents and in the national interest.

**Mr Kenneth Clarke:** I cannot think of a single leading Conservative Brexiteer who would have changed his opinions on membership of the EU in the slightest had the remain side won the referendum. They made it quite clear that they had no intention whatever of abandoning their long-held, quite sincere views, which they would have carried on arguing in this House and voting for. Does my hon. Friend share my view?

**Nick Boles:** The Father of the House is completely right. I have to say—I am sure the same is true of him—that I rather admire them for it. I admire my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) for making the same arguments passionately and with principle for 40 years—longer, practically, than many Members have been alive.

I want briefly to address the question of the Conservative manifesto commitment. I should point out that quite large chunks of the Conservative manifesto were junked by the Prime Minister during her own election campaign, so I do not know quite why we have elevated it to be a sort of Moses-style tablet. Nevertheless, it contained a sentence saying that we maintain that no deal is better than a bad deal. I agree, and I agreed then, in my hospital bed, when I agreed to stand as a candidate in the election, that that was the right position for the Government to take. As my right hon. Friend the

Member for South Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin)—West Dorset; apologies to the people of Dorset—explained, it was entirely right for the Government to want to prepare for no deal. Unfortunately, as he pointed out, they failed to do so.

However, what we did not say in that manifesto is that no deal is better than any deal; we said no deal is better than a bad deal. I remind my hon. Friends that we have a deal; it is a deal that the 27 nations of the European Union have agreed, that the Prime Minister, who recently won a confidence motion in the Conservative party, and her Cabinet have endorsed and advocate, and that, at the last count, about 200 Conservative Members, including myself, intend to support when the vote is finally put. It is simply not possible to suggest that by saying that I will not countenance no deal, I am breaking that manifesto commitment. We do not have a bad deal; we may have a deal that you, individually, do not like—not you, Mr Speaker, but individual hon. and right hon. Members—but nobody can claim that we do not have a deal that it is reasonable for Conservative Members to support. It is therefore reasonable for us to say that, at this late stage, with the Government having prepared as woefully as they have for no deal, we will on no account countenance a no-deal Brexit.

Finally, I join my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset in very clearly saying this: I will vote on any motion, on any amendment, on any piece of legislation, proposed by whomsoever in this House to ensure that we leave the European Union on 29 March with a deal or not at all.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Just before I call the next Member, we must hear from the Minister, and the Opposition Front Bench should really have the chance, very briefly, to comment on its own lead new clause before we come to the vote.

**Mr Chris Leslie** (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): I will be brief, Mr Speaker. I will want to move amendment 8, which stands in my name and in those of many hon. Members on both sides of the House. In many ways, it complements amendment 7, which was tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper).

Amendment 8 would institute a commencement motion for the powers that the Treasury is seeking. Clause 89 might have been wrapped up as fairly minor and inconsequential, but essentially the Government are asking for pretty whopping permission to start legislating for no-deal arrangements. At this stage in the game, I really do not think that right hon. and hon. Members should be delegating our powers entirely to Ministers in this way without question. I know it is difficult for the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin) to rebel for a second time, on amendment 7, but I would like to persuade him to do so for a third time on amendment 8. A commencement motion is an important adjunct so that we can give the House and hon. Members the chance to express how they wish Brexit to go forward—so that we have the opportunity to express our view. A commencement motion would allow hon. Members the chance to do just that.

As things stand—certainly if the Government's Brexit proposal is negated next week—there could be 21 days or perhaps another seven days before anything is voteable

[Mr Chris Leslie]

on in this place. My own view is that before we start delegating powers to Ministers on these issues, or indeed on others, we need to start saying that enough is enough. Hon. Members need a chance to help to guide the way forward. There are many different views on these particular issues—the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Nick Boles) has his particular preference and I have mine—but we need to provide for ourselves the time and the space to express them. Amendment 8 would simply provide for a commencement motion.

I hope that the Minister will recognise there is a strong cross-party opinion that we need now to give voice to Parliament. We cannot just drift into a no-deal situation. Parliament does want to take back control. He should concede and accept the amendment now.

**The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (Robert Jenrick):** I am grateful to all right hon. and hon. Members for the debate.

Delivering the deal negotiated with the EU remains the Government's central priority. It is neither our preference nor our expectation that we will leave the EU without a deal. However, as a responsible Government, we must prepare for all scenarios. In the Budget, we furthered that commitment by confirming an additional £500 million of funding in 2019-20, taking the total Government investment on preparing for EU exit to over £4 billion. At the Budget, to help to ensure that the tax system can continue to function under any EU exit outcome, we announced a series of modest, sensible provisions, which included a power to make necessary minor technical amendments to UK tax legislation. It also allowed, as we have heard, for the Government to introduce a carbon emissions tax to replace the EU emissions trading system in the event of no deal. By including those measures in the Finance Bill, our foremost motivation is to provide certainty to taxpayers—the kind of certainty that one would expect from any responsible Government.

Let me turn to amendment 7, which was tabled by the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper). Prior to proceedings in the Committee of the whole House, which considered clause 89, I placed a list of changes envisioned under the clause in the House of Commons Library. Right hon. and hon. Members who have taken the trouble to review the list will see that they are indeed minor technical changes, and out of minor and technical changes, these are the most minor and technical. Since then, we have received no indication from any Member to the contrary. Clause 89 is simply prudent preparation to provide our taxpayers with the certainty they deserve.

As I made clear, the Government do not want or expect a no-deal scenario. That was why we negotiated the withdrawal agreement, which will see us leave the EU in a smooth and orderly way on 29 March and sets the framework of our future relationship. As we heard from my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin) and my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Nick Boles), the best way of avoiding a no-deal scenario, if that is of grave concern to Members, is to support the withdrawal agreement next week.

6.15 pm

Unless Parliament agrees a deal, the UK will leave the European Union on 29 March with no deal, as that was the agreement we all knew when we voted to trigger article 50. That is now the law, and amendment 7 does not change that simple truth.

**Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con):** Will the Minister clarify his last sentence? Is he saying that if the deal is voted down next week, it will become the Government's stated objective to deliver no deal?

**Robert Jenrick:** The point I have just made is that the law of the land is that the UK will leave the European Union on 29 March, and nothing contained in amendment 7 will change that. As I will come on to say, the only difference that the amendment will implement is to make the UK somewhat less prepared for that eventuality. The purpose of clause 89 is to provide taxpayers and—

**Sir Oliver Letwin** *rose*—

**Robert Jenrick:** I give way to my right hon. Friend.

**Sir Oliver Letwin:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who is doing a valiant job—I do not envy him. Does he accept that although, as he says, the law at present is that we will leave on 29 March, the House of Commons, with the House of Lords and Her Majesty, has the ability to change that provision?

**Robert Jenrick:** The House of Commons has the right to make the law, but the law as it is today is that we will leave on 29 March. The point I am making is that, whatever the intentions of the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford and those who may wish to support amendment 7, all that will be achieved by supporting it is denying our citizens and taxpayers the degree of certainty that we wish to give them.

**Sir Oliver Letwin** *rose*—

**Mr Kenneth Clarke** *rose*—

**Robert Jenrick:** I will give way one last time, but I have only a couple of minutes.

**Mr Clarke:** I, too, extend my sympathies to my hon. Friend, who drew the short straw of responding to the debate. He is trying very eloquently to minimise the significance of the whole thing, but of course he realises there are big issues behind this. Can he tell us what contingency arrangements the Treasury has made for the fiscal impact of leaving with no deal, and its likely impact on our trade, our manufacturing industry and so on? He must concede that the published figures for future deficits, debts and so on will be made utterly meaningless if we leave with no deal, and a fiscal crisis will occur. Is the Chancellor planning the emergency Budget he will probably require?

**Robert Jenrick:** My right hon. and learned Friend and constituency neighbour tempts me to go into areas that I should not, but the Chancellor has said that we will be prepared and that we have fiscal room available—that was what he stated in the Budget, as certified by the Office for Budget Responsibility. My right hon. and



learned Friend appears to be making the case for prudent preparations in case of a no-deal scenario, which is all that clause 89 seeks to achieve.

**Yvette Cooper** *rose*—

**David T. C. Davies** (Monmouth) (Con) *rose*—

**Robert Jenrick:** I will give way one last time to my hon. Friend—I apologise to the right hon. Lady, but I only have a couple of minutes.

**David T. C. Davies:** With all due respect to my hon. Friend's Department, is it not the case that it published a series of figures about the economic disaster that was allegedly going to occur if we voted to leave the European Union, although none of that has happened, and that what we have here is an attempt to blackmail the Government into not going ahead with a decision that was taken after a majority of the population voted to leave the European Union?

**Robert Jenrick:** We are leaving the European Union. We wish to do so with a deal. The House will vote on the deal next week, but we must and will prepare for all scenarios.

**Yvette Cooper** *rose*—

**Robert Jenrick:** I give way to the right hon. Lady because, of course, amendment 7 is hers.

**Yvette Cooper:** Will the Minister confirm that he will still be able to use clause 89 powers if he either gives the House a chance to vote on no deal or, alternatively, takes the opportunity to apply for an extension of article 50?

**Robert Jenrick:** Clause 89 would give the Government the ability to provide certainty to taxpayers now. That is what we want to ensure. We do not want to inhibit the ability of HMRC and the Government to provide that critical certainty. Who would want to do that? Who would want to diminish certainty for taxpayers at this time? The right hon. Lady listed a number of businesses. Those businesses want certainty, and by supporting her amendment, we would diminish that certainty and our preparedness—admittedly only modestly—for a no-deal scenario.

We will not be deterred from making sensible preparations—the public expect us to do so—and using the Finance Bill to prevent or frustrate preparation for any eventuality is unwise and irresponsible. I therefore urge the House to reject all the amendments and new clauses tabled against clauses 89 and 90 so that we give our constituents and taxpayers across the country the degree of certainty they deserve.

**Sir Vince Cable** (Twickenham) (LD) *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. If the right hon. Gentleman feels able and willing to express his views in a minute, I will be delighted to hear him—I hope he will not be offended—but otherwise I will call the Opposition Front-Bench spokesperson.

**Sir Vince Cable:** Thank you for your indulgence, Mr Speaker. I just want to say a few words in support of amendments 7 and 8. They are Brexit-neutral, in the sense that they require the House to approve any change, but of course they relate primarily to no deal. The fiscal issues, as the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin) explained them, were arcane and rather gentle. I tabled a more brutal amendment that was not called.

In the 30 seconds left, I want to relate an incident from this morning, when I went to the ferry port at Portsmouth. It is very clear that the Government are totally and utterly unprepared for the chaotic impact that there will be on the road system, including access to the naval base, if a no-deal Brexit occurs. Despite repeated requests from the council and others, the Department for Transport and the Ministry of Defence are refusing to co-operate, and the police now say that the M3 motorway will have to be closed from Winchester to Basingstoke in order to provide a lorry park. Repeated efforts to get Ministers to respond have not been heeded. A meeting was held for 19 regional MPs last week, but only one attended, so I am taking on the job of representing a no-deal Brexit. It is a task I undertake with all the enthusiasm of an arsonist trying to put out a bushfire, but I will do it.

**Jonathan Reynolds:** This has been a significant and important debate. In fact, it is clear that the House desires a longer and broader debate—that point was well made by the Chair of the Treasury Committee. No deal is some people's preferred outcome, and they are the same people who told us that doing a deal would be the easiest thing in history. They were wrong then and they are wrong now. I feel that the case against the unilateral use of these no-deal powers has been comprehensively made, and I urge all Members to vote for our amendments, because that is best for jobs, prosperity and the national interest.

6.23 pm

*Three and a half hours having elapsed since the commencement of proceedings on the programme motion, the debate was interrupted (Programme Order, this day).*

*The Speaker put forthwith the Question already proposed from the Chair (Standing Order No. 83E). That the clause be read a Second time.*

*The House divided: Ayes 292, Noes 314.*

**Division No. 286]**

**[6.23 pm**

**AYES**

Abbott, rh Ms Diane	Blackman, Kirsty
Abrahams, Debbie	Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta
Ali, Rushanara	Blomfield, Paul
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena	Brabin, Tracy
Amesbury, Mike	Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Antoniazzi, Tonia	Brake, rh Tom
Ashworth, Jonathan	Brennan, Kevin
Bailey, Mr Adrian	Brock, Deidre
Bardell, Hannah	Brown, Alan
Barron, rh Sir Kevin	Brown, Lyn
Beckett, rh Margaret	Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Benn, rh Hilary	Bryant, Chris
Berger, Luciana	Buck, Ms Karen
Betts, Mr Clive	Burden, Richard
Black, Mhairi	Burgon, Richard
Blackford, rh Ian	Butler, Dawn

Byrne, rh Liam	Godsiff, Mr Roger	Maskell, Rachael	Saville Roberts, Liz
Cable, rh Sir Vince	Goodman, Helen	Matheson, Christian	Sharma, Mr Virendra
Cadbury, Ruth	Grady, Patrick	Mc Nally, John	Sheerman, Mr Barry
Cameron, Dr Lisa	Grant, Peter	McCabe, Steve	Sheppard, Tommy
Campbell, rh Sir Alan	Green, Kate	McCarthy, Kerry	Sherriff, Paula
Carden, Dan	Greenwood, Lilian	McDonagh, Siobhain	Shuker, Mr Gavin
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair	Greenwood, Margaret	McDonald, Andy	Skinner, Mr Dennis
Champion, Sarah	Griffith, Nia	McDonald, Stewart Malcolm	Slaughter, Andy
Chapman, Douglas	Grogan, John	McDonald, Stuart C.	Smeeth, Ruth
Chapman, Jenny	Gwynne, Andrew	McDonnell, rh John	Smith, Angela
Charalambous, Bambos	Hagh, Louise	McFadden, rh Mr Pat	Smith, Cat
Cherry, Joanna	Hamilton, Fabian	McGinn, Conor	Smith, Eleanor
Clwyd, rh Ann	Hanson, rh David	McGovern, Alison	Smith, Jeff
Coaker, Vernon	Hardy, Emma	McInnes, Liz	Smith, Laura
Coffey, Ann	Harman, rh Ms Harriet	McKinnell, Catherine	Smith, Nick
Cooper, Julie	Harris, Carolyn	McMahon, Jim	Smith, Owen
Cooper, Rosie	Hayes, Helen	McMorrin, Anna	Smyth, Karin
Cooper, rh Yvette	Hayman, Sue	Mearns, Ian	Snell, Gareth
Corbyn, rh Jeremy	Healey, rh John	Miliband, rh Edward	Sobel, Alex
Cowan, Ronnie	Hendrick, Sir Mark	Monaghan, Carol	Spellar, rh John
Coyle, Neil	Hendry, Drew	Moran, Layla	Starmar, rh Keir
Crawley, Angela	Hepburn, Mr Stephen	Morden, Jessica	Stephens, Chris
Creagh, Mary	Hill, Mike	Morgan, Stephen	Stevens, Jo
Creasy, Stella	Hillier, Meg	Morris, Grahame	Stone, Jamie
Cruddas, Jon	Hobhouse, Wera	Murray, Ian	Streeting, Wes
Cummins, Judith	Hodgson, Mrs Sharon	Nandy, Lisa	Stringer, Graham
Cunningham, Alex	Hoey, Kate	Newlands, Gavin	Sweeney, Mr Paul
Cunningham, Mr Jim	Hollern, Kate	Norris, Alex	Swinson, Jo
Daby, Janet	Hopkins, Kelvin	O'Hara, Brendan	Tami, rh Mark
Dakin, Nic	Hosie, Stewart	O'Mara, Jared	Thewliss, Alison
Davey, rh Sir Edward	Huq, Dr Rupa	Onn, Melanie	Thomas, Gareth
David, Wayne	Hussain, Imran	Onwurah, Chi	Thomas-Symonds, Nick
Davies, Geraint	Jardine, Christine	Osamor, Kate	Thornberry, rh Emily
Day, Martyn	Johnson, Diana	Owen, Albert	Timms, rh Stephen
De Cordova, Marsha	Jones, Darren	Peacock, Stephanie	Trickett, Jon
De Piero, Gloria	Jones, Gerald	Pearce, Teresa	Turley, Anna
Dent Coad, Emma	Jones, Helen	Pennycook, Matthew	Turner, Karl
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh	Jones, rh Mr Kevan	Perkins, Toby	Twigg, Derek
Docherty-Hughes, Martin	Jones, Sarah	Phillips, Jess	Twigg, Stephen
Dodds, Anneliese	Jones, Susan Elan	Phillipson, Bridget	Twist, Liz
Doughty, Stephen	Kane, Mike	Pidcock, Laura	Umunna, Chuka
Dowd, Peter	Keeley, Barbara	Platt, Jo	Vaz, Valerie
Drew, Dr David	Kendall, Liz	Pollard, Luke	Walker, Thelma
Dromey, Jack	Khan, Afzal	Pound, Stephen	Watson, Tom
Duffield, Rosie	Killen, Ged	Powell, Lucy	West, Catherine
Eagle, Ms Angela	Kinnock, Stephen	Qureshi, Yasmin	Western, Matt
Eagle, Maria	Kyle, Peter	Rashid, Faisal	Whitehead, Dr Alan
Edwards, Jonathan	Laird, Lesley	Rayner, Angela	Whitfield, Martin
Efford, Clive	Lake, Ben	Reed, Mr Steve	Whitford, Dr Philippa
Elliott, Julie	Lamb, rh Norman	Rees, Christina	Williams, Hywel
Ellman, Dame Louise	Lammy, rh Mr David	Reeves, Ellie	Williams, Dr Paul
Elmore, Chris	Lavery, Ian	Reeves, Rachel	Williamson, Chris
Esterson, Bill	Law, Chris	Reynolds, Emma	Wilson, Phil
Evans, Chris	Lee, Karen	Reynolds, Jonathan	Wishart, Pete
Farrelly, Paul	Leslie, Mr Chris	Rimmer, Ms Marie	Yasin, Mohammad
Farron, Tim	Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma	Rodda, Matt	Zeichner, Daniel
Fellows, Marion	Lewis, Clive	Rowley, Danielle	
Field, rh Frank	Lewis, Mr Ivan	Ruane, Chris	<b>Tellers for the Ayes:</b>
Fitzpatrick, Jim	Linden, David	Russell-Moyle, Lloyd	<b>Thangam Debonnaire and</b>
Flint, rh Caroline	Lloyd, Stephen	Ryan, rh Joan	<b>Colleen Fletcher</b>
Fovargue, Yvonne	Lloyd, Tony		
Foxcroft, Vicky	Long Bailey, Rebecca		
Frith, James	Lucas, Caroline		<b>NOES</b>
Furniss, Gill	Lucas, Ian C.	Adams, Nigel	Atkins, Victoria
Gaffney, Hugh	MacNeil, Angus Brendan	Afolami, Bim	Bacon, Mr Richard
Gapes, Mike	Madders, Justin	Afriyie, Adam	Badenoch, Mrs Kemi
Gardiner, Barry	Mahmood, Mr Khalid	Aldous, Peter	Baker, Mr Steve
George, Ruth	Mahmood, Shabana	Allan, Lucy	Baldwin, Harriett
Gethins, Stephen	Malhotra, Seema	Allen, Heidi	Barclay, rh Stephen
Gibson, Patricia	Mann, John	Amess, Sir David	Baron, Mr John
Gill, Preet Kaur	Marsden, Gordon	Andrew, Stuart	Bebb, Guto
Glindon, Mary	Martin, Sandy	Argar, Edward	Bellingham, Sir Henry

Benyon, rh Richard	Fallon, rh Sir Michael	Jones, rh Mr David	Pincher, rh Christopher
Beresford, Sir Paul	Field, rh Mark	Jones, Mr Marcus	Poulter, Dr Dan
Berry, Jake	Ford, Vicky	Kawczynski, Daniel	Prentis, Victoria
Blackman, Bob	Foster, Kevin	Keegan, Gillian	Prisk, Mr Mark
Blunt, Crispin	Francois, rh Mr Mark	Kennedy, Seema	Pritchard, Mark
Boles, Nick	Frazer, Lucy	Kerr, Stephen	Pursglove, Tom
Bone, Mr Peter	Freeman, George	Knight, rh Sir Greg	Quin, Jeremy
Bottomley, Sir Peter	Freer, Mike	Knight, Julian	Raab, rh Dominic
Bowie, Andrew	Fysh, Mr Marcus	Kwarteng, Kwasi	Redwood, rh John
Bradley, Ben	Gale, rh Sir Roger	Lamont, John	Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
Bradley, rh Karen	Garnier, Mark	Lancaster, rh Mark	Robertson, Mr Laurence
Brady, Sir Graham	Gauke, rh Mr David	Latham, Mrs Pauline	Robinson, Gavin
Braverman, Suella	Ghani, Ms Nusrat	Leadsom, rh Andrea	Robinson, Mary
Brereton, Jack	Gibb, rh Nick	Lee, Dr Phillip	Rosindell, Andrew
Bridgen, Andrew	Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl	Leigh, rh Sir Edward	Ross, Douglas
Brine, Steve	Girvan, Paul	Letwin, rh Sir Oliver	Rowley, Lee
Brokenshire, rh James	Glen, John	Lewer, Andrew	Rudd, rh Amber
Bruce, Fiona	Goldsmith, Zac	Lewis, rh Brandon	Rutley, David
Buckland, Robert	Goodwill, rh Mr Robert	Lewis, rh Dr Julian	Sandbach, Antoinette
Burghart, Alex	Gove, rh Michael	Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian	Scully, Paul
Burns, Conor	Graham, Luke	Lidington, rh Mr David	Seely, Mr Bob
Burt, rh Alistair	Graham, Richard	Little Pengelly, Emma	Selous, Andrew
Cairns, rh Alun	Grant, Bill	Lopez, Julia	Shannon, Jim
Campbell, Mr Gregory	Grant, Mrs Helen	Lopresti, Jack	Shapps, rh Grant
Campbell, Mr Ronnie	Gray, James	Lord, Mr Jonathan	Sharma, Alok
Cartledge, James	Grayling, rh Chris	Loughton, Tim	Shelbrooke, Alec
Cash, Sir William	Green, Chris	Mackinlay, Craig	Simpson, David
Caulfield, Maria	Green, rh Damian	Maclean, Rachel	Simpson, rh Mr Keith
Chalk, Alex	Greening, rh Justine	Main, Mrs Anne	Skidmore, Chris
Chishti, Rehman	Grieve, rh Mr Dominic	Mak, Alan	Smith, Chloe
Churchill, Jo	Griffiths, Andrew	Malthouse, Kit	Smith, rh Julian
Clark, Colin	Gyimah, Mr Sam	Mann, Scott	Smith, Royston
Clark, rh Greg	Hair, Kirstene	Masterton, Paul	Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth	Halfon, rh Robert	Maynard, Paul	Soubry, rh Anna
Clarke, Mr Simon	Hammond, rh Mr Philip	McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick	Spencer, Mark
Cleverly, James	Hammond, Stephen	McPartland, Stephen	Stephenson, Andrew
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey	Hancock, rh Matt	McVey, rh Ms Esther	Stevenson, John
Coffey, Dr Thérèse	Hands, rh Greg	Menzies, Mark	Stewart, Bob
Collins, Damian	Harper, rh Mr Mark	Mercer, Johnny	Stewart, Rory
Costa, Alberto	Harrington, Richard	Merriman, Huw	Streeter, Sir Gary
Courts, Robert	Harris, Rebecca	Metcalfe, Stephen	Stride, rh Mel
Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey	Harrison, Trudy	Miller, rh Mrs Maria	Stuart, Graham
Crabb, rh Stephen	Hart, Simon	Milling, Amanda	Sturdy, Julian
Crouch, Tracey	Hayes, rh Sir John	Mills, Nigel	Sunak, Rishi
Davies, Chris	Heald, rh Sir Oliver	Milton, rh Anne	Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Davies, David T. C.	Heapey, James	Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew	Swire, rh Sir Hugo
Davies, Glyn	Heaton-Harris, Chris	Moore, Damien	Syms, Sir Robert
Davies, Mims	Heaton-Jones, Peter	Mordaunt, rh Penny	Thomas, Derek
Davies, Philip	Henderson, Gordon	Morgan, rh Nicky	Thomson, Ross
Davis, rh Mr David	Herbert, rh Nick	Morris, Anne Marie	Throup, Maggie
Dinenage, Caroline	Hermon, Lady	Morris, David	Tolhurst, Kelly
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan	Hoare, Simon	Morris, James	Tomlinson, Justin
Docherty, Leo	Hollinrake, Kevin	Mundell, rh David	Tomlinson, Michael
Dodds, rh Nigel	Hollobone, Mr Philip	Murray, Mrs Sheryll	Tracey, Craig
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.	Holloway, Adam	Murrison, Dr Andrew	Tredinnick, David
Donelan, Michelle	Howell, John	Neill, Robert	Trevelyan, Anne-Marie
Double, Steve	Huddleston, Nigel	Newton, Sarah	Truss, rh Elizabeth
Dowden, Oliver	Hughes, Eddie	Nokes, rh Caroline	Tugendhat, Tom
Doyle-Price, Jackie	Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy	Norman, Jesse	Vaizey, rh Mr Edward
Drax, Richard	Hurd, rh Mr Nick	O'Brien, Neil	Vara, Mr Shailesh
Duddridge, James	Jack, Mr Alister	Offord, Dr Matthew	Vickers, Martin
Duguid, David	James, Margot	Opperman, Guy	Villiers, rh Theresa
Duncan, rh Sir Alan	Javid, rh Sajid	Paisley, Ian	Walker, Mr Charles
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain	Jayawardena, Mr Ranil	Parish, Neil	Walker, Mr Robin
Dunne, rh Mr Philip	Jenkin, Sir Bernard	Patel, rh Priti	Wallace, rh Mr Ben
Ellis, Michael	Jenkyns, Andrea	Paterson, rh Mr Owen	Warburton, David
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias	Jenrick, Robert	Pawsey, Mark	Warman, Matt
Elphicke, Charlie	Johnson, rh Boris	Penning, rh Sir Mike	Watling, Giles
Eustice, George	Johnson, Dr Caroline	Penrose, John	Whately, Helen
Evans, Mr Nigel	Johnson, Gareth	Percy, Andrew	Wheeler, Mrs Heather
Evennett, rh Sir David	Johnson, Joseph	Perry, rh Claire	Whittaker, Craig
Fabricant, Michael	Jones, Andrew	Philp, Chris	Whittingdale, rh Mr John



Wiggin, Bill  
Williamson, rh Gavin  
Wilson, rh Sammy  
Wollaston, Dr Sarah  
Wood, Mike  
Wragg, Mr William

Wright, rh Jeremy  
Zahawi, Nadhim

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
**Wendy Morton and**  
**Iain Stewart**

*Question accordingly negatived.*

*The Speaker then put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that time (Standing Order No. 83E).*

### Clause 89

#### MINOR AMENDMENTS IN CONSEQUENCE OF EU WITHDRAWAL

*Amendment proposed: 7, page 67, line 19, at end insert—*

“(7) The provisions of this section only come into force if—

- a negotiated withdrawal agreement and a framework for the future relationship have been approved by a resolution of the House of Commons on a motion moved by a Minister of the Crown for the purposes of section 13(1)(b) of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, or
- the Prime Minister has notified the President of the European Council, in accordance with Article 50(3) of the Treaty on European Union, of the United Kingdom’s request to extend the period in which the Treaties shall still apply to the United Kingdom, or
- leaving the European Union without a withdrawal agreement and a framework for the future relationship has been approved by a resolution of the House of Commons on a motion moved by a Minister of the Crown.”—(*Yvette Cooper.*)

*This amendment would prevent the Government implementing the “no deal” provisions of Clause 89 without the explicit consent of Parliament for such an outcome. It would provide three options for the provisions of Clause 89 to come into force: if the House of Commons has approved a negotiated withdrawal agreement and a framework for the future relationship; if the Government has sought an extension of the Article 50 period; or the House of Commons has approved leaving the European Union without a withdrawal agreement and framework for the future relationship.*

*Question put, That the amendment be made.*

*The House divided: Ayes 303, Noes 296.*

### Division No. 287]

[6.39 pm

#### AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane  
Abrahams, Debbie  
Ali, Rushanara  
Allen, Heidi  
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena  
Amesbury, Mike  
Antoniazzi, Tonia  
Ashworth, Jonathan  
Bailey, Mr Adrian  
Bardell, Hannah  
Bebb, Guto  
Beckett, rh Margaret  
Benn, rh Hilary  
Benyon, rh Richard  
Berger, Luciana  
Betts, Mr Clive  
Black, Mhairi  
Blackford, rh Ian  
Blackman, Kirsty

Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta  
Blomfield, Paul  
Boles, Nick  
Brabin, Tracy  
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben  
Brake, rh Tom  
Brennan, Kevin  
Brock, Deidre  
Brown, Alan  
Brown, Lyn  
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas  
Bryant, Chris  
Buck, Ms Karen  
Burden, Richard  
Burgon, Richard  
Butler, Dawn  
Byrne, rh Liam  
Cable, rh Sir Vince  
Cadbury, Ruth

Cameron, Dr Lisa  
Campbell, rh Sir Alan  
Carden, Dan  
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair  
Champion, Sarah  
Chapman, Douglas  
Chapman, Jenny  
Charalambous, Bambos  
Cherry, Joanna  
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth  
Clwyd, rh Ann  
Coaker, Vernon  
Coffey, Ann  
Cooper, Julie  
Cooper, Rosie  
Cooper, rh Yvette  
Corbyn, rh Jeremy  
Cowan, Ronnie  
Coyle, Neil  
Crawley, Angela  
Creagh, Mary  
Creasy, Stella  
Cummins, Judith  
Cunningham, Alex  
Cunningham, Mr Jim  
Daby, Janet  
Dakin, Nic  
Davey, rh Sir Edward  
David, Wayne  
Davies, Geraint  
Day, Martyn  
De Cordova, Marsha  
De Piero, Gloria  
Dent Coad, Emma  
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh  
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan  
Docherty-Hughes, Martin  
Dodds, Anneliese  
Doughty, Stephen  
Dowd, Peter  
Drew, Dr David  
Dromey, Jack  
Duffield, Rosie  
Eagle, Ms Angela  
Eagle, Maria  
Edwards, Jonathan  
Efford, Clive  
Elliott, Julie  
Ellman, Dame Louise  
Elmore, Chris  
Esterson, Bill  
Evans, Chris  
Fallon, rh Sir Michael  
Farrelly, Paul  
Farron, Tim  
Fellows, Marion  
Fitzpatrick, Jim  
Fovargue, Yvonne  
Foxcroft, Vicky  
Freeman, George  
Frith, James  
Furniss, Gill  
Gaffney, Hugh  
Gapes, Mike  
Gardiner, Barry  
George, Ruth  
Gethins, Stephen  
Gibson, Patricia  
Gill, Preet Kaur  
Glindon, Mary  
Godsiff, Mr Roger  
Goodman, Helen

Grady, Patrick  
Grant, Peter  
Gray, Neil  
Green, Kate  
Greening, rh Justine  
Greenwood, Lilian  
Greenwood, Margaret  
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic  
Griffith, Nia  
Grogan, John  
Gwynne, Andrew  
Gyimah, Mr Sam  
Haigh, Louise  
Hamilton, Fabian  
Hanson, rh David  
Hardy, Emma  
Harman, rh Ms Harriet  
Harris, Carolyn  
Hayes, Helen  
Hayman, Sue  
Healey, rh John  
Hendrick, Sir Mark  
Hendry, Drew  
Heppburn, Mr Stephen  
Hill, Mike  
Hillier, Meg  
Hobhouse, Wera  
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon  
Hollern, Kate  
Hosie, Stewart  
Huq, Dr Rupa  
Hussain, Imran  
Jardine, Christine  
Johnson, Diana  
Jones, Darren  
Jones, Gerald  
Jones, Helen  
Jones, rh Mr Kevan  
Jones, Sarah  
Jones, Susan Elan  
Kane, Mike  
Keeley, Barbara  
Kendall, Liz  
Khan, Afzal  
Killen, Ged  
Kinnock, Stephen  
Kyle, Peter  
Laird, Lesley  
Lake, Ben  
Lamb, rh Norman  
Lammy, rh Mr David  
Lavery, Ian  
Law, Chris  
Lee, Karen  
Lee, Dr Phillip  
Leslie, Mr Chris  
Letwin, rh Sir Oliver  
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma  
Lewis, Clive  
Lewis, Mr Ivan  
Linden, David  
Lloyd, Stephen  
Lloyd, Tony  
Long Bailey, Rebecca  
Lucas, Caroline  
Lucas, Ian C.  
MacNeil, Angus Brendan  
Madders, Justin  
Mahmood, Mr Khalid  
Mahmood, Shabana  
Malhotra, Seema  
Marsden, Gordon

Martin, Sandy  
 Maskell, Rachael  
 Matheson, Christian  
 Mc Nally, John  
 McCabe, Steve  
 McCarthy, Kerry  
 McDonagh, Siobhain  
 McDonald, Andy  
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm  
 McDonald, Stuart C.  
 McDonnell, rh John  
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat  
 McGinn, Conor  
 McGovern, Alison  
 McInnes, Liz  
 McKinnell, Catherine  
 McMahon, Jim  
 McMorrin, Anna  
 Mearns, Ian  
 Miliband, rh Edward  
 Monaghan, Carol  
 Moran, Layla  
 Morden, Jessica  
 Morgan, rh Nicky  
 Morgan, Stephen  
 Morris, Grahame  
 Murray, Ian  
 Neill, Robert  
 Newlands, Gavin  
 Norris, Alex  
 O'Hara, Brendan  
 O'Mara, Jared  
 Onn, Melanie  
 Onwurah, Chi  
 Osamor, Kate  
 Owen, Albert  
 Peacock, Stephanie  
 Pearce, Teresa  
 Pennycook, Matthew  
 Perkins, Toby  
 Phillips, Jess  
 Phillipson, Bridget  
 Pidcock, Laura  
 Platt, Jo  
 Pollard, Luke  
 Pound, Stephen  
 Powell, Lucy  
 Qureshi, Yasmin  
 Rashid, Faisal  
 Rayner, Angela  
 Reed, Mr Steve  
 Rees, Christina  
 Reeves, Ellie  
 Reeves, Rachel  
 Reynolds, Emma  
 Reynolds, Jonathan  
 Rimmer, Ms Marie  
 Rodda, Matt  
 Rowley, Danielle  
 Ruane, Chris  
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd  
 Ryan, rh Joan  
 Sandbach, Antoinette

Saville Roberts, Liz  
 Sharma, Mr Virendra  
 Sheerman, Mr Barry  
 Sheppard, Tommy  
 Sherriff, Paula  
 Shuker, Mr Gavin  
 Slaughter, Andy  
 Smeeth, Ruth  
 Smith, Angela  
 Smith, Cat  
 Smith, Eleanor  
 Smith, Jeff  
 Smith, Laura  
 Smith, Nick  
 Smith, Owen  
 Smyth, Karin  
 Snell, Gareth  
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas  
 Sobel, Alex  
 Soubry, rh Anna  
 Spellar, rh John  
 Starmer, rh Keir  
 Stephens, Chris  
 Stevens, Jo  
 Stone, Jamie  
 Streeting, Wes  
 Sweeney, Mr Paul  
 Swinson, Jo  
 Tami, rh Mark  
 Thewliss, Alison  
 Thomas, Gareth  
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick  
 Thornberry, rh Emily  
 Timms, rh Stephen  
 Trickett, Jon  
 Turley, Anna  
 Turner, Karl  
 Twigg, Derek  
 Twigg, Stephen  
 Twist, Liz  
 Umunna, Chuka  
 Vaizey, rh Mr Edward  
 Vaz, Valerie  
 Walker, Thelma  
 Watson, Tom  
 West, Catherine  
 Western, Matt  
 Whitehead, Dr Alan  
 Whitfield, Martin  
 Whitford, Dr Philippa  
 Williams, Hywel  
 Williams, Dr Paul  
 Williamson, Chris  
 Wilson, Phil  
 Wishart, Pete  
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah  
 Yasin, Mohammad  
 Zeichner, Daniel

**Tellers for the Ayes:**  
**Thangam Debbonaire and**  
**Colleen Fletcher**

#### NOES

Adams, Nigel  
 Afolami, Bim  
 Afriyie, Adam  
 Aldous, Peter  
 Allan, Lucy  
 Amess, Sir David

Andrew, Stuart  
 Argar, Edward  
 Atkins, Victoria  
 Bacon, Mr Richard  
 Badenoch, Mrs Kemi  
 Baker, Mr Steve

Baldwin, Harriett  
 Barclay, rh Stephen  
 Baron, Mr John  
 Bellingham, Sir Henry  
 Beresford, Sir Paul  
 Berry, Jake  
 Blackman, Bob  
 Blunt, Crispin  
 Bone, Mr Peter  
 Bottomley, Sir Peter  
 Bowie, Andrew  
 Bradley, Ben  
 Bradley, rh Karen  
 Brady, Sir Graham  
 Braverman, Suella  
 Brereton, Jack  
 Bridgen, Andrew  
 Brine, Steve  
 Brokenshire, rh James  
 Bruce, Fiona  
 Buckland, Robert  
 Burghart, Alex  
 Burns, Conor  
 Burt, rh Alistair  
 Cairns, rh Alun  
 Campbell, Mr Gregory  
 Campbell, Mr Ronnie  
 Cartledge, James  
 Cash, Sir William  
 Caulfield, Maria  
 Chalk, Alex  
 Chishti, Rehman  
 Churchill, Jo  
 Clark, Colin  
 Clark, rh Greg  
 Clarke, Mr Simon  
 Cleverly, James  
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey  
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse  
 Collins, Damian  
 Costa, Alberto  
 Courts, Robert  
 Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey  
 Crabb, rh Stephen  
 Crouch, Tracey  
 Davies, Chris  
 Davies, David T. C.  
 Davies, Glyn  
 Davies, Mims  
 Davies, Philip  
 Davis, rh Mr David  
 Dinenage, Caroline  
 Docherty, Leo  
 Dodds, rh Nigel  
 Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.  
 Donelan, Michelle  
 Double, Steve  
 Dowden, Oliver  
 Doyle-Price, Jackie  
 Drax, Richard  
 Duddridge, James  
 Duguid, David  
 Duncan, rh Sir Alan  
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain  
 Dunne, rh Mr Philip  
 Ellis, Michael  
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias  
 Elphicke, Charlie  
 Eustice, George  
 Evans, Mr Nigel  
 Evennett, rh Sir David  
 Fabricant, Michael

Field, rh Mark  
 Ford, Vicky  
 Foster, Kevin  
 Francois, rh Mr Mark  
 Frazer, Lucy  
 Freer, Mike  
 Fysh, Mr Marcus  
 Gale, rh Sir Roger  
 Garnier, Mark  
 Gauke, rh Mr David  
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat  
 Gibb, rh Nick  
 Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl  
 Girvan, Paul  
 Glen, John  
 Goldsmith, Zac  
 Goodwill, rh Mr Robert  
 Gove, rh Michael  
 Graham, Luke  
 Graham, Richard  
 Grant, Bill  
 Grant, Mrs Helen  
 Gray, James  
 Grayling, rh Chris  
 Green, Chris  
 Green, rh Damian  
 Griffiths, Andrew  
 Hair, Kirstene  
 Halfon, rh Robert  
 Hammond, rh Mr Philip  
 Hammond, Stephen  
 Hancock, rh Matt  
 Hands, rh Greg  
 Harper, rh Mr Mark  
 Harrington, Richard  
 Harris, Rebecca  
 Harrison, Trudy  
 Hart, Simon  
 Hayes, rh Sir John  
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver  
 Heapey, James  
 Heaton-Harris, Chris  
 Heaton-Jones, Peter  
 Henderson, Gordon  
 Herbert, rh Nick  
 Hermon, Lady  
 Hoare, Simon  
 Hoey, Kate  
 Hollinrake, Kevin  
 Hollobone, Mr Philip  
 Holloway, Adam  
 Howell, John  
 Huddleston, Nigel  
 Hughes, Eddie  
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy  
 Hurd, rh Mr Nick  
 Jack, Mr Alister  
 James, Margot  
 Javid, rh Sajid  
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil  
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard  
 Jenkyns, Andrea  
 Jenrick, Robert  
 Johnson, rh Boris  
 Johnson, Dr Caroline  
 Johnson, Gareth  
 Johnson, Joseph  
 Jones, Andrew  
 Jones, rh Mr David  
 Jones, Mr Marcus  
 Kawczynski, Daniel  
 Keegan, Gillian

Kennedy, Seema  
 Kerr, Stephen  
 Knight, rh Sir Greg  
 Knight, Julian  
 Kwarteng, Kwasi  
 Lamont, John  
 Lancaster, rh Mark  
 Latham, Mrs Pauline  
 Leadsom, rh Andrea  
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward  
 Lewer, Andrew  
 Lewis, rh Brandon  
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian  
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian  
 Lidington, rh Mr David  
 Little Pengelly, Emma  
 Lopez, Julia  
 Lopresti, Jack  
 Lord, Mr Jonathan  
 Loughton, Tim  
 Mackinlay, Craig  
 Maclean, Rachel  
 Main, Mrs Anne  
 Mak, Alan  
 Malthouse, Kit  
 Mann, Scott  
 Masterton, Paul  
 Maynard, Paul  
 McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick  
 McPartland, Stephen  
 McVey, rh Ms Esther  
 Menzies, Mark  
 Mercer, Johnny  
 Merriman, Huw  
 Metcalfe, Stephen  
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria  
 Milling, Amanda  
 Mills, Nigel  
 Milton, rh Anne  
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew  
 Moore, Damien  
 Mordaunt, rh Penny  
 Morris, Anne Marie  
 Morris, David  
 Morris, James  
 Mundell, rh David  
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll  
 Murrison, Dr Andrew  
 Newton, Sarah  
 Nokes, rh Caroline  
 Norman, Jesse  
 O'Brien, Neil  
 Offord, Dr Matthew  
 Opperman, Guy  
 Paisley, Ian  
 Parish, Neil  
 Patel, rh Priti  
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen  
 Pawsey, Mark  
 Penning, rh Sir Mike  
 Penrose, John  
 Percy, Andrew  
 Perry, rh Claire  
 Philp, Chris  
 Pincher, rh Christopher  
 Poulter, Dr Dan  
 Prentis, Victoria  
 Prisk, Mr Mark  
 Pritchard, Mark  
 Pursglove, Tom  
 Quin, Jeremy  
 Raab, rh Dominic

Redwood, rh John  
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob  
 Robertson, Mr Laurence  
 Robinson, Gavin  
 Robinson, Mary  
 Rosindell, Andrew  
 Ross, Douglas  
 Rowley, Lee  
 Rudd, rh Amber  
 Rutley, David  
 Scully, Paul  
 Seely, Mr Bob  
 Selous, Andrew  
 Shannon, Jim  
 Shapps, rh Grant  
 Sharma, Alok  
 Shelbrooke, Alec  
 Simpson, David  
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith  
 Skidmore, Chris  
 Smith, Chloe  
 Smith, rh Julian  
 Smith, Royston  
 Spencer, Mark  
 Stephenson, Andrew  
 Stevenson, John  
 Stewart, Bob  
 Stewart, Rory  
 Streeter, Sir Gary  
 Stride, rh Mel  
 Stringer, Graham  
 Stuart, Graham  
 Sturdy, Julian  
 Sunak, Rishi  
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond  
 Swire, rh Sir Hugo  
 Syms, Sir Robert  
 Thomas, Derek  
 Thomson, Ross  
 Throup, Maggie  
 Tolhurst, Kelly  
 Tomlinson, Justin  
 Tomlinson, Michael  
 Tracey, Craig  
 Tredinnick, David  
 Trevelyan, Anne-Marie  
 Truss, rh Elizabeth  
 Tugendhat, Tom  
 Vara, Mr Shailesh  
 Vickers, Martin  
 Villiers, rh Theresa  
 Walker, Mr Charles  
 Walker, Mr Robin  
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben  
 Warburton, David  
 Warman, Matt  
 Watling, Giles  
 Whately, Helen  
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather  
 Whittaker, Craig  
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John  
 Wiggin, Bill  
 Williamson, rh Gavin  
 Wilson, rh Sammy  
 Wood, Mike  
 Wragg, Mr William  
 Wright, rh Jeremy  
 Zahawi, Nadhim

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
**Wendy Morton and**  
**Iain Stewart**

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

*Amendment 7 agreed to.*

*Amendment proposed:* 8, page 67, line 19, at end insert—

“(7) The provisions of this section shall not come into force until the House of Commons has come to a resolution on a motion made by a Minister of the Crown agreeing its commencement.”—(Mr Leslie.)

*Question put, That the amendment be made.*

*The House divided: Ayes 292, Noes 303.*

**Division No. 288]**

**[6.57 pm**

**AYES**

Abbott, rh Ms Diane	Creagh, Mary
Abrahams, Debbie	Creasy, Stella
Ali, Rushanara	Cummins, Judith
Allen, Heidi	Cunningham, Alex
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena	Cunningham, Mr Jim
Amesbury, Mike	Daby, Janet
Antoniazzi, Tonia	Dakin, Nic
Ashworth, Jonathan	Davey, rh Sir Edward
Bailey, Mr Adrian	David, Wayne
Bardell, Hannah	Davies, Geraint
Bebb, Guto	Day, Martyn
Beckett, rh Margaret	De Cordova, Marsha
Benn, rh Hilary	De Piero, Gloria
Berger, Luciana	Dent Coad, Emma
Betts, Mr Clive	Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Black, Mhairi	Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Blackford, rh Ian	Dodds, Anneliese
Blackman, Kirsty	Doughty, Stephen
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta	Dowd, Peter
Blomfield, Paul	Drew, Dr David
Brabin, Tracy	Duffield, Rosie
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben	Eagle, Ms Angela
Brake, rh Tom	Eagle, Maria
Brennan, Kevin	Edwards, Jonathan
Brock, Deidre	Efford, Clive
Brown, Alan	Elliott, Julie
Brown, Lyn	Ellman, Dame Louise
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas	Elmore, Chris
Bryant, Chris	Esterson, Bill
Buck, Ms Karen	Evans, Chris
Burden, Richard	Farrelly, Paul
Burgon, Richard	Farron, Tim
Butler, Dawn	Fellows, Marion
Byrne, rh Liam	Fitzpatrick, Jim
Cable, rh Sir Vince	Fovargue, Yvonne
Cadbury, Ruth	Foxcroft, Vicky
Cameron, Dr Lisa	Frith, James
Campbell, rh Sir Alan	Furniss, Gill
Carden, Dan	Gaffney, Hugh
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair	Gapes, Mike
Champion, Sarah	Gardiner, Barry
Chapman, Douglas	George, Ruth
Chapman, Jenny	Gethins, Stephen
Charalambous, Bambos	Gibson, Patricia
Cherry, Joanna	Gill, Preet Kaur
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth	Glendon, Mary
Clwyd, rh Ann	Godsiff, Mr Roger
Coaker, Vernon	Goodman, Helen
Coffey, Ann	Grady, Patrick
Cooper, Julie	Grant, Peter
Cooper, Rosie	Gray, Neil
Cooper, rh Yvette	Green, Kate
Corbyn, rh Jeremy	Greening, rh Justine
Cowan, Ronnie	Greenwood, Lilian
Coyle, Neil	Greenwood, Margaret
Crawley, Angela	Grieve, rh Mr Dominic



Griffith, Nia  
 Grogan, John  
 Gwynne, Andrew  
 Gyimah, Mr Sam  
 Haigh, Louise  
 Hamilton, Fabian  
 Hanson, rh David  
 Hardy, Emma  
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet  
 Harris, Carolyn  
 Hayes, Helen  
 Hayman, Sue  
 Healey, rh John  
 Hendrick, Sir Mark  
 Hendry, Drew  
 Hepburn, Mr Stephen  
 Hill, Mike  
 Hillier, Meg  
 Hobhouse, Wera  
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon  
 Hollern, Kate  
 Hopkins, Kelvin  
 Hosie, Stewart  
 Huq, Dr Rupa  
 Hussain, Imran  
 Jardine, Christine  
 Johnson, Diana  
 Jones, Darren  
 Jones, Gerald  
 Jones, Helen  
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan  
 Jones, Sarah  
 Jones, Susan Elan  
 Kane, Mike  
 Keeley, Barbara  
 Kendall, Liz  
 Khan, Afzal  
 Killen, Ged  
 Kinnock, Stephen  
 Kyle, Peter  
 Laird, Lesley  
 Lake, Ben  
 Lamb, rh Norman  
 Lammy, rh Mr David  
 Lavery, Ian  
 Law, Chris  
 Lee, Karen  
 Lee, Dr Phillip  
 Leslie, Mr Chris  
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma  
 Lewis, Clive  
 Lewis, Mr Ivan  
 Linden, David  
 Lloyd, Stephen  
 Lloyd, Tony  
 Long Bailey, Rebecca  
 Lucas, Caroline  
 Lucas, Ian C.  
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan  
 Madders, Justin  
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid  
 Mahmood, Shabana  
 Malhotra, Seema  
 Marsden, Gordon  
 Martin, Sandy  
 Maskell, Rachael  
 Matheson, Christian  
 Mc Nally, John  
 McCabe, Steve  
 McCarthy, Kerry  
 McDonagh, Siobhain  
 McDonald, Andy

McDonald, Stewart Malcolm  
 McDonald, Stuart C.  
 McDonnell, rh John  
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat  
 McGinn, Conor  
 McGovern, Alison  
 McInnes, Liz  
 McKinnell, Catherine  
 McMahon, Jim  
 McMorrin, Anna  
 Mearns, Ian  
 Miliband, rh Edward  
 Monaghan, Carol  
 Moran, Layla  
 Morden, Jessica  
 Morgan, rh Nicky  
 Morgan, Stephen  
 Morris, Grahame  
 Murray, Ian  
 Newlands, Gavin  
 Norris, Alex  
 O'Hara, Brendan  
 O'Mara, Jared  
 Onn, Melanie  
 Onwurah, Chi  
 Osamor, Kate  
 Owen, Albert  
 Peacock, Stephanie  
 Pearce, Teresa  
 Pennycook, Matthew  
 Perkins, Toby  
 Phillips, Jess  
 Phillipson, Bridget  
 Pidcock, Laura  
 Platt, Jo  
 Pollard, Luke  
 Pound, Stephen  
 Powell, Lucy  
 Qureshi, Yasmin  
 Rashid, Faisal  
 Rayner, Angela  
 Reed, Mr Steve  
 Rees, Christina  
 Reeves, Ellie  
 Reeves, Rachel  
 Reynolds, Emma  
 Reynolds, Jonathan  
 Rimmer, Ms Marie  
 Rodda, Matt  
 Rowley, Danielle  
 Ruane, Chris  
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd  
 Ryan, rh Joan  
 Saville Roberts, Liz  
 Sharma, Mr Virendra  
 Sheerman, Mr Barry  
 Sheppard, Tommy  
 Sherriff, Paula  
 Shuker, Mr Gavin  
 Slaughter, Andy  
 Smeeth, Ruth  
 Smith, Angela  
 Smith, Cat  
 Smith, Eleanor  
 Smith, Jeff  
 Smith, Laura  
 Smith, Nick  
 Smith, Owen  
 Smyth, Karin  
 Sobel, Alex  
 Soubry, rh Anna  
 Spellar, rh John

Starmer, rh Keir  
 Stephens, Chris  
 Stevens, Jo  
 Stone, Jamie  
 Streeting, Wes  
 Sweeney, Mr Paul  
 Swinson, Jo  
 Tami, rh Mark  
 Thewliss, Alison  
 Thomas, Gareth  
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick  
 Thornberry, rh Emily  
 Timms, rh Stephen  
 Trickett, Jon  
 Turley, Anna  
 Turner, Karl  
 Twigg, Derek  
 Twigg, Stephen  
 Twist, Liz  
 Umunna, Chuka

Adams, Nigel  
 Afolami, Bim  
 Afriyie, Adam  
 Aldous, Peter  
 Allan, Lucy  
 Amess, Sir David  
 Andrew, Stuart  
 Argar, Edward  
 Atkins, Victoria  
 Bacon, Mr Richard  
 Badenoch, Mrs Kemi  
 Baker, Mr Steve  
 Baldwin, Harriett  
 Barclay, rh Stephen  
 Baron, Mr John  
 Bellingham, Sir Henry  
 Benyon, rh Richard  
 Beresford, Sir Paul  
 Berry, Jake  
 Blackman, Bob  
 Blunt, Crispin  
 Boles, Nick  
 Bone, Mr Peter  
 Bottomley, Sir Peter  
 Bowie, Andrew  
 Bradley, Ben  
 Bradley, rh Karen  
 Brady, Sir Graham  
 Braverman, Suella  
 Brereton, Jack  
 Bridgen, Andrew  
 Brine, Steve  
 Brokenshire, rh James  
 Bruce, Fiona  
 Buckland, Robert  
 Burghart, Alex  
 Burns, Conor  
 Burt, rh Alistair  
 Cairns, rh Alun  
 Campbell, Mr Gregory  
 Campbell, Mr Ronnie  
 Cartledge, James  
 Cash, Sir William  
 Caulfield, Maria  
 Chalk, Alex  
 Chishti, Rehman  
 Chope, Sir Christopher  
 Churchill, Jo  
 Clark, Colin

Vaz, Valerie  
 Walker, Thelma  
 Watson, Tom  
 West, Catherine  
 Western, Matt  
 Whitehead, Dr Alan  
 Whitfield, Martin  
 Whitford, Dr Philippa  
 Williams, Hywel  
 Williams, Dr Paul  
 Williamson, Chris  
 Wilson, Phil  
 Wishart, Pete  
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah  
 Yasin, Mohammad  
 Zeichner, Daniel

**Tellers for the Ayes:**  
**Thangam Debonaie and**  
**Colleen Fletcher**

#### NOES

Clark, rh Greg  
 Clarke, Mr Simon  
 Cleverly, James  
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey  
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse  
 Collins, Damian  
 Costa, Alberto  
 Courts, Robert  
 Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey  
 Crabb, rh Stephen  
 Crouch, Tracey  
 Davies, Chris  
 Davies, David T. C.  
 Davies, Glyn  
 Davies, Mims  
 Davies, Philip  
 Davis, rh Mr David  
 Dinenage, Caroline  
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan  
 Docherty, Leo  
 Dodds, rh Nigel  
 Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.  
 Donelan, Michelle  
 Double, Steve  
 Dowden, Oliver  
 Doyle-Price, Jackie  
 Drax, Richard  
 Duddridge, James  
 Duguid, David  
 Duncan, rh Sir Alan  
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain  
 Dunne, rh Mr Philip  
 Ellis, Michael  
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias  
 Elphicke, Charlie  
 Eustice, George  
 Evans, Mr Nigel  
 Evennett, rh Sir David  
 Fabricant, Michael  
 Fallon, rh Sir Michael  
 Field, rh Mark  
 Ford, Vicky  
 Foster, Kevin  
 Francois, rh Mr Mark  
 Frazer, Lucy  
 Freer, Mike  
 Fysh, Mr Marcus  
 Gale, rh Sir Roger  
 Garnier, Mark

Gauke, rh Mr David  
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat  
 Gibb, rh Nick  
 Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl  
 Girvan, Paul  
 Glen, John  
 Goldsmith, Zac  
 Goodwill, rh Mr Robert  
 Gove, rh Michael  
 Graham, Luke  
 Graham, Richard  
 Grant, Bill  
 Grant, Mrs Helen  
 Gray, James  
 Grayling, rh Chris  
 Green, Chris  
 Green, rh Damian  
 Griffiths, Andrew  
 Hair, Kirstene  
 Halfon, rh Robert  
 Hammond, rh Mr Philip  
 Hammond, Stephen  
 Hancock, rh Matt  
 Hands, rh Greg  
 Harper, rh Mr Mark  
 Harrington, Richard  
 Harris, Rebecca  
 Harrison, Trudy  
 Hart, Simon  
 Hayes, rh Sir John  
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver  
 Heappey, James  
 Heaton-Harris, Chris  
 Heaton-Jones, Peter  
 Henderson, Gordon  
 Herbert, rh Nick  
 Hermon, Lady  
 Hoare, Simon  
 Hoey, Kate  
 Hollinrake, Kevin  
 Hollobone, Mr Philip  
 Holloway, Adam  
 Howell, John  
 Huddleston, Nigel  
 Hughes, Eddie  
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy  
 Hurd, rh Mr Nick  
 Jack, Mr Alister  
 James, Margot  
 Javid, rh Sajid  
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil  
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard  
 Jenkyns, Andrea  
 Jenrick, Robert  
 Johnson, rh Boris  
 Johnson, Dr Caroline  
 Johnson, Gareth  
 Jones, Andrew  
 Jones, rh Mr David  
 Jones, Mr Marcus  
 Kawczynski, Daniel  
 Keegan, Gillian  
 Kennedy, Seema  
 Kerr, Stephen  
 Knight, rh Sir Greg  
 Knight, Julian  
 Kwarteng, Kwasi  
 Lamont, John  
 Lancaster, rh Mark  
 Latham, Mrs Pauline  
 Leadsom, rh Andrea  
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward  
 Letwin, rh Sir Oliver  
 Lewer, Andrew  
 Lewis, rh Brandon  
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian  
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian  
 Lidington, rh Mr David  
 Little Pengelly, Emma  
 Lopez, Julia  
 Lopresti, Jack  
 Lord, Mr Jonathan  
 Loughton, Tim  
 Mackinlay, Craig  
 Maclean, Rachel  
 Main, Mrs Anne  
 Mak, Alan  
 Malthouse, Kit  
 Mann, Scott  
 Masterton, Paul  
 Maynard, Paul  
 McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick  
 McPartland, Stephen  
 McVey, rh Ms Esther  
 Menzies, Mark  
 Mercer, Johnny  
 Merriman, Huw  
 Metcalfe, Stephen  
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria  
 Milling, Amanda  
 Mills, Nigel  
 Milton, rh Anne  
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew  
 Moore, Damien  
 Mordaunt, rh Penny  
 Morris, Anne Marie  
 Morris, David  
 Morris, James  
 Mundell, rh David  
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll  
 Murrison, Dr Andrew  
 Neill, Robert  
 Newton, Sarah  
 Nokes, rh Caroline  
 Norman, Jesse  
 O'Brien, Neil  
 Offord, Dr Matthew  
 Opperman, Guy  
 Paisley, Ian  
 Parish, Neil  
 Patel, rh Priti  
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen  
 Pawsey, Mark  
 Penning, rh Sir Mike  
 Penrose, John  
 Percy, Andrew  
 Perry, rh Claire  
 Philp, Chris  
 Pincher, rh Christopher  
 Poulter, Dr Dan  
 Prentis, Victoria  
 Prisk, Mr Mark  
 Pritchard, Mark  
 Pursglove, Tom  
 Quin, Jeremy  
 Raab, rh Dominic  
 Redwood, rh John  
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob  
 Robertson, Mr Laurence  
 Robinson, Gavin  
 Robinson, Mary  
 Rosindell, Andrew  
 Ross, Douglas  
 Rowley, Lee

Rudd, rh Amber  
 Rutley, David  
 Scully, Paul  
 Seely, Mr Bob  
 Selous, Andrew  
 Shannon, Jim  
 Shapps, rh Grant  
 Sharma, Alok  
 Shelbrooke, Alec  
 Simpson, David  
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith  
 Skidmore, Chris  
 Smith, Chloe  
 Smith, rh Julian  
 Smith, Royston  
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas  
 Spencer, Mark  
 Stephenson, Andrew  
 Stevenson, John  
 Stewart, Bob  
 Stewart, Rory  
 Streeter, Sir Gary  
 Stride, rh Mel  
 Stringer, Graham  
 Stuart, Graham  
 Sturdy, Julian  
 Sunak, Rishi  
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond  
 Swire, rh Sir Hugo  
 Syms, Sir Robert  
 Thomas, Derek  
 Thomson, Ross  
 Throup, Maggie  
 Tolhurst, Kelly  
 Tomlinson, Justin  
 Tomlinson, Michael  
 Tracey, Craig  
 Tredinnick, David  
 Trevelyan, Anne-Marie  
 Truss, rh Elizabeth  
 Tugendhat, Tom  
 Vara, Mr Shailesh  
 Vickers, Martin  
 Villiers, rh Theresa  
 Walker, Mr Charles  
 Walker, Mr Robin  
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben  
 Warburton, David  
 Warman, Matt  
 Watling, Giles  
 Whately, Helen  
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather  
 Whittaker, Craig  
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John  
 Wiggins, Bill  
 Williamson, rh Gavin  
 Wilson, rh Sammy  
 Wood, Mike  
 Wragg, Mr William  
 Wright, rh Jeremy  
 Zahawi, Nadhim  
**Tellers for the Noes:**  
 Wendy Morton and  
 Iain Stewart

*Question accordingly negated.*

**The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Jesse Norman):** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I understand that in the previous debate there was some unhappy and unfortunate talk about the potential for the M3 to be closed in connection with a lorry park. I want to put it on the record, from the Government's perspective, that the Government have absolutely no intention whatever of closing the M3 in connection with a lorry park. Therefore, the record should stand corrected as from now.

**Mr Speaker:** I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for what he has said, which is on the record and will be widely observed.

**Mr Marcus Jones (Nuneaton) (Con):** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Several media outlets are quoting that I have signed a letter to the Prime Minister saying that I will vote against a no-deal Brexit. I would like to put it on the record that this is not correct. Can you advise me whether it is in order for a Member of this House to put another Member's name to a letter when they have not given their consent to doing so? Given the febrile environment at the moment, can you make the point to the media that they should check their facts before they publish such information?

**Mr Speaker:** The hon. Gentleman arrogates to me almost superhuman powers if he thinks that I can advise the media upon the imperative of first checking facts before printing a story. I appreciate his confidence in me, but I fear that he has an assessment of my capabilities that is sadly unmatched by the reality. Nevertheless, he has put his point on the record, and doubtless he will circulate it more widely amongst the people of Nuneaton.

## New Clause 2

### REVIEW OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ENTREPRENEURS' RELIEF

“(1) Within twelve months of the passing of this Act, the Chancellor of the Exchequer must review the effectiveness of the changes made to entrepreneurs’ relief by Schedule 15, against the stated policy aims of that relief.

- (2) A review under this section must consider—
- the overall number of entrepreneurs in the UK,
  - the annual cost of entrepreneurs’ relief,
  - the annual number of claimants per year,
  - the average cost of relief paid per claim, and
  - the impact on productivity in the UK economy.”—

(Anneliese Dodds.)

*This new clause would require the Chancellor of the Exchequer to review the effectiveness of the changes made to entrepreneurs’ relief by Schedule 15.*

*Brought up, and read the First time.*

**Anneliese Dodds** (Oxford East) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

**Mr Speaker:** With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

New clause 9—*Review of changes to entrepreneurs’ relief*—

“(1) The Chancellor of the Exchequer must review the impact on investment in parts of the United Kingdom and regions of England of the changes made to entrepreneur’s relief by Schedule 15 to this Act and lay a report of that review before the House of Commons within six months of the passing of this Act.

- (2) A review under this section must consider—
- the effects of the provisions on business investment,
  - the effects of the provisions on employment, and
  - the effects of the provisions on productivity.

- (3) In this section—
- “parts of the United Kingdom” means—
- England,
  - Scotland,
  - Wales, and
  - Northern Ireland;
- “regions of England” has the same meaning as that used by the Office for National Statistics.”

*This new clause would require a review of the impact on investment of the changes made to entrepreneurs’ relief which extend the minimum qualifying period from 12 months to 2 years.*

New clause 10—*Review of geographical effects of provisions of section 9*—

“The Chancellor of the Exchequer must review the differential geographical effects of the changes made by section 9 and lay a report of that review before the House of Commons within six months of the passing of this Act.”

*This new clause would require a geographical impact assessment of income tax exemptions relating to private use of an emergency vehicle.*

New clause 16—*Personal allowance*—

“The Chancellor of the Exchequer must, no later than 5 April 2019, lay before the House of Commons an analysis of the distributional and other effects of a personal allowance in 2019-20 of £12,750.”

*This new clause would require a distributional analysis of increasing the personal allowance to £12,750.*

New clause 17—*Review of changes to capital allowances*—

“(1) The Chancellor of the Exchequer must review the effect of the changes to capital allowances in sections 29 to 34 and Schedule 12 in each part of the United Kingdom and each region of England and lay a report of that review before the House of Commons within six months of the passing of this Act.

(2) A review under this section must consider the effects of the changes on—

- business investment,
- employment, and
- productivity.

(3) The review must also estimate the effects on the changes if—

- the UK leaves the European Union without a negotiated withdrawal agreement
- the UK leaves the European Union following a negotiated withdrawal agreement, and remains in the single market and customs union, or
- the UK leaves the European Union following a negotiated withdrawal agreement, and does not remain in the single market and customs union.

- (4) In this section—
- “parts of the United Kingdom” means—
- England,
  - Scotland,
  - Wales, and
  - Northern Ireland;

“regions of England” has the same meaning as that used by the Office for National Statistics.”

*This new clause would require a review of the impact on investment, employment and productivity of the changes to capital allowance in the event of: Brexit with no deal; Brexit with single market and customs union membership; Brexit without single market and customs union membership.*

New clause 24—*Review of changes to capital allowances* (No. 2)—

“(1) The Chancellor of the Exchequer must review the effects of the changes made by sections 29 and 30 of this Act within six months of the passing of this Act.

(2) A review under this section must include an assessment of—

- the cost to the Exchequer of these changes,
- changes to business behaviour that are likely to arise as result from these changes, including (but not limited to) levels of business investment in buildings, plant and machinery, and
- the impact of these changes on businesses in regions of England.

(3) A review under this section must compare these assessments, so far as practicable, with an assessment of the impact of replacing non-domestic rates in England with a tax on the value of commercial land.

(4) In this section, “regions of England” has the same meaning as that used by the Office of National Statistics.”

*This new clause would require the Government to assess the effects on businesses and the public finances of new capital reliefs introduced by this Act and require the Government to compare these reliefs with replacing business rates with a tax on commercial land values.*

Amendment 12, in clause 5, page 2, line 24, leave out subsection (4)

*This amendment would delete provisions removing the legal link between the personal allowance and the national minimum wage.*

Government amendment 2.

Amendment 34, in schedule 15, page 297, line 42, leave out “29 October 2018” and insert “6 April 2019”.



*Amendment 34, along with Amendment 35, would remove the retrospective effect of the new qualifying conditions for entrepreneurs relief.*

Government amendment 3.

Amendment 35, in schedule 15, page 298, line 10, at end insert—

“(6) In relation to disposals on or after 29 October 2018, the amendments made by this Schedule to the definition of “personal company” do not apply in relation to any day before 29 October 2018.”

*See Amendment 34.*

**New clause 4—Review of late payment interest rates in respect of promoters of tax avoidance schemes—**

“(1) The Chancellor of the Exchequer must review the viability of increasing any relevant interest rate charged by virtue of the specified provisions on the late payment of penalties for the promoters of tax avoidance schemes to 6.1% per annum and lay a report of that review before the House of Commons within six months of the passing of this Act.

(2) In this section, “the specified provisions” means—

- (a) section 178 of FA 1989, and
- (b) sections 101 to 103 of FA 2009.”

*This new clause would require the Chancellor of the Exchequer to review the viability of increasing interest rates on the late payment of penalties for the promoters of tax avoidance schemes to 6.1%.*

**New clause 15—Report on consultation on certain provisions of this Act (No. 4)—**

“(1) No later than two months after the passing of this Act, the Chancellor of the Exchequer must lay before the House of Commons a report on the consultation undertaken on the provisions in subsection (2).

(2) Those provisions are—

- (a) section 15 and Schedule 3,
- (b) section 16 and Schedule 4,
- (c) sections 19 and 20,
- (d) section 22 and Schedule 7,
- (e) section 23 and Schedule 8,
- (f) sections 46 and 47,
- (g) section 83.

(3) A report under this section must specify in respect of each provision listed in subsection (2)—

- (a) whether a version of the provision was published in draft,
- (b) if so, whether changes were made as a result of consultation on the draft, (c) if not, the reasons why the provision was not published in draft and any consultation which took place on the proposed provision in the absence of such a draft.”

*This new clause would require a report on the consultation undertaken on certain provisions of the Bill – alongside New Clause 11, New Clause 13 and New Clause 14.*

**Government new clause 6—Intangible fixed assets: restrictions on goodwill and certain other assets.**

**New clause 8—Review of changes to Oil activities and petroleum revenue tax—**

“(1) The Chancellor of the Exchequer must review the effect of the changes to Oil activities and petroleum revenue tax in sections 36 and 37 and Schedule 14 in Scotland and the United Kingdom as a whole and lay a report of that review before the House of Commons within six months of the passing of this Act.

(2) A review under this section must consider the effects of the changes on—

- (a) business investment,
- (b) employment, and
- (c) productivity.”

*This new clause would require the Government to review and publish a report on the investment, employment and productivity impact of the Bill's fiscal measures on the North Sea sector.*

**New clause 11—Report on consultation on certain provisions of this Act—**

“(1) No later than two months after the passing of this Act, the Chancellor of the Exchequer must lay before the House of Commons a report on the consultation undertaken on the provisions in subsection (2).

(2) Those provisions are—

- (a) section 5,
- (b) section 6,
- (c) section 8,
- (d) section 9,
- (e) section 10,
- (f) Schedule 15,
- (g) section 39,
- (h) section 40,
- (i) section 41, and
- (j) section 42.

(3) A report under this section must specify in respect of each provision listed in subsection (2)—

- (a) whether a version of the provision was published in draft,
- (b) if so, whether changes were made as a result of consultation on the draft, and
- (c) if not, the reasons why the provision was not published in draft and any consultation which took place on the proposed provision in the absence of such a draft.”

*This new clause would require a report on the consultation undertaken on certain provisions of the Bill – alongside New Clause 13, New Clause 14 and New Clause 15.*

**New clause 14—Report on consultation on certain provisions of this Act (No. 3)—**

“(1) No later than two months after the passing of this Act, the Chancellor of the Exchequer must lay before the House of Commons a report on the consultation undertaken on the provisions in subsection (2).

(2) Those provisions are—

- (a) section 61, and
- (b) Schedule 18.

(3) A report under this section must specify in respect of each provision listed in subsection (2)—

- (a) whether a version of the provision was published in draft,
- (b) if so, whether changes were made as a result of consultation on the draft,
- (c) if not, the reasons why the provision was not published in draft and any consultation which took place on the proposed provision in the absence of such a draft.”

*This new clause would require a report on the consultation undertaken on certain provisions of the Bill – alongside New Clause 11, New Clause 13 and New Clause 15.*

**New clause 23—Review of income tax revenue—**

“(1) The Office for Budget Responsibility must review the revenue raised by income tax within six months of the passing of this Act.

(2) A review under this section must consider revenue raised by—

- (a) the rates of income tax specified in sections 3 and 4, combined with
- (b) the basic rate limit and personal allowance specified in section 5.

(3) A review under this section must also consider the effect on revenue of—

- (a) raising each of the rates of income tax specified in sections 3 and 4 by one percentage point, and
- (b) setting the basic rate limit for the tax years 2019-20 and 2020-21 at £33,850.

(4) A review under this section must also include a distributional analysis of the effect of introducing the policies specified in paragraphs (3)(a) and (3)(b).

(5) The Chancellor of the Exchequer must lay before the House of Commons the report of the review under this section as soon as practicable after its completion.”

*This new clause would require the OBR to estimate how much money would be raised by increasing all rates of income tax by 1p and freezing the higher rate threshold.*

New clause 26—*Review of changes made by sections 79 and 80—*

“(1) The Chancellor of the Exchequer must review the effects of the changes made by sections 79 and 80 to TMA 1970, and lay a report on that review before the House of Commons not later than 30 March 2019.

(2) The review under this section must include a comparison of the time limit on proceedings for the recovery of lost tax that involves an offshore matter with other time limits on proceedings for the recovery of lost tax, including, but not limited to, those provided for by Schedules 11 and 12 to the Finance (No. 2) Act 2017.

(3) The review under this section must also consider the extent to which provisions equivalent to section 36A(7)(b) of TMA 1970 (relating to reasonable expectations) apply to the application of other time limits.”

*This new clause would require the Treasury to review the effect of the changes made by sections 79 and 80 and compare them with other legislation relating to the recovery of lost tax including specifically the loan charge provisions of Schedules 11 and 12 to the Finance (No. 2) Act 2017.*

Government new schedule 1—*Intangible fixed assets: restrictions on goodwill and certain other assets.*

Government amendments 4 to 6.

Amendment 22, in clause 53, page 34, line 14, at end insert—

“(5) The Chancellor of the Exchequer must review the expected effects on public health of the changes made to the Alcoholic Liquor Duties Act 1979 by this section and lay a report of that review before the House of Commons within one year of the passing of this Act.”

*This amendment would require the Chancellor of the Exchequer to review the impact of the revised rates on cider and wine on public health.*

Amendment 23, in clause 60, page 44, line 17, at end insert—

“(3) The Chancellor of the Exchequer must review the effects of a reduction in air passenger duty rates from 1 April 2020 and lay a report of that review before the House of Commons within six months of the passing of this Act.

(4) A review under subsection (3) must in consider the effects of a reduction on—

- (a) airlines,
- (b) airport operators,
- (c) other businesses, and
- (d) passengers.”

*This amendment would require the Chancellor of the Exchequer to review the effects of a reduction in air passenger duty.*

Amendment 36, in clause 79, page 52, line 24, leave out “12 years” and insert “8 years”.

*Amendments 36 to 45 would reduce the time limits HMRC have to make an assessment of income tax or capital gains tax (Clause 79) and inheritance tax (Clause 80) to eight years, rather than 12 years, where there is non-deliberate offshore tax non-compliance.*

Amendment 37, page 52, line 27, at end insert—

“(2A) Where the loss of tax is brought about carelessly by the taxpayer, an assessment may be made at any time not more than 12 years after the end of the year of assessment to which the lost tax relates. This is subject to section 36(1A) above and any other provision of the Taxes Acts allowing a longer period.”

*See Amendment 36.*

Amendment 38, page 53, line 22, after “(2)” insert “or (2A)”.

*See Amendment 36.*

Amendment 39, page 53, line 28, at end insert—

“(7A) An assessment may also not be made under subsection (2) or (2A) if—

- (a) before the time limit that would otherwise apply for making the assessment, information is made available to HMRC by the taxpayer on the basis of which HMRC could reasonably have been expected to become aware of the lost tax, and
- (b) it was reasonable to expect the assessment to be made before that time limit.”

*See Amendment 36.*

Amendment 40, page 53, line 34, at end insert—

“(8A) Subsection (7A) will not apply in cases where the taxpayer is subsequently found to have failed to provide all relevant information available to HMRC, or to have provided misleading information.

(8B) For the purposes of subsection (7A), whether information has been made available to HMRC is to be determined in line with section 29(6) above.”

*See Amendment 36.*

Amendment 41, page 53, line 35, after “(2)” insert “or (2A)”.

*See Amendment 36.*

Amendment 25, page 54, line 1, leave out “2013-14” and insert “2019-20”.

*This amendment, alongside Amendment 26, would mean that new section 36A of the Taxes Management Act 1970 did not apply retrospectively.*

Amendment 26, page 54, line 5, leave out “2015-16” and insert “2019-20”.

*This amendment, alongside Amendment 25, would mean that new section 36A of the Taxes Management Act 1970 did not apply retrospectively.*

Amendment 42, in clause 80, page 54, line 19, leave out “12 years” and insert “8 years”.

*See Amendment 36.*

Amendment 43, page 54, line 20, at end insert—

“(2A) Where the loss of tax is brought about carelessly by a person liable for the tax (or a person acting on behalf of such a person), proceedings for the recovery of the lost tax may be brought at any time not more than 12 years after the later of the dates in section 240(2)(a) and (b).”

*See Amendment 36.*

Amendment 44, page 55, line 2, at end insert—

“(7A) Proceedings may also not be brought under this section if—

- (a) before the last date on which the proceedings could otherwise be brought, information is made available to HMRC by a person liable for the tax (or a person acting on behalf of such a person) on the basis of which HMRC could reasonably have been expected to become aware of the lost tax, and
- (b) it was reasonable to expect the proceedings to be brought before that date.”

*See Amendment 36.*

Amendment 45, page 55, line 8, at end insert—

“(8A) Subsection (7A) will not apply in cases where a person liable for the tax (or a person acting on behalf of such a person) is subsequently found to have failed to provide all relevant information available to HMRC, or to have provided misleading information.

(8B) For the purposes of subsection (7A), whether information has been made available to HMRC is to be determined in line with section 29(6) TMA 1970.”

See Amendment 36.

Amendment 27, in clause 82, page 58, line 9, leave out from “section” to “may” in line 10.

*This amendment would provide for all regulations under the new power (EU double taxation directive) to be subject to the affirmative procedure.*

Amendment 28, page 58, leave out lines 13 to 17.

See Amendment 27.

Amendment 18, in schedule 1, page 148, line 34, at end insert—

“21A The Chancellor of the Exchequer must review the expected revenue effects of the changes made to TCGA 1992 in this Schedule, along with an estimate of the difference between the amount of tax required to be paid to the Commissioners under those provisions and the amount paid, and lay a report of that review before the House of Commons within six months of the passing of this Act.”

*This amendment would require the Chancellor of the Exchequer to review the effect on public finances, and on reducing the tax gap, of the changes made to capital gains tax in Schedule 1.*

Amendment 17, in schedule 2, page 177, line 21, at end insert—

## “PART 1A

### REVIEW OF EFFECTS ON PUBLIC FINANCES

17A The Chancellor of the Exchequer must review the expected revenue effects of the changes made to capital gains tax returns and payments on account in this in this Schedule, along with an estimate of the difference between the amount of tax required to be paid to the Commissioners under those provisions and the amount paid, and lay a report of that review before the House of Commons within six months of the passing of this Act.”

*This amendment would require the Chancellor of the Exchequer to review the effect on public finances, and on reducing the tax gap, of the changes made to capital gains tax in Schedule 2.*

Amendment 29, page 177, line 42, at end insert

“unless the amendment relates to a disposal of an asset or assets resulting in a capital loss between the completion date of the disposal in respect of which the return is made and the end of the tax year in which the disposal is made.

(2A) In that case, an amendment may be made to take into account any capital losses which have arisen after the completion date and within the same tax year.”

*This amendment would allow UK residents to submit an amended residential property return where a capital loss on non-residential assets is incurred after the completion of the residential disposal and within the same tax year.*

Amendment 19, in schedule 5, page 211, line 45, at end insert—

## “PART 2A

### REVIEW OF EFFECTS ON PUBLIC FINANCES

34A (1) The Chancellor of the Exchequer must review the revenue effects of this Schedule and lay a report of that review before the House of Commons within six months of the passing of this Act.

(2) The review under sub-paragraph (1) must consider—

- (a) the expected change in corporation tax paid attributable to the provisions in this Schedule, and
- (b) an estimate of any change, attributable to the provisions in this Schedule, in the difference between the amount of tax required to be paid to the Commissioners and the amount paid.”

*This amendment would require the Chancellor of the Exchequer to review the effect on public finances, and on reducing the tax gap, of Schedule 5.*

Amendment 21, in schedule 6, page 221, line 26, at end insert—

“13 The Chancellor of the Exchequer must review the expected change to payments of Diverted Profits Tax and any associated changes to overall payments made to the Commissioners arising from the provisions of this Schedule, and lay a report of that review before the House of Commons within 6 months of the passing of this Act.”

*This amendment would require the Chancellor of the Exchequer to review the effect on public finances of the diverted profits tax provisions in the Bill.*

**Anneliese Dodds:** As my hon. Friends have set out a number of times already today, this is a Finance Bill that continues the Government’s previous programme of austerity for the many while the very best-off people are protected. This Conservative Government chose to tie the hands of this House with regard to amending the Bill, so there are very few means we can adopt to have an impact on any of these measures. None the less, new clauses 2 and 4 would require the Government to at least review their regressive policy approach. I realise that I need to compress my remarks, so I will speak briefly to each of those new clauses and then to new clause 26, which pushes in the same direction, and new schedule 1, which in many respects exemplifies this Government’s slipshod approach, particularly to tax policy making.

7.15 pm

New clause 2 would require a review of the likely efficacy or otherwise of the Government’s very minor changes to entrepreneurs’ relief set out in the Bill. Overall, it has been estimated that the revenue forgone through tax reliefs amounts to the same as all the revenue raised through corporation and council tax, business rates, fuel duty and stamp duty. A full £2.7 billion of that forgone revenue comprises entrepreneurs’ relief.

The official Opposition are committed to properly reviewing tax reliefs as forgone revenue, to ensure that they are appropriately targeted to achieve public policy outcomes. No such analysis has been conducted by this Government, including of entrepreneurs’ relief, despite the fact that there is little evidence that it promotes entrepreneurialism or productivity to any large extent. Indeed, just 6,000 people receive entrepreneurs’ relief on gains of more than £1 million. Independent bodies such as the IFS and the Resolution Foundation have thus been deeply critical of it. At the very least, we need to know whether the Government’s reforms in the Bill are anything more than cosmetic. That is what new clause 2 asks for.

Beyond the apparently limited changes to entrepreneurs’ relief, the Bill includes a number of cases where those with the broadest shoulders are exempted from their contribution to taxation. I will just mention three. First, a proportional rather than absolute value is used to exempt non-residents from the anti-enveloping rule,



which means they will be less likely than residents to be subject to capital gains tax. That is a farce, given that the measure was meant to ensure a level playing field. Secondly, the Bill has a new discriminatory trading exemption for capital gains tax that is available only to non-UK investors. Finally, we see the imposition of longer investigatory time limits for offshore tax affairs for income and inheritance tax, but not for corporation tax, thus privileging those who can incorporate and large multinational corporations.

New clause 4 is an attempt to highlight the systematic bias in the Government's approach by contrasting the level of interest paid on penalties incurred by tax avoidance promoters with the interest payable on student loans. I am sure that many Members have seen the research released by the TUC yesterday, which highlighted the fact that households are now subject to record levels of debt. The research indicated that, excluding mortgages, average debt per household shot up by £886 last year to a new peak of £15,385.

Peculiarly, some people have tried to criticise that analysis by pointing out that it includes student loan debt, but surely we should all be deeply concerned by the fact that so many young people face such a mountain of debt, which is what it feels like. As I am sure many Members have heard from their constituents, we now have a situation where former students work incredibly hard all year and try to pay off their loan, but it is larger at the end of the year than it was at the beginning because of the interest rate of 6.1%. Let us compare that with the current interest rate on late payment of penalties for promoters of tax avoidance schemes. That interest rate, I am sure Members will be interested to hear, is 3.25%. It is essential that the Government look into that carefully. We will not press new clause 4 to a vote, but we hope the Government will look into that in much more detail than they have up to now.

Under this Government, there is often one rule for the very best-off and another rule for everyone else. That is what we see when it comes to the loan charge, which is covered by new clause 26. The activities targeted by the loan charge were a form of tax avoidance, but the Government's approach to dealing with them has been deeply unfair.

**Anna Turley (Redcar)** (Lab/Co-op): Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Anneliese Dodds:** I do not believe I can, as I have been told that I have to proceed quickly.

For many years, the Government failed to take action, before clamping down purely on taxpayers and doing little to nothing to the enablers of this form of tax avoidance. I hope the Minister will be clear about this. He has talked about the promotion of defective schemes. When taxpayers are described as having done something illegal, which is what HMRC has said about the behaviour of those subject to the loan charge, why will the Government not say that those who promoted those schemes also promoted something illegal? They use this language about defective systems. I am sorry, but that is pusillanimous. Those who were unwittingly led into schemes that are now described as illegal must themselves be able to take action against those who wrongly advised them.

I hope that the Minister will look at that very carefully and accept the new clause. If he does not, I hope that he will accept my backstop, to coin a phrase, and have a

meeting with me. I am glad he has intimated that he may be willing to do so to talk about how we can better help people who have ended up in a very difficult situation—some of them with their eyes wide open, but many of them not realising the impact of these schemes.

**Nicky Morgan:** I rise to speak briefly—I know time is short in this debate—about new clause 26. For the avoidance of doubt among those on the Treasury Bench, I will not be supporting the new clause, but, as Chair of the Treasury Committee, I want to put on the record some concerns about the loan charge on behalf of the many individuals who have contacted the Committee and of the Committee members who have expressed concerns about it. I hope that Ministers will listen and engage with MPs across the House on this issue.

The Committee has raised concerns about the loan charge in evidence sessions with my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, and with HMRC and the Chartered Institute of Taxation. As the hon. Member for Oxford East (Anneliese Dodds) said, it is right that people should pay their fair share of tax on their earnings, and we do not support anything that seeks to get around that. It is right that HMRC should act swiftly and firmly to close down such avoidance schemes.

However, tax law sets out time limits within which HMRC can open inquiries and make tax assessments. Normally, those time limits take account of whether a taxpayer has taken reasonable care to comply with their tax obligations, has been careless or has deliberately decided not to comply. They are seen as valuable taxpayer protections, giving a degree of certainty that takes appropriate account of taxpayer behaviour.

It is certainly concerning to me—I am not sure I can speak on behalf of the whole Committee, but I think it is fair to say that I speak on behalf of many of its members—that HMRC's contractor loan settlement opportunity requires people who want to put their affairs straight to waive those protections, with the threat of the loan charge looming over them. It is not clear why it is necessary for that settlement opportunity to pressure people into paying tax for years that HMRC calls "not protected"—years where HMRC is out of time—even though it may have had the information it needed to open inquiries or raise assessments at the proper time.

**Dame Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham)** (Con): I support the way in which my right hon. Friend is addressing new clause 26, on which I find myself in a similar position to her. Although we want people to pay the correct taxes, I have constituents who may face losing their homes over this, after entering into what they thought were perfectly legal and allowable arrangements. Does she agree that the Treasury must address that?

**Nicky Morgan:** I very much agree with my right hon. Friend. It will probably turn out that most of us have constituents who are affected in that way. There are some who perhaps did know what they were doing when they entered into these tax arrangements, and some who clearly did not. It is absolutely right that the correct tax is applied, but, equally, it cannot be right that people are facing serious situations that will undermine their financial security and also their mental health.

**John Redwood:** Is my right hon. Friend aware that not only did quite a few people take advice, but they notified the Revenue of what they were doing and no objections were made at the time?

**Nicky Morgan:** Yes, I absolutely agree with my right hon. Friend. That was raised in the Westminster Hall debate led by my fellow Committee member, my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker).

I say to the Minister that it is troubling to hear that tens of thousands of people who want to settle with HMRC before the 5 April deadline have yet to receive calculations from HMRC. It is impossible for them—I think it would be for most of us—to settle large bills within a matter of months if they do not know what they will be asked to pay, let alone if they cannot start to make arrangements for how to pay them. These individuals need to know how much they have to pay, and I ask Treasury Ministers to step in and make clear what will happen to those people if they do not hear from HMRC by 5 April.

I will leave that with Ministers. I hope they can tell that there are MPs on both sides of the House who are concerned about this. By working together, we can make sure that the right tax is paid, but also that people are treated fairly.

**Kirsty Blackman:** I am aware that we are fairly short of time, so I will not rerun many of the things I said in Committee—I am sure the Minister and those on the Opposition Front Bench will be delighted to hear that.

I want to highlight a few of the SNP amendments and new clauses in this group. We have a couple of new clauses asking once again whether the Government's provisions will do what they intend. For example, we want them to review the changes to entrepreneurs' relief. We also want them to look at the changes in relation to emergency vehicles, because we are particularly concerned about the potential rural impact. Those who have emergency vehicles in rural areas may have more cause to use them outside work time than people who use them in cities. We felt that that issue was not drawn out enough in Committee or in the information the Government provided previously.

New clause 17 is about Brexit analysis. It is important to note that, since the Brexit vote in June 2016, over \$1 trillion has been pulled from UK equity funds, which is obviously a really large number. In any changes or preparations the Government carry out in relation to Brexit, therefore, they should note the impact on the economy, which, according to the Bank of England, has cost individual families £900 each so far, and there is also the impact on financial services, for example, which have historically been very strong in the UK.

New clauses 15, 11 and 14 again ask the Government to provide information through consultation reports. It is important that the Government tell us the consultation they did on the draft clauses they brought forward. On the ones they did not bring forward, why did they not do so?

On that point, I should mention that the Government have included a new schedule in this group. That is a relatively unusual thing for the Government to do at this stage, given that they could have included the schedule in the original Bill or brought it forward in Committee. Because the new schedule was not brought

forward in the initial stages, the explanatory memorandum provided by the Government does not include details about it. It would have been helpful if it had been considered at an earlier stage or if the Members who sat through the Bill Committee had been notified that it was likely to come forward. Presumably, the Government knew about it before the Christmas recess, and it did not just appear out of the ether. That process could be improved.

The main thrust of my contribution in the short time I have remaining is about the removal of the link between the personal allowance and the minimum wage. I understand that the Government have removed it on the basis that the personal allowance has now reached £12,500 and that they therefore believe they do not need to keep the link. I understand why they are making that case, but if that link had been kept, with the Government required to do a review if the personal allowance threshold was set at less than £12,500, future Governments would have continued to be bound by it. That would have meant that the protection the Government felt was necessary for people on the lowest incomes would still be there in the future. I understand that the Government do not intend to reduce the personal allowance, but that protection could have been left in place without the law causing any problems. That is something I am concerned about.

It is particularly concerning when the living wage the Government have put in place is not a real living wage, but a pretend living wage. It also does not apply to anyone under 25, which is an issue the SNP has raised over and over again. Just because someone is 24 does not mean that their living costs are less than they would be if they were 26—they could have the same number of children and live in exactly the same accommodation. However, the Government believe that it is okay to pay them less just because they are under that age threshold. That is exacerbated by the fact that the minimum wage increases the Government have introduced this year increase by a higher percentage—not just a higher monetary value—the minimum wage received by those who are over 25. The gap is widening: those who are over 25 are getting a bigger increase in the minimum wage, while there is a smaller increase for the younger age groups. The Government need to take seriously the fact that they are saying apprentices are worth pennies, frankly, and that 16 and 17-year-olds are worth far less than people under the age of 25. We raised our concerns in Committee in relation to the removal of the number. I do not think it would have cost the Government anything to leave in the link to protect future generations.

**Mrs Main:** I wanted to have more time to be able to say what a great job the Government have been doing: a 43-year low for unemployment rates, 1,000 jobs a day created and bringing in the personal allowance upgrade even earlier. We do not have time to go through all that, but I believe that getting people into work and out of poverty is the way forward for many families.

The Government were absolutely right to target business rates as a way of helping the high street and small businesses, with a cut of 33% in rates for businesses with a rateable value of under £51,000. In areas like mine with high property values, however, it is not having the impact the Chancellor might have hoped. The new rate simply provides a cliff edge that penalises successful

businesses in areas that are plagued by high property values. We must devise a system that helps small businesses and pubs to thrive, not just those with a low retail value. I recently met pub owners in my constituency who have been hit extremely hard by business rates. I have cut out an awful lot of my speech, but I am pleased to say that I have secured a Westminster Hall debate on this matter next Tuesday. I look forward to exploring the matter further with a Minister. Pubs in areas such as St Albans are seeing massive hikes in business rates, not the help that was intended.

Time is pressing, but I want to touch on new clause 26 tabled by the right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Sir Edward Davey). I have serious concerns about the retrospective nature of the tax being collected. Several of my constituents have raised cases with me and I am extremely concerned about how the process has been handled. Many make the case that this was not illegal tax evasion; they were advised to use the scheme as a way of keeping more of their own money. It is worth remembering that these people are not employees. They take on more risk, with no sick pay, maternity pay or other forms of support offered to an employee. I want to give a couple of personal examples, because I think that is key and we have so little time.

One of my constituents, who worked as an IT professional in the FinTech industries, is being pursued for £900,000 by HMRC for the loan charge. He is extremely worried—many are on the brink emotionally—and this has put him and his family under considerable stress. He had been advised that what he had done was lawful and he considered it to be so. He told me, worryingly, that he tried to settle the case with HMRC for about £700,000, but that that had been rejected. Many people who find themselves in tax difficulties manage to make negotiated settlements with HMRC. It appears that this particular group of people are being treated very unfairly and are being left in the very difficult situation of not knowing exactly how much they owe or how quickly they have to pay.

**Colin Clark:** Other colleagues will be aware that the oil industry had a lot of contractors who were using what effectively turned out to be disguised schemes. Does my hon. Friend agree that there is a duty on HMRC? We have heard today from another hon. Member that customers should not be unduly disadvantaged if they have not managed to settle their claim to date, because after 5 April it will be significantly more.

**Mrs Main:** Exactly. I have also been advised by a former constituent, who, despite no longer living in the UK, is being pursued by HMRC for thousands of pounds of unpaid tax. Another person was advised that this mechanism truly was lawful and it has come as a huge shock to his financial planning that he is left in this position.

There are reportedly over 1,000 people being pursued for unpaid tax. No one is disputing that people should pay tax that is due. The issue is the way it is being requested. People have been badly advised. They have never been able to check whether anything they were doing was illegal, because they were being advised that it was not illegal at the time. It is a loophole that has now been closed.

**Luke Graham:** Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Mrs Main:** It will have to be very quick, because I am aware other people need to speak.

**Luke Graham:** My hon. Friend is making a very valid point. One of my constituents, an IT contractor, was advised by his own accountant. A review would be very helpful in ensuring that people receive proper advice, so that laws can be followed and taxes collected.

**Mrs Main:** My hon. Friend is exactly right. There are many versions of that story. I have constituents who say that HMRC was made aware of these arrangements but no objection was raised until many years later. That has to be fundamentally wrong. What more due diligence can anyone do?

I will conclude, because I know the right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton wishes to speak. The huge pressure and distress—even suicidal thoughts—that this measure has put in people's minds is totally unacceptable. I say to the Minister: if we do nothing else tonight, can we accept new clause 26? There is a clear ambiguity in the law that applied at the time—perhaps clarity has been provided now. The fact that people cannot negotiate a reasonable settlement even though they acted in good faith at the time, and are being pursued to the point of the destruction of their careers, homes, family lives and marriages, is completely unacceptable. We clearly need a review, and I hope the Minister takes that on board and accepts new clause 26. If it is pressed to a vote, I shall vote for it.

**Sir Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD):** I thank the hon. Member for St Albans (Mrs Main) for her passionate speech. I also thank the right hon. Member for Loughborough (Nicky Morgan), who chairs the Treasury Committee, and right hon. and hon. Members from across the House, who have campaigned as a Parliament against this measure and supported new clause 26. It is my wish to divide the House on the new clause if the Minister does not accept it.

Let me make it crystal clear from the start that I support the Treasury's aim of closing tax loopholes and stopping tax avoidance. The introduction of loan charges in the Finance Act 2017 to stop future abuse was correct, and the review my new clause proposes would not seek to prevent the Treasury from stopping that abuse from the 2016 Budget announcement. Instead—somewhat inelegantly, due to the rules of Finance Bill debate—new clause 26 aims to focus the minds of Treasury Ministers on the gross unfairness of the way the 2017 Act went about closing an unacceptable tax loophole.

I believe that the review envisaged in the new clause would reveal the unfairness of the retrospective nature of the current loan charge legislation in two ways. First, it would show how that retrospective nature is even more severe than non-retrospective but backward-looking proceedings for the recovery of lost tax elsewhere in our tax legislation. Secondly, it would show that the test of reasonableness included in proposed new section 36A, if applied to the loan charge, would in fact prevent any retrospective tax collection from the loan charge.

Let me remind the House why the Treasury should, after the review, ditch the retrospective nature of this measure, delay April's implementation and amend the charge so it focuses only on payments made after 2016.



[*Sir Edward Davey*]

It is because the loan charge, as introduced, offends against the rule of law. It is the sort of taxation that led the barons to rebel against King John and gave birth to Magna Carta. It is simply not acceptable for a Government to introduce a law that makes illegal something someone did years ago, when that action was considered legal. That is a clear principle.

**Ruth Cadbury** (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): I thank the right hon. Gentleman for giving way—I realise time is short—and for tabling new clause 26, which I, too, support. Does he agree that it is unreasonable for people to be expected to have kept records going back 20 years when they were reassured at the time that the scheme was legitimate?

**Sir Edward Davey:** The hon. Lady is absolutely right, and I thank her for her support. Let us remember that these people—our constituents—were given professional tax advice and behaved in a way they thought was right and lawful at the time.

**Tommy Sheppard** (Edinburgh East) (SNP): I fully support the right hon. Gentleman's comments and will vote for new clause 26 if it is pressed to a Division. I wonder whether he will reflect briefly on my concern that some people who support the Government's position have implied that, in seeking justice and fairness for our constituents, we in some way condone tax avoidance. In fact, the opposite is the case—we say that there should not be tax avoidance or evasion. The real culprits in this are not the individuals who were conned and duped by professionals into taking out these schemes and now face bankruptcy, but the firms that designed and sold them the schemes in the first place, some of which are still operating.

**Sir Edward Davey:** The hon. Gentleman is right on all the points he makes. When my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Stephen Lloyd) tabled the early-day motion that got cross-party support when this campaign was getting going, those were exactly the points he made. We all condemn tax avoidance and support the Treasury, but this retrospective approach to taxation is simply unacceptable.

**Crispin Blunt:** I congratulate hon. Members and hon. Friends on their speeches and wholly agree with them. It is grossly unfair that one of my constituents, a contractor between 2004 and 2006, is expected to repay tax from this period. It goes against the whole principle of fairness and surely would not survive any challenge in the European Court of Human Rights.

**Sir Edward Davey:** Indeed. HMRC knew about these tax schemes for years and took no action. They were widely used—as we have heard, right hon. and hon. Members from around the House have constituents affected—and widely advertised and yet were ignored by the tax authorities. People could only take some public sector positions if they agreed to be paid via these schemes, and it emerged ahead of the Westminster Hall debate that even some HMRC contractors were paid through such a scheme.

**Wes Streeting** (Ilford North) (Lab): I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for tabling the new clause. I found HMRC's answers to the Treasury Committee wholly unsatisfactory. There remain serious questions to be asked of the promoters of these schemes, of the employers, including public sector employers, who promoted them to contractors, and also of HMRC. If people were given tax advice and followed it, and if HMRC was aware of these schemes but did not take action in any previous tax year, how on earth could any reasonable person have concluded that they were doing anything wrong?

**Sir Edward Davey:** I totally agree, and I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's intervention.

**Sir William Cash** (Stone) (Con): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Sir Edward Davey:** I cannot resist.

**Sir William Cash:** It is not often that I agree with the right hon. Gentleman, as he knows, but I strongly agree with him on this issue. Retrospective legislation is bad in principle. This is an unjust provision, unreasonable and unfair, and I urge the Government to take note of the arguments put forward.

**Sir Edward Davey:** Having taken that wonderful intervention, I bring it to the House's attention that the hon. Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone) has signed my new clause. It is bringing the House together at a time when elsewhere it is divided.

I end on what this loan charge and its retrospective nature have meant for our constituents. It has caused misery. It has affected people's lives, their health, their families. It has caused gross misery. Some people believe they will have to go bankrupt if they are forced to pay, or that they might lose their homes, and that is why the House is united against this retrospective action. I really hope that the Minister will get to his feet, accept the new clause, go ahead with the review and bring it back before the end of the tax year, so that the House can see it and vote on it.

**Bambos Charalambous** (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): I rise to speak in support of new clause 2. I was staggered to learn that entrepreneurs' relief costs the Treasury an estimated £2.7 billion, and this to allow people selling companies worth up to £10 million to keep half the money they would otherwise pay in capital gains tax.

I was even more surprised to learn that this tax relief was concentrated among a few very wealthy individuals, with 6,000 people making gains of over £1 million and averaging £450,000 in tax relief each. This relief is only benefiting the very wealthy and should be reviewed as to its effectiveness. If it is scrapped, the £2.7 billion could be used to fund schools buckling under the pressure of funding cuts and provide huge investment in special educational needs and children and adolescent mental health needs. It could also go some way to funding children's services and social care in local authorities and policing.

This is not the only area where the Government are giving away money that could otherwise be put to better use. Under amendment 22, in the name of the hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman), the

Government are being asked to review the expected effects on public health of the changes made to the Alcoholic Liquor Duties Act 1979. The Alcohol Health Alliance has stated that the Government's own figures show that alcohol duty cuts from 2013-14 have cost the Treasury £4 billion, which is the equivalent yearly cost of employing over 100,000 teachers. The figure is expected to rise to £9.1 billion by 2024. Considering the pressures on budgets as a result of austerity, that is not an insignificant amount.

The freeze on duty on beer, spirits and cider for 12 months from February 2019 is in effect a cut, as it is not keeping in line with inflation. Indeed, it has not done so for six of the last seven years. Cheap alcohol has a tremendous effect in causing damage to people's health, the economy and wider society. Alcohol is the leading risk factor in respect of the deaths of people aged 15 to 49. In England alone, there are more than 1 million hospital admissions and 24,000 deaths related to alcohol every year. That is a clearly an impact that the Government need to consider when they set duties on beer, spirits and cider. Cuts in alcohol duty have a double effect. They reduce revenue for the Treasury, which in turn reduces the amount of funding for the NHS, while simultaneously increasing demand and costs in the NHS by encouraging the consumption of cheap alcohol. I therefore ask the Government to review the impact of the alcohol duty freeze on public health.

7.45 pm

Let me now say something about new clause 26, tabled by the right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Sir Edward Davey). When it comes to collecting taxes from individuals, the Treasury, via HMRC, has been brutal in its demands from contractors who have been paid through loans. I should make it clear that I have no time for tax dodgers and tax avoiders, and that I believe the disguised remuneration scheme was used by some people colluding with businesses to avoid paying tax. That is wrong and tax avoidance should be dealt with severely. However, I have met a number of people at my local surgeries and heard their stories of being mercilessly pursued for alleged unpaid taxes going back many years, and it is clear to me that HMRC has adopted a "shoot first and ask questions later" approach.

**Liz Twist** (Blaydon) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that the stories we hear from our constituents suggest that some of them are not only afraid of losing their homes and livelihoods, but are actually having suicidal thoughts because of the pressure that is being put on them to pay the money?

**Bambos Charalambous**: That is an excellent point, which I was about to make myself. While the large accountancy firms have gone unpunished for creating tax avoidance schemes for big banks, those individual contractors are bearing the brunt of HMRC's powers. I have been informed by the Loan Charge Action Group of suicides, bankruptcies and relationship breakdowns as a result of the stress involved in their dealings with HMRC. The group has said that many of the people being pursued by HMRC unwittingly signed up to loan-based schemes, but the promoters of the tax avoidance vehicles have not been targeted.

I ask the Minister to reconsider these measures and to ensure that people are not punished when they should not be.

**Mel Stride**: Given the limited time that is available to me to summarise a debate that has covered a large number of amendments and new clauses, I shall confine my remarks principally to the issue that has been raised most frequently, which relates to new clause 26. The new clause requires the Government to lay before the House a report reviewing the effects of changes made by clauses 79 and 80 no later than 30 March 2019. While I should note that such a report will come too soon for the measures to have had a real effect, the Government of course remain committed to setting out the rationale for their policies as well as their impact, and in that spirit we will not oppose the new clause.

I do, however, echo many of the comments made by Members about what these schemes are truly about, which is gross aggressive tax avoidance. The way in which disguised remuneration typically works is that, instead of an employer's paying an employee by way of a salary in the normal way, which attracts PAYE income tax and employees' and employers national insurance, the payment is made as a loan. Typically, those so-called loans, which are not really loans at all—there is no intention of ever repaying them—are routed out via an offshore trust in a low or no-tax jurisdiction, and then routed back to the United Kingdom to be received by the end recipient. That is extremely unfair. It is unfair to our public services, because we have a duty as a Government to collect the tax that is due to fund them, and it is unfair to the vast majority of taxpayers who do the right thing, which is not to get involved in aggressive tax avoidance schemes in the first place and to pay their fair share of tax.

One issue that has been raised on a number of occasions is the question of whether HMRC's loan charge arrangements are themselves retrospective. They are not retrospective because, critically—this is where I take issue with the right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Sir Edward Davey)—at the time when they were entered into they were defective. No matter how far we go back, the scheme typically—I have described the way it works—was defective. It did not work then, it does not work now and the tax is due.

These schemes have been taken through the courts on many occasions. A scheme used to the benefit of Rangers Football Club was taken to the Supreme Court—the highest court in the land—and was found to be defective.

**Dr Wollaston**: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**Mel Stride**: I will not, simply because I have two minutes and 30 seconds left and I want to cover some of the other issues raised this evening.

However, as I have said, the Government will accept this new clause. It is absolutely right that, when HMRC deals with the public, it has a strict duty of care, a duty of proportionality and a duty to be as sympathetic as it can be relevant to the circumstances of those with whom it is dealing. In my dealings with HMRC, I have made those points forcefully clear. As the right hon. Gentleman will know, HMRC has recently come forward to say that those earning £50,000 or less—which is over twice the average national salary of somebody working in our country—will automatically be granted, without requirement for additional paperwork, a minimum of five years' time to pay as an arrangement to settle their affairs. Of course for those who come forward before

[Mel Stride]

April there is effectively in most cases no penalty as such; they will simply be required to pay that tax which was due in the past—and it was always due in the past—plus the interest that is rightly applied.

I have less than a minute left and want to say a little about amendment 12, tabled by the hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman), on the national minimum wage lock. She will know that, because we have increased the personal allowance now to £12,500 for every year of the forecast period, there will be no necessity for that lock to be in place. She makes the point that there could be a projection beyond that point. That will be a matter for a future Government of course and it is not for this Parliament to bind its successors.

I conclude on the suggested entrepreneurs' relief review and new clause 2, which the hon. Member for Oxford East (Anneliese Dodds) spoke to. We had a review that was published in December 2017, which reported on this particular matter, and it showed that a third of those using entrepreneurs' relief went on to reinvest in new businesses and half of those who were aware of entrepreneurs' relief said that it significantly influenced their decision to enter into an entrepreneurial activity. It is an important element of the business tax landscape and we will of course, as we do with all taxes, keep that relief under review.

In the six seconds I have left, I urge that the House accepts the Government new clauses and, with the exception of new clause 26, rejects the Opposition amendments.

7.53 pm

*Five hours having elapsed since the commencement of proceedings on the programme motion, the debate was interrupted (Programme Order, this day).*

*The Deputy Speaker put forthwith the Question already proposed from the Chair (Standing Order No. 83E), That the clause be read a Second time.*

*The House divided: Ayes 289, Noes 312.*

**Division No. 289]**

**[7.53 pm**

**AYES**

Abbott, rh Ms Diane	Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Abrahams, Debbie	Brake, rh Tom
Ali, Rushanara	Brennan, Kevin
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena	Brock, Deidre
Amesbury, Mike	Brown, Alan
Antoniazzi, Tonia	Brown, Lyn
Ashworth, Jonathan	Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Austin, Ian	Bryant, Chris
Bailey, Mr Adrian	Buck, Ms Karen
Bardell, Hannah	Burden, Richard
Barron, rh Sir Kevin	Burgon, Richard
Beckett, rh Margaret	Butler, Dawn
Benn, rh Hilary	Byrne, rh Liam
Berger, Luciana	Cable, rh Sir Vince
Betts, Mr Clive	Cadbury, Ruth
Black, Mhairi	Cameron, Dr Lisa
Blackford, rh Ian	Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Blackman, Kirsty	Carden, Dan
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta	Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Blomfield, Paul	Champion, Sarah
Brabin, Tracy	Chapman, Douglas

Chapman, Jenny	Hamilton, Fabian
Charalambous, Bambos	Hanson, rh David
Cherry, Joanna	Hardy, Emma
Clwyd, rh Ann	Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Coaker, Vernon	Harris, Carolyn
Coffey, Ann	Hayes, Helen
Cooper, Julie	Hayman, Sue
Cooper, Rosie	Healey, rh John
Cooper, rh Yvette	Hendrick, Sir Mark
Corbyn, rh Jeremy	Hendry, Drew
Cowan, Ronnie	Hepburn, Mr Stephen
Coyle, Neil	Hermon, Lady
Crawley, Angela	Hill, Mike
Creagh, Mary	Hillier, Meg
Creasy, Stella	Hobhouse, Wera
Cruddas, Jon	Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Cummins, Judith	Hollern, Kate
Cunningham, Alex	Hopkins, Kelvin
Cunningham, Mr Jim	Hosie, Stewart
Daby, Janet	Huq, Dr Rupa
Dakin, Nic	Hussain, Imran
Davey, rh Sir Edward	Jardine, Christine
David, Wayne	Johnson, Diana
Davies, Geraint	Jones, Darren
Day, Martyn	Jones, Gerald
De Cordova, Marsha	Jones, Helen
De Piero, Gloria	Jones, rh Mr Kevan
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh	Jones, Sarah
Docherty-Hughes, Martin	Jones, Susan Elan
Dodds, Anneliese	Kane, Mike
Doughty, Stephen	Keeley, Barbara
Dowd, Peter	Kendall, Liz
Drew, Dr David	Khan, Afzal
Duffield, Rosie	Killen, Ged
Eagle, Ms Angela	Kinnock, Stephen
Eagle, Maria	Kyle, Peter
Edwards, Jonathan	Laird, Lesley
Efford, Clive	Lake, Ben
Elliott, Julie	Lamb, rh Norman
Ellman, Dame Louise	Lammy, rh Mr David
Elmore, Chris	Lavery, Ian
Esterson, Bill	Law, Chris
Evans, Chris	Lee, Karen
Farrelly, Paul	Leslie, Mr Chris
Farron, Tim	Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Fellows, Marion	Lewis, Clive
Fitzpatrick, Jim	Linden, David
Flint, rh Caroline	Lloyd, Stephen
Fovargue, Yvonne	Lloyd, Tony
Foxcroft, Vicky	Long Bailey, Rebecca
Frith, James	Lucas, Caroline
Furniss, Gill	Lucas, Ian C.
Gaffney, Hugh	MacNeil, Angus Brendan
Gapes, Mike	Madders, Justin
Gardiner, Barry	Mahmood, Mr Khalid
George, Ruth	Mahmood, Shabana
Gethins, Stephen	Malhotra, Seema
Gibson, Patricia	Mann, John
Gill, Preet Kaur	Marsden, Gordon
Glendon, Mary	Martin, Sandy
Godsiff, Mr Roger	Maskell, Rachael
Goodman, Helen	Matheson, Christian
Grady, Patrick	Mc Nally, John
Grant, Peter	McCabe, Steve
Gray, Neil	McCarthy, Kerry
Green, Kate	McDonagh, Siobhain
Greenwood, Lillian	McDonald, Andy
Greenwood, Margaret	McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
Griffith, Nia	McDonald, Stuart C.
Grogan, John	McDonnell, rh John
Gwynne, Andrew	McFadden, rh Mr Pat
Haigh, Louise	McGinn, Conor



McGovern, Alison  
 McInnes, Liz  
 McKinnell, Catherine  
 McMahan, Jim  
 McMorrin, Anna  
 Mearns, Ian  
 Miliband, rh Edward  
 Monaghan, Carol  
 Moran, Layla  
 Morden, Jessica  
 Morgan, Stephen  
 Morris, Grahame  
 Murray, Ian  
 Nandy, Lisa  
 Newlands, Gavin  
 Norris, Alex  
 O'Hara, Brendan  
 O'Mara, Jared  
 Onn, Melanie  
 Onwurah, Chi  
 Osamor, Kate  
 Owen, Albert  
 Peacock, Stephanie  
 Pearce, Teresa  
 Pennycook, Matthew  
 Perkins, Toby  
 Phillips, Jess  
 Phillipson, Bridget  
 Pidcock, Laura  
 Platt, Jo  
 Pollard, Luke  
 Pound, Stephen  
 Powell, Lucy  
 Qureshi, Yasmin  
 Rashid, Faisal  
 Rayner, Angela  
 Reed, Mr Steve  
 Rees, Christina  
 Reeves, Ellie  
 Reeves, Rachel  
 Reynolds, Emma  
 Reynolds, Jonathan  
 Rimmer, Ms Marie  
 Rodda, Matt  
 Rowley, Danielle  
 Ruane, Chris  
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd  
 Ryan, rh Joan  
 Saville Roberts, Liz  
 Sharma, Mr Virendra  
 Sheerman, Mr Barry  
 Sheppard, Tommy  
 Sherriff, Paula  
 Shuker, Mr Gavin

Skinner, Mr Dennis  
 Slaughter, Andy  
 Smeeth, Ruth  
 Smith, Angela  
 Smith, Cat  
 Smith, Eleanor  
 Smith, Jeff  
 Smith, Laura  
 Smith, Nick  
 Smith, Owen  
 Smyth, Karin  
 Snell, Gareth  
 Sobel, Alex  
 Spellar, rh John  
 Starmer, rh Keir  
 Stephens, Chris  
 Stevens, Jo  
 Stone, Jamie  
 Streeting, Wes  
 Stringer, Graham  
 Sweeney, Mr Paul  
 Swinson, Jo  
 Tami, rh Mark  
 Thewliss, Alison  
 Thomas, Gareth  
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick  
 Timms, rh Stephen  
 Trickett, Jon  
 Turley, Anna  
 Turner, Karl  
 Twigg, Derek  
 Twigg, Stephen  
 Twist, Liz  
 Umunna, Chuka  
 Vaz, Valerie  
 Walker, Thelma  
 Watson, Tom  
 West, Catherine  
 Western, Matt  
 Whitehead, Dr Alan  
 Whitfield, Martin  
 Whitford, Dr Philippa  
 Williams, Hywel  
 Williams, Dr Paul  
 Williamson, Chris  
 Wilson, Phil  
 Wishart, Pete  
 Yasin, Mohammad  
 Zeichner, Daniel

**Tellers for the Ayes:**  
**Colleen Fletcher and**  
**Thangam Debbonaire**

#### NOES

Adams, Nigel  
 Afolami, Bim  
 Afriyie, Adam  
 Aldous, Peter  
 Allan, Lucy  
 Allen, Heidi  
 Amess, Sir David  
 Andrew, Stuart  
 Argar, Edward  
 Atkins, Victoria  
 Bacon, Mr Richard  
 Badenoch, Mrs Kemi  
 Baker, Mr Steve  
 Baldwin, Harriett  
 Barclay, rh Stephen

Baron, Mr John  
 Bebb, Guto  
 Bellingham, Sir Henry  
 Benyon, rh Richard  
 Beresford, Sir Paul  
 Berry, Jake  
 Blackman, Bob  
 Blunt, Crispin  
 Boles, Nick  
 Bone, Mr Peter  
 Bottomley, Sir Peter  
 Bowie, Andrew  
 Bradley, Ben  
 Bradley, rh Karen  
 Brady, Sir Graham

Braverman, Suella  
 Brereton, Jack  
 Bridgen, Andrew  
 Brine, Steve  
 Brokenshire, rh James  
 Bruce, Fiona  
 Buckland, Robert  
 Burghart, Alex  
 Burns, Conor  
 Burt, rh Alistair  
 Cairns, rh Alun  
 Campbell, Mr Gregory  
 Cartledge, James  
 Cash, Sir William  
 Caulfield, Maria  
 Chalk, Alex  
 Chishti, Rehman  
 Choqe, Sir Christopher  
 Churchill, Jo  
 Clark, Colin  
 Clark, rh Greg  
 Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth  
 Clarke, Mr Simon  
 Cleverly, James  
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey  
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse  
 Collins, Damian  
 Costa, Alberto  
 Courts, Robert  
 Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey  
 Crabb, rh Stephen  
 Crouch, Tracey  
 Davies, Chris  
 Davies, David T. C.  
 Davies, Glyn  
 Davies, Mims  
 Davies, Philip  
 Davis, rh Mr David  
 Dinenage, Caroline  
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan  
 Docherty, Leo  
 Dodds, rh Nigel  
 Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.  
 Donelan, Michelle  
 Double, Steve  
 Dowden, Oliver  
 Doyle-Price, Jackie  
 Drax, Richard  
 Duddridge, James  
 Duguid, David  
 Duncan, rh Sir Alan  
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain  
 Dunne, rh Mr Philip  
 Ellis, Michael  
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias  
 Elphicke, Charlie  
 Eustice, George  
 Evans, Mr Nigel  
 Evennett, rh Sir David  
 Fabricant, Michael  
 Fallon, rh Sir Michael  
 Field, rh Mark  
 Ford, Vicky  
 Foster, Kevin  
 Francois, rh Mr Mark  
 Frazer, Lucy  
 Freeman, George  
 Freer, Mike  
 Fysh, Mr Marcus  
 Gale, rh Sir Roger

Garnier, Mark  
 Gauke, rh Mr David  
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat  
 Gibb, rh Nick  
 Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl  
 Girvan, Paul  
 Glen, John  
 Goldsmith, Zac  
 Goodwill, rh Mr Robert  
 Gove, rh Michael  
 Graham, Luke  
 Graham, Richard  
 Grant, Bill  
 Grant, Mrs Helen  
 Gray, James  
 Grayling, rh Chris  
 Green, Chris  
 Green, rh Damian  
 Greening, rh Justine  
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic  
 Griffiths, Andrew  
 Gyimah, Mr Sam  
 Hair, Kirstene  
 Halfon, rh Robert  
 Hammond, rh Mr Philip  
 Hammond, Stephen  
 Hancock, rh Matt  
 Hands, rh Greg  
 Harper, rh Mr Mark  
 Harrington, Richard  
 Harris, Rebecca  
 Harrison, Trudy  
 Hart, Simon  
 Hayes, rh Sir John  
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver  
 Heapey, James  
 Heaton-Harris, Chris  
 Heaton-Jones, Peter  
 Henderson, Gordon  
 Herbert, rh Nick  
 Hoare, Simon  
 Hollinrake, Kevin  
 Hollobone, Mr Philip  
 Holloway, Adam  
 Howell, John  
 Huddleston, Nigel  
 Hughes, Eddie  
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy  
 Hurd, rh Mr Nick  
 Jack, Mr Alister  
 James, Margot  
 Javid, rh Sajid  
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil  
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard  
 Jenkyns, Andrea  
 Jenrick, Robert  
 Johnson, rh Boris  
 Johnson, Dr Caroline  
 Johnson, Gareth  
 Jones, Andrew  
 Jones, rh Mr David  
 Jones, Mr Marcus  
 Kawczynski, Daniel  
 Keegan, Gillian  
 Kennedy, Seema  
 Kerr, Stephen  
 Knight, rh Sir Greg  
 Knight, Julian  
 Kwarteng, Kwasi  
 Lamont, John  
 Lancaster, rh Mark  
 Latham, Mrs Pauline

Leadsom, rh Andrea  
 Lee, Dr Phillip  
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward  
 Letwin, rh Sir Oliver  
 Lewer, Andrew  
 Lewis, rh Brandon  
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian  
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian  
 Lidington, rh Mr David  
 Little Pengelly, Emma  
 Lopez, Julia  
 Lopresti, Jack  
 Lord, Mr Jonathan  
 Loughton, Tim  
 Mackinlay, Craig  
 Maclean, Rachel  
 Main, Mrs Anne  
 Mak, Alan  
 Malthouse, Kit  
 Mann, Scott  
 Masterton, Paul  
 Maynard, Paul  
 McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick  
 McPartland, Stephen  
 McVey, rh Ms Esther  
 Menzies, Mark  
 Mercer, Johnny  
 Merriman, Huw  
 Metcalfe, Stephen  
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria  
 Milling, Amanda  
 Mills, Nigel  
 Milton, rh Anne  
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew  
 Moore, Damien  
 Mordaunt, rh Penny  
 Morgan, rh Nicky  
 Morris, Anne Marie  
 Morris, David  
 Morris, James  
 Mundell, rh David  
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll  
 Murrison, Dr Andrew  
 Neill, Robert  
 Newton, Sarah  
 Nokes, rh Caroline  
 Norman, Jesse  
 O'Brien, Neil  
 Offord, Dr Matthew  
 Opperman, Guy  
 Paisley, Ian  
 Parish, Neil  
 Patel, rh Priti  
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen  
 Pawsey, Mark  
 Penning, rh Sir Mike  
 Penrose, John  
 Percy, Andrew  
 Perry, rh Claire  
 Philp, Chris  
 Pincher, rh Christopher  
 Poulter, Dr Dan  
 Prentis, Victoria  
 Prisk, Mr Mark  
 Pritchard, Mark  
 Pursglove, Tom  
 Quin, Jeremy  
 Raab, rh Dominic  
 Redwood, rh John  
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob  
 Robertson, Mr Laurence  
 Robinson, Gavin

Robinson, Mary  
 Rosindell, Andrew  
 Ross, Douglas  
 Rowley, Lee  
 Rudd, rh Amber  
 Rutley, David  
 Sandbach, Antoinette  
 Scully, Paul  
 Seely, Mr Bob  
 Selous, Andrew  
 Shannon, Jim  
 Shapps, rh Grant  
 Sharma, Alok  
 Shelbrooke, Alec  
 Simpson, David  
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith  
 Skidmore, Chris  
 Smith, Chloe  
 Smith, rh Julian  
 Smith, Royston  
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas  
 Soubry, rh Anna  
 Spencer, Mark  
 Stephenson, Andrew  
 Stevenson, John  
 Stewart, Bob  
 Stewart, Rory  
 Streeter, Sir Gary  
 Stride, rh Mel  
 Stuart, Graham  
 Sturdy, Julian  
 Sunak, Rishi  
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond  
 Swire, rh Sir Hugo  
 Syms, Sir Robert  
 Thomas, Derek  
 Thomson, Ross  
 Throup, Maggie  
 Tolhurst, Kelly  
 Tomlinson, Justin  
 Tomlinson, Michael  
 Tracey, Craig  
 Tredinnick, David  
 Trevelyan, Anne-Marie  
 Truss, rh Elizabeth  
 Tugendhat, Tom  
 Vaizey, rh Mr Edward  
 Vara, Mr Shailesh  
 Vickers, Martin  
 Villiers, rh Theresa  
 Walker, Mr Charles  
 Walker, Mr Robin  
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben  
 Warburton, David  
 Warman, Matt  
 Watling, Giles  
 Whately, Helen  
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather  
 Whittaker, Craig  
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John  
 Wiggin, Bill  
 Williamson, rh Gavin  
 Wilson, rh Sammy  
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah  
 Wood, Mike  
 Wragg, Mr William  
 Wright, rh Jeremy  
 Zahawi, Nadhim

#### Tellers for the Noes:

Iain Stewart and  
 Wendy Morton

*Question accordingly negated.*

*The Deputy Speaker then put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that time (Standing Order No. 83E).*

### Schedule 15

#### ENTREPRENEURS' RELIEF

*Amendments made:* 2, page 291, line 31, leave out paragraph 2 and insert—

“2 (1) Chapter 3 of Part 5 of TCGA 1992 (transfer of business assets: entrepreneurs' relief) is amended as follows.

(2) In section 169K(1B) (disposals associated with relevant material disposal), for paragraph (a) (together with the “and” at the end of it) substitute—

“(a) the ordinary shares disposed of constitute at least 5% of the company's ordinary share capital and are shares in the individual's personal company (and section 169S(3A)(a) to (c) apply here but as if the reference to the final day of the period mentioned in section 169S(3A)(a) were to the date of the disposal), and”.

(3) In section 169LA (relevant business assets: goodwill transferred to a close company)—

(a) for subsection (1) substitute—

“(1) Subject to subsection (1A), subsection (4) applies if—

(a) as part of a qualifying business disposal, a person (“P”) disposes of goodwill directly or indirectly to a close company (“C”), and

(b) immediately after the disposal, P meets any of the personal company conditions in the case of C or any company which is a member of a group of companies of which C is a member.

(1ZA) For the purposes of subsection (1)(b)—

(a) the reference to the personal company conditions is a reference to any of the conditions in 169S(3)(a), (b), (c)(i) or (ii), and

(b) P is taken to have all the rights and interests of any relevant connected person.

(1ZB) For the purposes of subsection (1ZA)—

(a) section 169S(3) is treated as having effect with the omission of the references to “by virtue of that holding”,

(b) section 169S(3A)(a) and (b) are to apply for the purposes of section 169S(3)(c)(ii) but as if the reference to the final day of the period mentioned in section 169S(3A)(a) were to the time immediately after the disposal, and

(c) the condition in section 169S(3)(c)(i) is to be read as containing two separate conditions (one relating to profits and the other relating to assets).”, and

(b) in subsection (1A)(a), for “subsection (1)(aa)” substitute “subsection (1)(b)”.

(4) In section 169S (interpretation of Chapter), for subsections (3) and (4) substitute—

(3) For the purposes of this Chapter a company is a “personal company” in relation to an individual if—

(a) the individual holds at least 5% of the ordinary share capital of the company,

(b) by virtue of that holding, at least 5% of the voting rights in the company are exercisable by the individual, and

(c) either or both of the following conditions are met—

(i) by virtue of that holding, the individual is beneficially entitled to at least 5% of the profits available for distribution to equity holders and, on a winding up, would be beneficially entitled to at least 5% of assets so available, or

(ii) in the event of a disposal of the whole of the ordinary share capital of the company, the individual would be beneficially entitled to at least 5% of the proceeds.

(3A) In determining whether subsection (3)(c)(ii) applies for the purposes of any provision of this Chapter under which a question arises as to whether or not a company is the individual's personal company at any time in a particular period—

- (a) it is to be assumed that (so far as this is not otherwise the case) the whole of the ordinary share capital is disposed of at that time for a consideration equal to its market value on the final day of the period,
- (b) it is to be assumed that the amount of the proceeds to which the individual would be beneficially entitled at that time is the amount of the proceeds to which, having regard to all the circumstances as they existed at that time, it would be reasonable to expect the person to be beneficially entitled, and
- (c) the effect of any avoidance arrangements is to be ignored.

(3B) For the purposes of subsection (3A)(c)—

- (a) arrangements are “avoidance arrangements” if the main purpose of, or one of the main purposes of, the arrangements is to secure that any provision of this Chapter applies or does not apply, and
- (b) “arrangements” includes any agreement, understanding, scheme, transaction or series of transactions (whether or not legally enforceable).

(3C) For the purposes of subsection (3) if the individual holds any shares in the company jointly with one or more other persons, the individual is to be treated as the sole holder of so many of them as is proportionate to the value of the individual's share (and references in subsection (3) to the exercise of voting rights or beneficial entitlement are to be read accordingly).

(3D) A modified version of Chapter 6 of Part 5 of CTA 2010 (group relief: equity holders and profits or assets available for distribution) applies for the purposes of subsection (3) reading references to company A as references to the individual.

(3E) The reference here to a modified version of Chapter 6 of Part 5 of CTA 2010 is to the provisions of that Chapter having effect as if—

- (a) for the purposes of section 158(1)(b), a person carrying on a business of banking were not a loan creditor of a company in respect of any loan capital or debt issued or incurred by the company for money lent by the person to the company in the ordinary course of that business,
- (b) sections 171(1)(b) and (3), 173, 174 and 176 to 181 were omitted, and
- (c) any modifications were made as are necessary for the purpose of applying that Chapter as if the individual were company A.”

Amendment 3, page 298, line 7, at end insert

“but, in the case of a disposal made before 21 December 2018, section 169LA(1ZA)(a) of TCGA 1992 has effect as if the reference to section 169S(3)(c)(ii) of that Act were omitted”.—(*Mel Stride.*)

### New Clause 6

#### INTANGIBLE FIXED ASSETS: RESTRICTIONS ON GOODWILL AND CERTAIN OTHER ASSETS

“Schedule (Intangible fixed assets: restrictions on goodwill and certain other assets) contains provision about the debits to be brought into account for corporation tax purposes in respect of goodwill and certain other assets.”—(*Mel Stride.*)

*Brought up, and added to the Bill.*

### New Clause 18

#### REVIEW OF EFFECTS ON MEASURES IN ACT OF CERTAIN CHANGES IN MIGRATION LEVELS

“(1) The Chancellor of the Exchequer must review the effects on the provisions of this Act of migration in the scenarios in subsection (2) and lay a report of that review before the House of Commons within one month of the passing of this Act.

(2) Those scenarios are that—

- (a) the United Kingdom does not leave the European Union,
- (b) the United Kingdom leaves the European Union without a negotiated withdrawal agreement,
- (c) the United Kingdom leaves the European Union following a negotiated withdrawal agreement, and remains in the single market and customs union,
- (d) the United Kingdom leaves the United Kingdom on the terms of the draft withdrawal agreement of 14 November 2018.

(3) In respect of each of those scenarios the review must consider separately the effects of—

- (a) migration by EU nationals, and
- (b) migration by non-EU nationals.

(4) In respect of each of those scenarios the review must consider separately the effects on the measures in each part of the United Kingdom and each region of England.

(5) In this section—

“parts of the United Kingdom” means—

- (a) England,
- (b) Scotland,
- (c) Wales, and
- (d) Northern Ireland;

“regions of England” has the same meaning as that used by the Office for National Statistics.”—(*Kirsty Blackman.*)

*This new clause would require a review of effects on measures in the Bill of certain changes in migration levels.*

*Brought up.*

*Question put, That the clause be added to the Bill.*

*The House divided: Ayes 288, Noes 311.*

**Division No. 290]**

**[8.9 pm**

#### AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane	Brown, Alan
Abrahams, Debbie	Brown, Lyn
Ali, Rushanara	Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena	Bryant, Chris
Amesbury, Mike	Buck, Ms Karen
Antoniazzi, Tonia	Burden, Richard
Ashworth, Jonathan	Burgon, Richard
Austin, Ian	Butler, Dawn
Bailey, Mr Adrian	Byrne, rh Liam
Bardell, Hannah	Cable, rh Sir Vince
Barron, rh Sir Kevin	Cadbury, Ruth
Beckett, rh Margaret	Cameron, Dr Lisa
Benn, rh Hilary	Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Berger, Luciana	Carden, Dan
Betts, Mr Clive	Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Black, Mhairi	Champion, Sarah
Blackford, rh Ian	Chapman, Douglas
Blackman, Kirsty	Chapman, Jenny
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta	Charalambos, Bambos
Blomfield, Paul	Cherry, Joanna
Brabin, Tracy	Clwyd, rh Ann
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben	Coaker, Vernon
Brake, rh Tom	Coffey, Ann
Brennan, Kevin	Cooper, Julie
Brock, Deidre	Cooper, Rosie



Cooper, rh Yvette  
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy  
 Cowan, Ronnie  
 Coyle, Neil  
 Crawley, Angela  
 Creagh, Mary  
 Creasy, Stella  
 Cruddas, Jon  
 Cummins, Judith  
 Cunningham, Alex  
 Cunningham, Mr Jim  
 Daby, Janet  
 Dakin, Nic  
 Davey, rh Sir Edward  
 David, Wayne  
 Davies, Geraint  
 Day, Martyn  
 De Cordova, Marsha  
 De Piero, Gloria  
 Debbonaire, Thangam  
 Dent Coad, Emma  
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh  
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin  
 Dodds, Anneliese  
 Doughty, Stephen  
 Dowd, Peter  
 Drew, Dr David  
 Duffield, Rosie  
 Eagle, Ms Angela  
 Eagle, Maria  
 Edwards, Jonathan  
 Efford, Clive  
 Elliott, Julie  
 Ellman, Dame Louise  
 Elmore, Chris  
 Esterson, Bill  
 Evans, Chris  
 Farrelly, Paul  
 Farron, Tim  
 Fitzpatrick, Jim  
 Fletcher, Colleen  
 Flint, rh Caroline  
 Fovargue, Yvonne  
 Foxcroft, Vicky  
 Frith, James  
 Furniss, Gill  
 Gaffney, Hugh  
 Gapes, Mike  
 Gardiner, Barry  
 George, Ruth  
 Gethins, Stephen  
 Gibson, Patricia  
 Gill, Preet Kaur  
 Glindon, Mary  
 Godsiff, Mr Roger  
 Goodman, Helen  
 Grant, Peter  
 Gray, Neil  
 Green, Kate  
 Greenwood, Lilian  
 Greenwood, Margaret  
 Griffith, Nia  
 Grogan, John  
 Gwynne, Andrew  
 Haigh, Louise  
 Hamilton, Fabian  
 Hanson, rh David  
 Hardy, Emma  
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet  
 Harris, Carolyn  
 Hayes, Helen  
 Hayman, Sue

Healey, rh John  
 Hendrick, Sir Mark  
 Hendry, Drew  
 Hepburn, Mr Stephen  
 Hermon, Lady  
 Hill, Mike  
 Hillier, Meg  
 Hobhouse, Wera  
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon  
 Hollern, Kate  
 Hopkins, Kelvin  
 Hosie, Stewart  
 Huq, Dr Rupa  
 Hussain, Imran  
 Jardine, Christine  
 Johnson, Diana  
 Jones, Darren  
 Jones, Gerald  
 Jones, Helen  
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan  
 Jones, Sarah  
 Jones, Susan Elan  
 Kane, Mike  
 Keeley, Barbara  
 Kendall, Liz  
 Khan, Afzal  
 Killen, Ged  
 Kinnock, Stephen  
 Kyle, Peter  
 Laird, Lesley  
 Lake, Ben  
 Lamb, rh Norman  
 Lammy, rh Mr David  
 Lavery, Ian  
 Law, Chris  
 Lee, Karen  
 Leslie, Mr Chris  
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma  
 Lewis, Clive  
 Linden, David  
 Lloyd, Tony  
 Long Bailey, Rebecca  
 Lucas, Caroline  
 Lucas, Ian C.  
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan  
 Madders, Justin  
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid  
 Mahmood, Shabana  
 Malhotra, Seema  
 Mann, John  
 Marsden, Gordon  
 Martin, Sandy  
 Maskell, Rachael  
 Matheson, Christian  
 Mc Nally, John  
 McCabe, Steve  
 McCarthy, Kerry  
 McDonagh, Siobhain  
 McDonald, Andy  
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm  
 McDonald, Stuart C.  
 McDonnell, rh John  
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat  
 McGinn, Conor  
 McGovern, Alison  
 McInnes, Liz  
 McKinnell, Catherine  
 McMahan, Jim  
 McMorrin, Anna  
 Mearns, Ian  
 Miliband, rh Edward  
 Monaghan, Carol

Moran, Layla  
 Morden, Jessica  
 Morgan, Stephen  
 Morris, Grahame  
 Murray, Ian  
 Nandy, Lisa  
 Newlands, Gavin  
 Norris, Alex  
 O'Hara, Brendan  
 O'Mara, Jared  
 Onn, Melanie  
 Onwurah, Chi  
 Osamor, Kate  
 Owen, Albert  
 Peacock, Stephanie  
 Pearce, Teresa  
 Pennycook, Matthew  
 Perkins, Toby  
 Phillips, Jess  
 Phillipson, Bridget  
 Pidcock, Laura  
 Platt, Jo  
 Pollard, Luke  
 Pound, Stephen  
 Powell, Lucy  
 Qureshi, Yasmin  
 Rashid, Faisal  
 Rayner, Angela  
 Reed, Mr Steve  
 Rees, Christina  
 Reeves, Ellie  
 Reeves, Rachel  
 Reynolds, Emma  
 Reynolds, Jonathan  
 Rimmer, Ms Marie  
 Rodda, Matt  
 Rowley, Danielle  
 Ruane, Chris  
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd  
 Ryan, rh Joan  
 Saville Roberts, Liz  
 Sharma, Mr Virendra  
 Sheerman, Mr Barry  
 Sheppard, Tommy  
 Sherriff, Paula  
 Shuker, Mr Gavin  
 Skinner, Mr Dennis  
 Slaughter, Andy  
 Smeeth, Ruth  
 Smith, Angela

Smith, Cat  
 Smith, Eleanor  
 Smith, Jeff  
 Smith, Laura  
 Smith, Nick  
 Smith, Owen  
 Smyth, Karin  
 Snell, Gareth  
 Sobel, Alex  
 Spellar, rh John  
 Starmer, rh Keir  
 Stephens, Chris  
 Stevens, Jo  
 Stone, Jamie  
 Streeting, Wes  
 Stringer, Graham  
 Sweeney, Mr Paul  
 Swinson, Jo  
 Tami, rh Mark  
 Thewliss, Alison  
 Thomas, Gareth  
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick  
 Timms, rh Stephen  
 Trickett, Jon  
 Turley, Anna  
 Turner, Karl  
 Twigg, Derek  
 Twigg, Stephen  
 Twist, Liz  
 Umunna, Chuka  
 Vaz, Valerie  
 Walker, Thelma  
 Watson, Tom  
 West, Catherine  
 Western, Matt  
 Whitehead, Dr Alan  
 Whitfield, Martin  
 Whitford, Dr Philippa  
 Williams, Hywel  
 Williams, Dr Paul  
 Williamson, Chris  
 Wilson, Phil  
 Wishart, Pete  
 Yasin, Mohammad  
 Zeichner, Daniel

**Tellers for the Ayes:**  
**Patrick Grady and**  
**Marion Fellows**

#### NOES

Adams, Nigel  
 Afolami, Bim  
 Afriyie, Adam  
 Aldous, Peter  
 Allan, Lucy  
 Allen, Heidi  
 Amess, Sir David  
 Andrew, Stuart  
 Argar, Edward  
 Atkins, Victoria  
 Bacon, Mr Richard  
 Badenoch, Mrs Kemi  
 Baker, Mr Steve  
 Baldwin, Harriett  
 Barclay, rh Stephen  
 Baron, Mr John  
 Bebb, Guto  
 Bellingham, Sir Henry  
 Benyon, rh Richard

Beresford, Sir Paul  
 Bery, Jake  
 Blackman, Bob  
 Blunt, Crispin  
 Boles, Nick  
 Bone, Mr Peter  
 Bottomley, Sir Peter  
 Bowie, Andrew  
 Bradley, Ben  
 Bradley, rh Karen  
 Brady, Sir Graham  
 Braverman, Suella  
 Brereton, Jack  
 Bridgen, Andrew  
 Brine, Steve  
 Brokenshire, rh James  
 Bruce, Fiona  
 Buckland, Robert  
 Burghart, Alex

Burns, Conor	Goldsmith, Zac	Lewer, Andrew	Ross, Douglas
Burt, rh Alistair	Goodwill, rh Mr Robert	Lewis, rh Brandon	Rowley, Lee
Cairns, rh Alun	Gove, rh Michael	Lewis, rh Dr Julian	Rudd, rh Amber
Campbell, Mr Gregory	Graham, Luke	Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian	Rutley, David
Cartlidge, James	Graham, Richard	Lidington, rh Mr David	Sandbach, Antoinette
Cash, Sir William	Grant, Bill	Little Pengelly, Emma	Scully, Paul
Caulfield, Maria	Grant, Mrs Helen	Lopez, Julia	Seely, Mr Bob
Chalk, Alex	Gray, James	Lopresti, Jack	Selous, Andrew
Chishti, Rehman	Grayling, rh Chris	Lord, Mr Jonathan	Shannon, Jim
Chope, Sir Christopher	Green, Chris	Loughton, Tim	Shapps, rh Grant
Churchill, Jo	Green, rh Damian	Mackinlay, Craig	Sharma, Alok
Clark, Colin	Greening, rh Justine	Maclean, Rachel	Shelbrooke, Alec
Clark, rh Greg	Grieve, rh Mr Dominic	Main, Mrs Anne	Simpson, David
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth	Griffiths, Andrew	Mak, Alan	Simpson, rh Mr Keith
Clarke, Mr Simon	Gyimah, Mr Sam	Malthouse, Kit	Skidmore, Chris
Cleverly, James	Hair, Kirstene	Mann, Scott	Smith, Chloe
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey	Halfon, rh Robert	Masterton, Paul	Smith, rh Julian
Coffey, Dr Thérèse	Hammond, rh Mr Philip	Maynard, Paul	Smith, Royston
Collins, Damian	Hammond, Stephen	McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick	Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
Costa, Alberto	Hancock, rh Matt	McPartland, Stephen	Spencer, Mark
Courts, Robert	Hands, rh Greg	McVey, rh Ms Esther	Stephenson, Andrew
Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey	Harper, rh Mr Mark	Menzies, Mark	Stevenson, John
Crabb, rh Stephen	Harrington, Richard	Mercer, Johnny	Stewart, Bob
Crouch, Tracey	Harris, Rebecca	Merriman, Huw	Stewart, Rory
Davies, Chris	Harrison, Trudy	Metcalfe, Stephen	Streeter, Sir Gary
Davies, David T. C.	Hart, Simon	Miller, rh Mrs Maria	Stride, rh Mel
Davies, Glyn	Hayes, rh Sir John	Milling, Amanda	Stuart, Graham
Davies, Mims	Heald, rh Sir Oliver	Mills, Nigel	Sturdy, Julian
Davies, Philip	Heapey, James	Milton, rh Anne	Sunak, Rishi
Davis, rh Mr David	Heaton-Harris, Chris	Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew	Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Dinenage, Caroline	Heaton-Jones, Peter	Moore, Damien	Swire, rh Sir Hugo
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan	Henderson, Gordon	Mordaunt, rh Penny	Syms, Sir Robert
Docherty, Leo	Herbert, rh Nick	Morgan, rh Nicky	Thomas, Derek
Dodds, rh Nigel	Hoare, Simon	Morris, Anne Marie	Thomson, Ross
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.	Hollinrake, Kevin	Morris, David	Throup, Maggie
Donelan, Michelle	Hollobone, Mr Philip	Morris, James	Tolhurst, Kelly
Double, Steve	Holloway, Adam	Mundell, rh David	Tomlinson, Justin
Dowden, Oliver	Howell, John	Murray, Mrs Sheryll	Tomlinson, Michael
Doyle-Price, Jackie	Huddleston, Nigel	Murrison, Dr Andrew	Tracey, Craig
Drax, Richard	Hughes, Eddie	Neill, Robert	Tredinnick, David
Duddridge, James	Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy	Newton, Sarah	Trevelyan, Anne-Marie
Duguid, David	Hurd, rh Mr Nick	Nokes, rh Caroline	Truss, rh Elizabeth
Duncan, rh Sir Alan	Jack, Mr Alister	Norman, Jesse	Tugendhat, Tom
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain	James, Margot	O'Brien, Neil	Vaizey, rh Mr Edward
Dunne, rh Mr Philip	Javid, rh Sajid	Offord, Dr Matthew	Vara, Mr Shailesh
Ellis, Michael	Jayawardena, Mr Ranil	Opperman, Guy	Vickers, Martin
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias	Jenkin, Sir Bernard	Paisley, Ian	Villiers, rh Theresa
Elphicke, Charlie	Jenkyns, Andrea	Parish, Neil	Walker, Mr Charles
Eustice, George	Jenrick, Robert	Patel, rh Priti	Walker, Mr Robin
Evans, Mr Nigel	Johnson, rh Boris	Paterson, rh Mr Owen	Wallace, rh Mr Ben
Evennett, rh Sir David	Johnson, Dr Caroline	Pawsey, Mark	Warburton, David
Fabricant, Michael	Johnson, Gareth	Penning, rh Sir Mike	Warman, Matt
Fallon, rh Sir Michael	Jones, Andrew	Penrose, John	Watling, Giles
Field, rh Mark	Jones, rh Mr David	Percy, Andrew	Whately, Helen
Ford, Vicky	Jones, Mr Marcus	Perry, rh Claire	Wheeler, Mrs Heather
Foster, Kevin	Kawczynski, Daniel	Philp, Chris	Whittaker, Craig
Francois, rh Mr Mark	Keegan, Gillian	Pincher, rh Christopher	Whittingdale, rh Mr John
Frazer, Lucy	Kennedy, Seema	Poulter, Dr Dan	Wiggin, Bill
Freeman, George	Kerr, Stephen	Prentis, Victoria	Williamson, rh Gavin
Freer, Mike	Knight, rh Sir Greg	Prisk, Mr Mark	Wilson, rh Sammy
Fysh, Mr Marcus	Knight, Julian	Pritchard, Mark	Wollaston, Dr Sarah
Gale, rh Sir Roger	Kwarteng, Kwasi	Pursglove, Tom	Wood, Mike
Garnier, Mark	Lamont, John	Quin, Jeremy	Wragg, Mr William
Gauke, rh Mr David	Lancaster, rh Mark	Raab, rh Dominic	Wright, rh Jeremy
Ghani, Ms Nusrat	Latham, Mrs Pauline	Redwood, rh John	Zahawi, Nadhim
Gibb, rh Nick	Leadsom, rh Andrea	Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob	
Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl	Lee, Dr Phillip	Robertson, Mr Laurence	
Girvan, Paul	Leigh, rh Sir Edward	Robinson, Gavin	
Glen, John	Letwin, rh Sir Oliver	Robinson, Mary	
		Rosindell, Andrew	

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
**Iain Stewart and**  
**Wendy Morton**

*Question accordingly negated.*

### New Clause 26

#### REVIEW OF CHANGES MADE BY SECTIONS 79 AND 80

“(1) The Chancellor of the Exchequer must review the effects of the changes made by sections 79 and 80 to TMA 1970, and lay a report on that review before the House of Commons not later than 30 March 2019.

(2) The review under this section must include a comparison of the time limit on proceedings for the recovery of lost tax that involves an offshore matter with other time limits on proceedings for the recovery of lost tax, including, but not limited to, those provided for by Schedules 11 and 12 to the Finance (No. 2) Act 2017.

(3) The review under this section must also consider the extent to which provisions equivalent to section 36A(7)(b) of TMA 1970 (relating to reasonable expectations) apply to the application of other time limits.”—(*Sir Edward Davey*.)

*This new clause would require the Treasury to review the effect of the changes made by sections 79 and 80 and compare them with other legislation relating to the recovery of lost tax including specifically the loan charge provisions of Schedules 11 and 12 to the Finance (No. 2) Act 2017.*

*Brought up, and added to the Bill.*

### New Schedule 1

#### INTANGIBLE FIXED ASSETS: RESTRICTIONS ON GOODWILL AND CERTAIN OTHER ASSETS

1 Part 8 of CTA 2009 (intangible fixed assets) is amended as follows.

2 In section 711 (overview of Part) in subsection (8) after paragraph (f) (but before the following “and”) insert—

“(fa) Chapter 15A (debts in respect of goodwill and certain other assets).”.

3 In section 715 (application of Part to goodwill) in subsection (2) for the words from “section 816A” to the end substitute “Chapter 15A (debts in respect of goodwill and certain other assets).”.

4 In section 746 (“non-trading credits” and “non-trading debits”) in subsection (2) for paragraph (ba) substitute—

“(ba) sections 879C(3), 879I(3), 879K(5) and 879O(3)(b) (debts in respect of goodwill and certain other assets treated as non-trading debits).”.

5 Omit section 816A (restrictions on goodwill and certain other assets).

6 After section 879 insert—

#### “CHAPTER 15A

#### DEBITS IN RESPECT OF GOODWILL AND CERTAIN OTHER ASSETS

##### *Introduction*

##### **879A Introduction**

(1) This Chapter contains special rules about the debits to be brought into account by a company for tax purposes in respect of relevant assets.

(2) In this Chapter “relevant asset” means—

- (a) goodwill in a business or part of a business,
- (b) an intangible fixed asset that consists of information which relates to customers or potential customers of a business or part of a business,
- (c) an intangible fixed asset that consists of a relationship (whether contractual or not) between a person carrying on a business and one or more customers of that business or part of that business,
- (d) an unregistered trade mark or other sign used in the course of a business or part of a business, or

- (e) a licence or other right in respect of an asset within any of paragraphs (a) to (d).

##### *Requirement to write down at a fixed rate*

##### **879B Requirement to write down at a fixed rate**

(1) This section applies if a company acquires or creates a relevant asset on or after 1 April 2019.

(2) The company is to be treated as having made an election under section 730 to write down the cost of the asset for tax purposes at a fixed rate.

(3) In its application in relation to the asset, section 731 (writing down at fixed rate: calculation) has effect as if in subsection (1)(a) for “4%” there was substituted “6.5%”.

(4) The Treasury may by regulations amend subsection (3) so as to alter the percentage substituted for 4%.

##### *Restrictions on debits: pre-FA 2019 relevant assets*

##### **879C Restrictions on debits: pre-FA 2019 relevant assets**

(1) This section applies in respect of a relevant asset of a company if it is a pre-FA 2019 relevant asset.

(2) No debits in respect of the asset are to be brought into account by the company for tax purposes under Chapter 3 (debts in respect of intangible fixed assets) or Chapter 15 (adjustments on change of accounting policy).

(3) Any debit in respect of the asset that is brought into account by the company for tax purposes under Chapter 4 (realisation of intangible fixed assets) is treated for the purposes of Chapter 6 as a non-trading debit.

(4) Sections 879D to 879H set out the cases in which a relevant asset of a company is a pre-FA 2019 relevant asset for the purposes of this Chapter.

##### **879D Pre-FA 2019 relevant asset: the first case**

(1) For the purposes of this Chapter a relevant asset of a company is a pre-FA 2019 relevant asset if—

- (a) the company acquired or created the asset during the period beginning with 8 July 2015 and ending with 31 March 2019, and
- (b) the asset was a chargeable intangible asset in relation to the company at any time during the period beginning with 29 October 2018 and ending with 31 March 2019.

##### **879E Pre-FA 2019 relevant asset: the second case**

(1) For the purposes of this Chapter a relevant asset of a company (“C”) is a pre-FA 2019 relevant asset if—

- (a) another company acquired or created the asset during the period beginning with 8 July 2015 and ending with 31 March 2019,
- (b) it was a chargeable intangible asset in relation to that other company at any time during the period beginning with 29 October 2018 and ending with 31 March 2019, and
- (c) C acquired the asset on or after 1 April 2019 otherwise than in case A or case B from a person who was a related party in relation to C.

(2) Case A is where—

- (a) C acquired the asset from a company that was within the charge to corporation tax at the time of the acquisition, and
- (b) the asset was not a pre-FA 2019 relevant asset in the hands of that company immediately before the acquisition.

(3) Case B is where C acquired the asset from a person (“the intermediary”) who acquired the asset on or after 1 April 2019 from a third person—

- (a) who was not at the time of the intermediary’s acquisition a related party in relation—
  - (i) to the intermediary, or



- (ii) if the intermediary was not a company, to a company in relation to which the intermediary was a related party, and

- (b) who is not, at the time of the acquisition by C, a related party in relation to C.

(4) References in this section to one person being (or not being) a related party in relation to another person are to be read as including references to the participation condition being met (or, as the case may be not being met) as between those persons.

(5) References in subsection (4) to a person include a firm in a case where, for section 1259 purposes, references in this section to a company are read as references to the firm.

(6) In subsection (5) “section 1259 purposes” means the purposes of determining under section 1259 the amount of profits or losses to be allocated to a partner in a firm.

(7) Section 148 of TIOPA 2010 (when the participation condition is met) applies for the purposes of subsection (4) as it applies for the purpose of section 147(1)(b) of TIOPA 2010.

#### **879F Pre-FA 2019 relevant asset: the third case**

(1) For the purposes of this Chapter a relevant asset of a company (“C”) is a pre-FA 2019 relevant asset if—

- (a) the relevant asset was created on or after 29 October 2018,
- (b) C acquired the relevant asset on or after 1 April 2019 from a person (“the transferor”) who was a related party in relation to C at the time of the acquisition,
- (c) the value of the relevant asset derives in whole or in part from another asset (“the other asset”), and
- (d) the other asset meets the preserved status condition (see section 879G).

(2) But if only part of the value of the relevant asset derives from the other asset—

- (a) the relevant asset is to be treated for the purposes of this Chapter as if it were two separate assets—
  - (i) one representing the part of the value of the relevant asset that does so derive, and
  - (ii) the other representing the part of the value of the relevant asset that does not so derive, and
- (b) subsection (1) applies only in relation to the separate asset representing the part of the value of the relevant asset that does so derive.

(3) For the purposes of this section the cases in which the value of a relevant asset may be derived from another asset include any case where—

- (a) assets have been merged or divided,
- (b) assets have changed their nature, or
- (c) rights or interests in or over assets have been created or extinguished.

(4) Section 879G supplements this section.

#### **879G The preserved status condition etc**

(1) For the purposes of section 879F the other asset meets the preserved status condition if subsection (2) or (3) applies.

(2) This subsection applies if the other asset—

- (a) was acquired or created by a company during the period beginning with 8 July 2015 and ending with 31 March 2019, and
- (b) was a chargeable intangible asset in the hands of that company at any time during the period beginning with 29 October 2018 and ending with 31 March 2019 when—
  - (i) that company and C were related parties, or
  - (ii) that company and the transferor were related parties.

(3) This subsection applies if the other asset was a pre-FA 2019 relevant asset in the hands of a company at any time during the period beginning with 1 April 2019 and ending with the acquisition mentioned in section 879F(1)(b) when—

- (a) that company and C were related parties, or

(b) that company and the transferor were related parties.

(4) It does not matter for the purposes of section 879F(1)(a) who created the relevant asset.

(5) Any apportionment necessary for the purposes of section 879F(2) must be made on a just and reasonable basis.

(6) Section 879E(4) to (7) applies for the purposes of section 879F and this section.

(7) Expressions used in this section have the same meaning as in section 879F.

#### **879H Pre-FA 2019 relevant asset: the fourth case**

(1) For the purposes of this Chapter a relevant asset of a company is a pre-FA 2019 relevant asset if—

- (a) the company acquired the asset on or after 1 April 2019 directly or indirectly in consequence of, or otherwise in connection with, a disposal of a relevant asset by another person, and
- (b) the asset disposed of would have been a pre-FA 2019 relevant asset in the hands of the company had the person transferred it to the company at the time of the disposal.

(2) For the purposes of this section it does not matter whether—

- (a) the asset disposed of is the same asset as the acquired asset,
- (b) the acquired asset is acquired at the time of the disposal, or
- (c) the acquired asset is acquired by merging assets or otherwise.

#### *Restrictions on debits: no business or no qualifying IP assets acquired*

#### **879I Restrictions on debits: no business or no qualifying IP assets acquired**

(1) This section applies in respect of a relevant asset of a company if the company acquires the asset on or after 1 April 2019 otherwise than as part of the acquisition of a business.

(2) This section also applies in respect of a relevant asset of a company if—

- (a) the company acquires the asset on or after 1 April 2019 as part of the acquisition of a business, and
- (b) the company does not acquire any qualifying IP assets as part of the acquisition of the business for use on a continuing basis in the course of the business.

(3) No debits in respect of the asset are to be brought into account by the company for tax purposes under Chapter 3 (debts in respect of intangible fixed assets) or Chapter 15 (adjustments on change of accounting policy).

(4) Any debit in respect of the asset that is brought into account by the company for tax purposes under Chapter 4 (realisation of intangible fixed assets) is treated for the purposes of Chapter 6 as a non-trading debit.

#### **879J Meaning of qualifying IP asset**

(1) In section 879I “qualifying IP asset”, in relation to a company, means an intangible fixed asset that meets the following two conditions.

(2) The first condition is that the asset is—

- (a) a patent, registered design, copyright or design right, plant breeders’ right, or right under section 7 of the Plant Varieties Act 1997,
- (b) a right under the law of a country or territory outside the United Kingdom corresponding or similar to a right within paragraph (a), or
- (c) a licence or other right in respect of anything within paragraph (a) or (b).

(4) The second condition is that in the hands of the company the asset—

- (a) is not to any extent excluded from this Part by Chapter 10, and
- (b) is not a pre-FA 2002 asset (see section 881).

(5) The reference in subsection (2)(c) to a licence or other right does not include a licence or other right that permits the use of computer software but does not permit its manufacture, adaptation or supply.

(6) The Treasury may by regulations amend the meaning of qualifying IP asset for the purposes of this Chapter.

*Restrictions on debits: acquisition from individual or firm*

**879K Restrictions on debits: acquisition from individual or firm**

(1) This section applies in respect of a relevant asset of a company if—

- (a) the company acquires the asset on or after 1 April 2019 directly or indirectly from an individual or firm (“the transferor”),
- (b) the related party condition is met, and
- (c) the third party acquisition condition is not met.

(2) The related party condition is met if—

- (a) in a case where the transferor is an individual, the transferor is a related party in relation to the company at the time of the acquisition;
- (b) in a case where the transferor is a firm, any individual who is a member of the transferor is a related party in relation to the company at that time.

(3) The third party acquisition condition is met if—

- (a) in a case where the relevant asset is goodwill—
  - (i) the transferor acquired all or part of the relevant business in one or more third party acquisitions as part of which the transferor acquired goodwill, and
  - (ii) the relevant asset is acquired by the company as part of an acquisition of all the relevant business;
- (b) in a case where the relevant asset is not goodwill—
  - (i) the transferor acquired the relevant asset in a third party acquisition, and
  - (ii) the relevant asset is acquired by the company as part of an acquisition of all the relevant business.

(4) No debits in respect of the asset are to be brought into account by the company for tax purposes under Chapter 3 (debts in respect of intangible fixed assets) or Chapter 15 (adjustments on change of accounting policy).

(5) Any debit in respect of the asset that is brought into account by the company for tax purposes under Chapter 4 (realisation of intangible fixed assets) is treated for the purposes of Chapter 6 as a non-trading debit.

**879L Meaning of relevant business and third party acquisition**

(1) This section applies for the purposes of section 879K(3).

(2) “Relevant business” means—

- (a) in a case where the relevant asset is within paragraph (e) of subsection (2) of section 879A, the business or (as the case may be) the part of the business mentioned in the paragraph of that subsection within which the licensed asset falls, and
- (b) in any other case, the business or (as the case may be) the part of the business mentioned in the paragraph of that subsection within which the relevant asset falls.

(3) The transferor acquires something in a “third party acquisition” if—

- (a) the transferor acquires it from a company (“C”) and, at the time of that acquisition—
  - (i) if the transferor is an individual, the transferor is not a related party in relation to C, or
  - (ii) if the transferor is a firm, no individual who is a member of the transferor is a related party in relation to C, or
- (b) the transferor acquires it from a person (“P”) who is not a company and, at the time of that acquisition—

(i) if the transferor is an individual, P is not connected with the transferor, or

(ii) if the transferor is a firm, no individual who is a member of the transferor is connected with P.

(4) But an acquisition is not a “third party acquisition” if—

- (a) its main purpose, or one of its main purposes, is for any person to obtain a tax advantage (within the meaning of section 1139 of CTA 2010), or
- (b) it occurs during the period beginning with 8 July 2015 and ending with 31 March 2019.

(5) In this section “connected” has the same meaning as in Chapter 12 (see section 842).

*Partial restrictions on debits*

**879M When the partial restrictions apply: qualifying IP assets**

(1) Section 879O (the partial restrictions on debits) applies in respect of a relevant asset (“the asset concerned”) of a company if—

- (a) the company acquires the asset concerned on or after 1 April 2019 as part of the acquisition of a business,
- (b) the company also acquires qualifying IP assets as part of the acquisition of the business for use on a continuing basis in the course of the business, and
- (c) the amount in subsection (3) is less than 1.

(2) But section 879O does not apply in respect of the asset concerned if either of the following sections applies in respect of it—

- (a) section 879C (restrictions on debits: pre-FA 2019 relevant assets);
- (b) section 879K (restrictions on debits: acquisition from individual or firm).

(3) The amount is—

$$\frac{A \times N}{B}$$

where—

A is the expenditure incurred by the company for or in connection with the acquisition of the qualifying IP assets mentioned in subsection (1)(b),

B is the expenditure incurred by the company for or in connection with the acquisition of the asset concerned and any other relevant assets acquired with the business, and

N is 6.

(4) The Treasury may by regulations amend the meaning of N.

(5) In this section—

“expenditure” means expenditure that is—

- (a) capitalised for accounting purposes, or
- (b) recognised in determining the profit or loss of the company concerned without being capitalised for accounting purposes,

subject to any adjustments under this Part or Part 4 of TIOPA 2010;

“qualifying IP asset” has the same meaning as in section 879I (see section 879J).

**879N When the partial restrictions apply: acquisition from individual or firm**

(1) Section 879O (the partial restrictions on debits) also applies in respect of a relevant asset of a company if—

- (a) the company acquires the asset on or after 1 April 2019 directly or indirectly from an individual or firm (“the transferor”),
- (b) the related party condition is met,
- (c) the third party acquisition condition is met, and
- (d) the amount in subsection (6) is less than 1.

(2) But section 879O does not apply in respect of the relevant asset if either of the following sections applies in respect of it—

- (a) section 879C (restrictions on debits: pre-FA 2019 relevant assets);
- (b) section 879I (restrictions on debits: no business or no qualifying IP assets acquired).
- (3) The related party condition is met if—
- (a) in a case where the transferor is an individual, the transferor is a related party in relation to the company at the time of the acquisition;
- (b) in a case where the transferor is a firm, any individual who is a member of the transferor is a related party in relation to the company at that time.
- (4) The third party acquisition condition is met if—
- (a) in a case where the relevant asset is goodwill—
- (i) the transferor acquired all or part of the relevant business in one or more third party acquisitions as part of which the transferor acquired goodwill, and
- (ii) the relevant asset is acquired by the company as part of an acquisition of all the relevant business;
- (b) in a case where the relevant asset is not goodwill—
- (i) the transferor acquired the relevant asset in a third party acquisition, and
- (ii) the relevant asset is acquired by the company as part of an acquisition of all the relevant business.
- (5) Section 879L (meaning of relevant business and third party acquisition) applies for the purposes of this section.
- (6) The amount is—

$$\frac{A}{B}$$

where—

- A is the relevant accounting value of third party acquisitions (see subsections (7) to (9)), and
- B is the expenditure incurred by the company for or in connection with the acquisition of the relevant asset that is—
- (a) capitalised by the company for accounting purposes, or
- (b) recognised in determining the company's profit or loss without being capitalised for accounting purposes,
- subject to any adjustments under this Part or Part 4 of TIOPA 2010.

(7) In a case in which the relevant asset is goodwill, the relevant accounting value of third party acquisitions is the notional accounting value of the goodwill mentioned in subsection (4)(a)(i) (“the previously acquired goodwill”).

(8) In a case in which the relevant asset is not goodwill, the relevant accounting value of third party acquisitions is the notional accounting value of the relevant asset.

(9) The “notional accounting value” of the previously acquired goodwill, or the relevant asset, is what its accounting value would have been in GAAP-compliant accounts drawn up by the transferor—

- (a) immediately before the relevant asset was acquired by the company, and
- (b) on the basis that the relevant business was a going concern.

### 879O The partial restrictions on debits

(1) Where this section applies in respect of a relevant asset of a company, the following restrictions have effect.

(2) If a debit in respect of the relevant asset is to be brought into account by the company for tax purposes under a provision of Chapter 3 (debts in respect of intangible fixed assets) or Chapter 15 (adjustments on change of accounting policy), the amount of that debit is—

$$D \times RA$$

where—

D is the amount of the debit that would be brought into account disregarding this section (and, accordingly, for the purposes of any calculation of

the tax written-down value of the relevant asset needed to determine D, this section's effect in relation to any debits previously brought into account is to be disregarded), and

RA is the relevant amount (see subsection (6)).

(3) If, but for this section, a debit in respect of any of the relevant assets would be brought into account by the company for tax purposes under a provision of Chapter 4 (realisation of intangible fixed assets), the following two debits are to be brought into account under that provision instead—

- (a) a debit determined in accordance with subsection (4), and
- (b) a debit determined in accordance with subsection (5), which is to be treated for the purposes of Chapter 6 as a non-trading debit (“the non-trading debit”).

(4) The amount of the debit determined in accordance with this subsection is—

$$D \times RA$$

where—

D is the amount of the debit that would be brought into account under Chapter 4 disregarding this section (and, accordingly, for the purposes of any calculation of the tax written down value of the relevant asset needed to determine D, this section's effect in relation to any debits previously brought into account is to be disregarded), and

RA is the relevant amount (see subsection (6)).

(5) The amount of the non-trading debit is—

$$D - TD$$

where—

D is the amount of the debit that would be brought into account under Chapter 4 disregarding this section (but, for the purposes of any calculation of the tax written-down value of the relevant asset needed to determine D, this section's effect in relation to any debits previously brought into account is not to be disregarded), and

TD is the amount of the debit determined in accordance with subsection (4).

(6) In this section the “relevant amount” means—

- (a) in a case where this section applies in respect of the relevant asset by reason only of section 879M, the amount in subsection (3) of that section;
- (b) in a case where this section applies in respect of the relevant asset by reason only of section 879N, the amount in subsection (6) of that section;
- (c) in a case where this section applies in respect of the relevant asset by reason of both section 879M and 879N, the amount found by multiplying the amount in subsection (3) of section 879M by the amount in subsection (6) of section 879N.

### Supplementary

#### 879P Date of acquisition of relevant asset

(11) A company that acquires a relevant asset in pursuance of an unconditional obligation under a contract is to be treated for the purposes of this Chapter as having acquired the asset on the date on which the company became subject to that obligation or (if later) the date on which that obligation became unconditional.

(2) An obligation is unconditional if it may not be varied or extinguished by the exercise of a right (whether under contract or otherwise).”

7 (1) The amendments made by this Schedule have effect in relation to accounting periods beginning on or after 1 April 2019.

(2) For the purposes of sub-paragraph (1), an accounting period beginning before, and ending on or after, 1 April 2019 is to be treated as if so much of the accounting period as falls



before that date, and so much of the accounting period as falls on or after that date, were separate accounting periods.”—  
(*Mel Stride.*)

*Brought up, and added to the Bill.*

### Clause 25

#### INTANGIBLE FIXED ASSETS: EXCEPTIONS TO DEGROUPING CHARGES ETC

*Amendments made:* 4, page 14, line 29, at beginning insert “the exemption conferred by”.

Amendment 5, page 14, line 33, at end insert—

“(3) For the purposes of subsection (2)(a) ignore paragraph 6 of Schedule 7AC to TCGA 1992 (cases in which exemptions do not apply).”

Amendment 6, page 15, line 6, at end insert—

“(6) In its application in relation to a company that ceases to be a member of a group or ceases to meet the condition in section 785(2)(b) of CTA 2009 before 21 December 2018, section 782A of CTA 2009 has effect as if subsection (3) of that section was omitted.”—(*Mel Stride.*)

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** I will now suspend the House for no more than five minutes in order to make a decision about certification. The Division bells will be rung two minutes before the House resumes. Following my certification, the Government will table the appropriate consent motion, copies of which will be made available in the Vote Office and will be distributed by Doorkeepers.

8.24 pm

*Sitting suspended.*

8.27 pm

*On resuming—*

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** I can now inform the House that I have completed certification of the Bill, as required by the Standing Order. I have confirmed the view expressed in the Speaker’s provisional certificate issued on 7 January. Copies of my final certificate will be made available in the Vote Office and on the parliamentary website.

Under Standing Order No. 83M, a consent motion is therefore required for the Bill to proceed. Copies of the motion are available in the Vote Office and on the parliamentary website, and have been made available to Members in the Chamber. Does a Minister intend to move the consent motion?

**The Lord Commissioner of Her Majesty’s Treasury (Craig Whittaker)** *indicated assent.*

*The House forthwith resolved itself into the Legislative Grand Committee (England, Wales and Northern Ireland) (Standing Order No. 83M).*

[DAME ROSIE WINTERTON *in the Chair*]

8.28 pm

**The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Dame Rosie Winterton):** I remind hon. Members that, if there is a Division, only Members representing constituencies in England, Wales and Northern Ireland

may vote on the consent motion. As the knife has fallen, there can be no debate. I call the Minister to move the motion.

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 83M(5)),*

That the Committee consents to the following certified clause of the Finance (No. 3) Bill:

*Clause certified under Standing Order No. 83L(2) (as modified in its application by Standing Order No. 83S(4)) as relating exclusively to England, Wales and Northern Ireland and being within devolved legislative competence*

Clause 3 of the Bill, as amended in Committee and the Public Bill Committee and on Report.—(*Mel Stride.*)

*Question agreed to.*

*The occupant of the Chair left the Chair to report the decision of the Committee (Standing Order No. 83M(6)).*

*The Deputy Speaker resumed the Chair; decision reported.*

*Third Reading*

8.29 pm

**Mel Stride:** I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

Eight years ago, our country’s finances were in peril. For far too long, Labour had spent and borrowed more than our country could afford. The deficit was at a peacetime high and debt was spiralling out of control. [*Interruption.*] I would not keep repeating it if Labour Members had learned their lesson, but they clearly have not, so they need to be told. This Government came into office knowing that we had to rise to the challenge of working with the British people to bring expenditure back under control and to once again live within our means, and we have done just that, with the deficit now four fifths lower than it was when we came into office and debt beginning its first sustained fall in a generation.

But bringing down the deficit alone was not the limit of our endeavour. The manner in which we did so was equally important: reducing the deficit, yes, but remaining committed to funding our vital public services, giving tax cuts to millions of strivers right up and down the country, and building a tax system that rewards and incentivises business and growth—prudent but pro-business, and deeply invested in the idea that those who work hard should be rewarded. The results are clear to see: 3.3 million more people in work since 2010, unemployment at its lowest level since the 1970s, wages growing, and the rate of absolute poverty at a record low. This Bill continues that work.

At the heart of the Conservative ideal is the firm belief that people know how to spend their money better than Government do, and that those who work hard deserve to be rewarded. The best way for Government to serve that ideal is to cut taxes, especially for those on low and middle incomes—to get out of the pockets of the British people and let them decide what they do with the money that they have worked so hard to earn. When this Government came into office, the personal allowance was at £6,475 and the higher rate threshold was at £43,875. We were elected to raise those thresholds to £12,500 and £50,000 respectively. In this Bill, we deliver on that commitment not just in line with our manifesto but a full year early—at the earliest affordable opportunity. Those changes mean that, compared with 2015, we have cut taxes for 32 million people, with an additional 1.7 million people paying no tax at all, and

nearly a million fewer people having to pay the higher rate of income tax. We are also making sure that the extra money in people's pockets goes further. It is for that reason that we are freezing fuel duty, freezing air passenger duty on short-haul flights in real terms, and freezing the duty on beer, cider and spirits.

Also central to the mission of this Government is our steadfast support for business—our instinctive and deep-rooted understanding that it is never Government who generate the wealth and taxes that fund our vital public services, but the innovation and hard work of millions of people right up and down our country. The achievements of our businesses have been very significant, yet despite that, productivity has been subdued since the financial crisis, and business investment in our country, while strong, is lower than we would like it to be to make the most of the opportunities that lie ahead.

That is why in this Bill we are taking substantial action to boost private sector investment. We have introduced, at the request of the CBI, a new capital allowance for qualifying non-residential structures and buildings that will support business investment and improve the international competitiveness of the UK tax system. From 1 January, we are increasing the annual investment allowance to £1 million for two years, providing additional support for firms to invest and grow. Not least because of the relentless lobbying of my Conservative colleagues who represent constituencies in Scotland, we are legislating for a groundbreaking transferable tax history mechanism for late-life oil and gas fields.

A core pillar of this Government's approach to taxation is a belief in fairness—that everyone should pay what they owe when they owe it. This Government have an outstanding record in this area. We have protected more than £200 billion in revenue that would otherwise have gone unpaid since 2010, and we have introduced more than 100 avoidance and evasion measures since that time.

In this Bill, we continue that work, taking action against multinationals that keep their intangible property in low-tax jurisdictions in order to avoid UK tax; tackling profit fragmentation, whereby companies reduce their tax burden by artificially shifting their revenue; and cracking down on multinationals that attempt to erode the tax base—a tax system where enterprise is rewarded but everyone pays their fair share and our public services get the funding that they need.

I have been proud to take this Bill through the House. It provides a tax cut for 32 million people. It backs British businesses, introducing with measures to boost private sector investment and support jobs and growth, to ensure that our country is the country in which enterprise can thrive. I understand that the Labour party does not agree with every aspect of the Bill but will not divide the House on Third Reading, which is positive. Those on the Government Benches support tax cuts for millions of hard-working people. We support business growth and investment. We support job creation, and we are the side of the House to ensure that taxes are fair and paid. I commend the Bill to the House.

8.35 pm

**Anneliese Dodds:** This has been a Finance Bill of highs and lows. One high was the Government finally listening, albeit only when they were pushed to do so by

the prospect of losing a vote, as we have just seen in relation to the loan charge. Another high was the fact that we saw the House seize the initiative to act to protect our country from the negative consequences of a no-deal Brexit for our economy and for our safety and resilience, as set out by the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin) in what I thought was an extraordinary speech.

I understand that the vote a couple of hours ago on the amendment tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) was the first time that a Government have been defeated at this late stage of a Finance Bill since the summer of 1978. At that stage I was only four months old, so I cannot exactly say that this is the only time I have seen a Government defeat on a Finance Bill in my lifetime, but I suspect it was the first time for many other Members. It was an appropriate defeat, because it shows that this House has adopted responsibility when our Government have sadly been unwilling to do so.

All this has happened in a context where Government have systematically attempted to reduce the opportunities for this House to influence the Finance Bill. Conservative Ministers' decisions over recent years to prevent the House from substantively amending Finance Bills have been unprecedented. They have become a new norm and reflect the lack of confidence that this Government have in arguing their convictions. Surely that, above all, is the case with the Government's approach in this Finance Bill, which preserves austerity for the many while the very best-off people and profitable corporations continue to benefit, our productivity gap yawns, regional inequalities widen and we see the creation of unprecedented phenomena in this country, such as the fact that getting into work is no longer the ticket out of poverty that it once was.

We have seen this Government's unwillingness even to gather the figures and evidence about how their measures will affect child poverty or public health, in a context where life expectancy is for the first time going down in some of our communities. We have seen them bowing to lobbying pressure and introducing loopholes to protect many overseas investors from measures intended to level the playing field between them and domestic investors. Finally, we have seen the extraordinary contortion of a new schedule being inserted into the Bill just before Christmas to introduce a new tax relief for profitable corporations, not only very late in the day but without any information whatsoever about the cost that it will pose to the public purse. Indeed, we will not get that information before the measure is implemented.

The Government are spendthrift when it comes to profitable companies and the very best off, but miserly when it comes to the worst off. I see those on the Government Front Bench adopting a rather pantomime-style response to that. I am sorry to say that the overall package in this Finance Bill supports that contention, as do the figures, if only we could have them in front of us now.

Despite the considerable problems with this Bill, given the fact that it now contains provisions that militate against a no-deal scenario—surely the most significant risk currently to our economy and indeed to our security—we cannot and will not oppose it. I want to end by thanking all the civil servants and indeed staff of

[Anneliese Dodds]

this House who have worked so hard on this Bill, and who have helped us in the Opposition—[*Interruption.*] I see that the Minister wants to thank them, too. I also want to thank all my hon. Friends who have contributed to our debates on this Bill.

8.40 pm

**Kirsty Blackman:** It is great to have the chance to speak on the Third Reading of my fifth Finance Bill. Given my relatively short time in the House, that shows just how many Finance Bills we have had.

There is much this Government do that I would criticise, but I will start with three things that I am pleased are in this Finance Bill. The first, which the Minister mentioned, is the transferrable tax history. To be clear, I was calling for that when there was only one Scottish Conservative Member of Parliament in this place. Actually, I think there has been cross-party work on the transferrable tax history. I think the Government have worked well with industry in bringing it forward, and I am pleased that they have done so. I am really pleased that it is in the Bill, and I think it will make a big difference to the North sea in particular, given the fact that we can extract oil and gas from the North sea for a longer period as a result of the changes made. The jobs associated with that will be secured, which is particularly important for my constituents and those in constituencies around the north-east of Scotland, so I am pleased it is in the Bill.

I am also pleased that clauses 92 and 93 are in the Bill. Clause 92 was accepted by the Government in relation to tax avoidance. It was tabled by the SNP, and it requires a review of the effects of the provisions in reducing tax avoidance and evasion. The Government will have to bring forward this review within six months of the passing of the Act, and we look forward to them doing so. The Government chose to accept two of our amendments, neither of which I was involved in the debates on, so I am a little bit disappointed about that. My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) led on this part of the debate, and my congratulations go to her on getting this through.

Clause 93 was also accepted as an SNP amendment. It was the result of the excellent work of my hon. Friend the Member for Inverclyde (Ronnie Cowan) on fixed odds betting terminals and the general work he has been doing on the public health impacts of gambling. Earlier, I made the point that we sometimes put in tax measures to discourage behaviour that we do not want to happen—for example, a harmful behaviour. I am really pleased that the Government will, as a result of the SNP's pressure, bring forward a review of the public health impacts of gambling and the changes made. When the Government are taking decisions about gambling and gaming duties, they should always be thinking about the public health impacts and have them front and centre of any explanatory memorandum for future Finance Bills.

I am not going to be overwhelmingly positive; I have some negatives as well. The process for this year's Finance Bill has been particularly—[*Interruption.*] Shambolic, yes. It has been particularly shambolic and inadequate, because the Government have failed to

consult on as many of the measures as they should have done. They did not put them forward in draft format, so companies and organisations were not able to make known their concerns or suggest ways in which the Bill could be changed to make it better. I fear that that is not good for scrutiny. Changes were introduced in this Finance Bill to correct errors made in previous Finance Bills or to strengthen provisions that were inadequate in previous Finance Bills. Again, I am concerned that, because of the process this year, we will see more of that in future years.

The other thing that is particularly poor in this Finance Bill—this is a real contrast with the decisions made in Scotland—are the tax changes. Tax changes that have been made on things that are devolved to Scotland, which I none the less feel able to criticise, are not the ones that I feel should have been made, because they are not made from the progressive point of view that we would like. The tax changes we are making in Scotland are on a much more progressive basis, and the Government would do well to look at what we are doing in Scotland. In England, about half of taxpayers pay more than they would if they were in Scotland, and those taxpayers are the ones at the lower end of the income spectrum. They are the people we think we should be supporting, rather than the people at the top end of the income spectrum.

I have just a last couple of points. Better scrutiny of the process is always required. I have called repeatedly for the Finance Bill to be subject to evidence sessions in Committee, and I will continue to make that call of the Government until they capitulate, because Finance Bill Committees should hear evidence. The other half of this—the spend process—has been improved very slightly, but it has not been improved nearly enough, and we need better and more adequate scrutiny of Government spend before it happens, rather than just doing it through the estimates process.

Lastly, I would like to take this opportunity to thank my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire South (Mhairi Black), who was with me in Committee, as well as two members of staff, Jonathan Kiehlmann, who was involved in this, and Scott Taylor, without whose help I could not have gone through the Finance Bill Committee or the stages we are at now. I would like to offer my specific thanks to them.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed.*

## Business without Debate

### DELEGATED LEGISLATION

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)).*

#### EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS)

That the draft Electronic Communications and Wireless Telegraphy (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 29 November, be approved.—(*Jeremy Quin.*)

*Question agreed to.*



## PETITION

### Maximum sentences for child cruelty offences

8.46 pm

**Tom Tugendhat** (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): What a huge pleasure it is to be here this evening. May I start by paying tribute to some people in the Gallery just above us? Up there we have Paula Hudgell and her family. On her lap, we can see Tony. Tony is four years old, and he is an incredibly courageous young man. He was, sadly, incredibly brutalised by his birth parents, before his real parents took care of him. He was so cruelly treated in their care, and the assault on him was so great, that he lost both his legs. That is an extraordinary situation for anybody in our society to find themselves in, but where it happens to a child, at the hands of their parents, it is a wrong that screams out for justice.

That is why I am here this evening with a petition of 12,000 names—if I may, Madam Deputy Speaker, I will show you just a few of them—that Paula and Tony have collected to ask for a change in the law. How can it be right that, had Tony been an adult, and his attackers been charged with grievous bodily harm, they could have received a life sentence, but because he is a child, and because they were his parents, the maximum sentence was 10 years?

That is clearly wrong, and this petition expresses the wishes of the people not just of Kent, and not just of Kings Hill and Tonbridge and Malling, but of the whole country, who are speaking out for justice, speaking out for Tony, speaking out for the whole Hudgell family and, most of all, speaking out clearly about the wrong that we see today in our country and asking why it is not more severely punished.

Madam Deputy Speaker, thank you for letting me lodge this petition this evening. This is the first of a long series of parliamentary steps that I shall take alongside the Hudgells to change the law and to see justice done for children.

*Following is the full text of the petition:*

*[The petition of residents of Tonbridge and Malling,*

*Declares that the sentence given to the abusers of Tony Hudgell will not act as a serious deterrent considering the life changing injuries Tony suffered at their hands; the reasons for this petition is not to change the sentence already given, but for Parliament to raise the threshold of maximum sentences for future cases.*

*The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to introduce tougher sentences for child cruelty offences.*

*And the petitioners remain, etc.]*

[P002308]

## A40 in West Oxfordshire: Congestion

*Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Jeremy Quin.)*

8.48 pm

**Robert Courts** (Witney) (Con): I am delighted to see the Minister in his place again as I bring the matter of West Oxfordshire's roads before the House. I am delighted to have the opportunity to raise the issue of congestion on the A40, which is of enormous significance for those who travel on the road daily.

The A40 is one of the main trunk roads of this country and the main trunk road that travels through my constituency. Congestion is a particular concern between Witney and Oxford. There is a very good reason for my constituents' concern over the congestion that they face, many on a daily basis. It is not just from the major market towns of Witney, Carterton and Eynsham, but from the surrounding villages. Between 23,000 and 32,000 vehicles currently use the section between Witney and Oxford each day, which is above the road's capacity. During school term times, the average journey speed on the A40 between Cassington and Wolvercote in peak time is 17 mph, while on the worst days it can be as low as 10 mph.

The Oxfordshire strategic traffic model forecasts an increase in highway demand on the A40 between Witney and Oxford of between 70 and 140 movements per peak hour by 2031. Without improvements, that will lead to an even greater overcapacity on the road and increase the severity of the congestion that my constituents already suffer from. Peak journey times between Witney and Oxford could increase by about 15 minutes.

I have spoken of the major towns, but equally people living in towns and villages further afield, who may not even use the A40, are suffering the ill effects of the congestion on that road. For example, in Bladon, which is the village in which I live, we suffer from excessive traffic, particularly HGVs, which rat-run through our village on the A4095 to escape the congestion on the A40. Businesses across West Oxfordshire are shackled by the logjams on the A40 and I have lost count of the number of businesses that have said to me over the past two years that they could expand were it not for the barrier that the A40 presents because of the congestion on it.

The A40 is costing jobs and revenue. Because of the difficulties for people travelling in and out of West Oxfordshire, it is making recruitment for our NHS and our schools very difficult. The plain truth is that West Oxfordshire will never and can never reach its full potential until the congestion on the A40 is addressed.

Back in 2002, my predecessor remarked in this House that

*"In west Oxfordshire, we have some of the best and brightest businesses in the country, but the gridlock on our main road is like a hand pressed against their windpipes. Business in west Oxfordshire must be allowed to breathe."*—[*Official Report*, 12 June 2002; Vol. 386, c.308WH.]

He was right and his words remain true today. I do not rise in this debate to complain. I rise to be a voice of optimism and not to speak of the past, but to champion the opportunities and to explain to the Minister—I am very grateful to him for listening—what it is we need for our area. There is, in truth, more optimism now than

[Robert Courts]

there has been for decades. Progress is being made. If we are ambitious and bold in the years ahead, we might just be able to get to grips with this issue.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I had the opportunity to be in the hon. Gentleman's constituency through the armed forces parliamentary scheme. I have witnessed some of the problems he has on the roads in his constituency and I am very aware of the gridlock to which he refers. I am also very aware of the impact on the economic life of farming and the rural community. Does he feel that the changes he is proposing, and hoping that the Minister will respond to, will enable the rural life in his constituency to grow and have the economic life and strength it really needs?

**Robert Courts:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for that excellent intervention. He refers to two points to which I would like to draw attention. The life of rural communities is absolutely essential. I referred to the village in which I live, Bladon. It is a small village. It is one example of many villages which find that they are clogged up in turn because the A40 is so difficult.

**Alex Chalk** (Cheltenham) (Con): Not just villages, but towns such as Cheltenham beyond Witney are affected. The situation at the moment is that the A40 is like a furred up artery. If we could just unclog that artery, it would be good for jobs, businesses, social mobility and all the things we want to see in Gloucestershire as well as Oxfordshire. Does my hon. Friend agree?

**Robert Courts:** I could not agree more and I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point. I tend to talk about the A40 in terms of Witney and West Oxfordshire, but we must not forget that the effects of the congestion on the road spill over into Gloucestershire and his constituency. [Interruption.] And of course I am reminded, from a sedentary position by my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis), that it affects the whole of Oxfordshire, not just West Oxfordshire.

**Victoria Prentis** (Banbury) (Con): My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. Does he agree that in Oxfordshire we are really getting behind the Government's housing programme and going for growth? His area and mine repeatedly top the leader board for the number of new houses built. Does he agree that our road arteries are holding us back?

**Robert Courts:** That is an excellent point. One point overrides all others—if there are to be new homes, the infrastructure must come with them. I will dwell on that a little more later, but my hon. Friend makes her point excellently.

The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) referred obliquely to Brize Norton. That is terribly important. The people who work at that Royal Air Force base come not necessarily from Carterton but from further afield—sometimes 50 or 100 miles away—because of the nature of service life. This issue affects the Royal Air Force's functioning and efficiency, too, and we must address that.

There is no silver bullet for A40 congestion. We will require a combination of schemes from a variety of funding streams to tackle it. I will briefly cover some of the options and funding avenues, and ask for the Minister's help in securing the funding we need.

First, the park and ride scheme, for which a public consultation has just closed, is Oxfordshire County Council's most immediate project for A40 improvement. The intended funding stream for that is the Department for Transport's local growth fund. There are plans to build a park and ride at Eynsham, together with an eastbound bus lane between Eynsham and the Duke's Cut canal bridge near Wolvercote. Those proposals probably represent the biggest step forward on A40 congestion in a generation. They would bring real change and progress on an issue that affects the day-to-day lives of us all. We would see essential widening of the road and long-needed upgrades to public transport along the route. It would be a significant step—although perhaps not a conclusive one—in the right direction, and I will ask for the Minister's help in securing funding. However, it may be that those proposals on their own do not offer a final fix and that no aspect of this scheme can be seen in isolation. Work may need to continue—

**Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown** (The Cotswolds) (Con): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising this issue. On that theme, does he agree that part of the solution to any road congestion is improving the railways? Some while ago, I got funding for the doubling of the Cotswold line from Moreton to Evesham. Is it not now imperative that we get full doubling right through from Moreton-in-Marsh to Oxford? That would take a significant burden off the A40.

**Robert Courts:** Absolutely—I could not agree more. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point. There are two ways of addressing road congestion: increasing the flow of the road—the furred artery, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) referred to it—and taking cars off the road wherever possible. My hon. Friend the Member for The Cotswolds (Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown) refers to redoubling the Cotswold line so we can have faster, more reliable and more frequent trains and take as many people off the A40 as possible. I feel particularly strongly about that—it is one of my pet projects—and I will refer to it again a little later.

The second aspect I would like to talk about is the Government's housing infrastructure fund. One of the biggest causes for optimism at the moment is Oxfordshire County Council's plan for road upgrades and the strong case it is making for a part of that £5 billion fund. I am delighted that it is making the most of that opportunity with a very strong bid for A40 upgrades, which it will submit later this year and no doubt will be highly competitive. I look forward to continuing to work with Oxfordshire County Council and neighbouring councils, and with the Government, to progress that bid.

The bid will seek to achieve upgrades for four strategic and interdependent road sections, including general roadway widening along critical sections of the A40 to complete the dualling from Witney to Eynsham, new bus lanes, additional cycle path links and—this is another thing I have campaigned for since being elected—a walking path to promote active travel between Eynsham

and Oxford. The B4044 community path in particular is something I have campaigned for consistently since being elected. I want to take this opportunity to praise the hard work of campaigners and put on the record my full support for enabling people to cycle as much as possible—to get out of cars and to cycle from Eynsham into the centre of Oxford, as I was lucky enough to be able to do along the excellent A44 path from Bladon to Oxford when I worked in the centre of Oxford, and I am delighted that the B4044 community path is included in Oxfordshire County Council's plan.

The bid is connected to delivery of the Oxfordshire-Cotswolds garden village, which will see 2,200 new homes built on the A40 corridor. This, along with further developments west of Eynsham and Witney, will put increased demand on the A40, and so the road's capacity must be enhanced if we are to cope. I look to the Minister for his help in achieving this funding. I have always been clear that transport upgrades—improvements to bus, road and rail—need to happen before, not after, new homes are occupied to ensure that new development does not place an unacceptable burden on existing residents.

These schemes will also assist our area in delivering improved housing choice, affordability for residents and reasonable commuting time to their place of employment. They will attract high-value knowledge businesses to go alongside the leading businesses in West Oxfordshire I have already referred to, further enhancing the dynamism of our area. West Oxfordshire is an economically successful region, but this comes at a price, and that price is increased pressure on our existing infrastructure, less reliable connections and less resilience. The deficiencies in our current transport network must be addressed before we start to think about additional growth.

I fully support Oxford County Council's efforts. I have no doubt it will submit a compelling bid that I sincerely and passionately hope will be successful, and I urge the Government to accept and support the bid. I am sure the Minister will offer his advice and advocacy to that very end.

In my last two or three points, I will refer to the major road network scheme, which, looking further into the future, I believe offers more promise of further A40 funding. I have campaigned for such a programme to ensure central Government funding for local major roads that fall outside the strategic road network, and I welcome the broad outline of the scheme. Considering the existing strategic road network together with major local authority roads is a welcome step, and providing a dedicated funding stream for the major road network will enable growth and development to be more effectively planned.

I well remember discussing this matter with the Transport Secretary—I am grateful to him for visiting—as we stood near Eynsham. He saw the congestion on the A40 for himself, and this scheme grew out of that visit. I explained how the A40 had been de-trunked in 2002 by the Labour Government and how that resulted in the road falling between the cracks, not receiving the significant central Government investment required to tackle the severe congestion on the road. The major road network proposals offer the potential of local authority-controlled roads being able to access central Government funding while not losing the important local democratic control provided by locally elected councillors.

I have submitted a consultation response on the MRN and was pleased to read the Government's response published just before Christmas. I am greatly encouraged by it, and the MRN shows great promise, but we now need to see the rhetoric transformed into decisive action, such that we begin to tackle the congestion issues on roads such as the A40.

I ought briefly to mention the Oxford to Cambridge expressway project. I appreciate that it will be some time yet before construction starts, but it demonstrates how much the Government value Oxfordshire and its growth. It is a key area for business growth, and housing growth is expected as well, but if we are to accept, as the Government have done, that Oxfordshire is a key growth area for the UK, of paramount strategic and economic significance, there is no excuse for neglecting our infrastructure needs. It is all well and good building a new expressway but, if we are to deliver the economic growth envisaged, we must address our current infrastructure deficiencies, such as on the A40, which affects Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire, with urgency.

Either the Oxford-Cambridgeshire corridor is a national priority for economic growth, or it is not, and if it is, this must be reflected in the Government's investment decisions, and those must help and benefit communities throughout the whole of Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire and beyond.

**Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** Considerable growth is due to take place in Cheltenham, Gloucester, the Cotswolds and Oxfordshire. Does my hon. Friend agree that if we do not relieve congestion in what is a narrow throat, growth will be inhibited not only in Oxfordshire but in Gloucestershire, and further afield in Wales as well?

**Robert Courts:** That is absolutely true. The focus tends to be on the Witney area, because that is where the A40 approaches the A44 and then joins the strategic network, but let us not forget the serious impact on communities further afield, such as the rural areas mentioned by the hon. Member for Strangford. I am thinking of the rest of Oxfordshire, of Cheltenham, and of rural communities elsewhere in Gloucestershire. This is a narrowing road that happens to reach a pinch point in my constituency, but affects the far wider areas represented by Members who have come to contribute to tonight's debate.

**Alex Chalk:** I have spoken to representatives of businesses in Eagle Tower, in the centre of Cheltenham, which are struggling to recruit people because they cannot persuade them to travel from London. Whether the company is GE Aviation, Spirax-Sarco or GCHQ, better communications mean better recruitment and are better for the local economy.

**Robert Courts:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and that problem affects not just Cheltenham but my constituency. It affects Witney, Eynsham, Carterton and the Royal Air Force, which is also struggling to recruit people. Business is suffering, but so are our essential public services. I mentioned that only briefly at the beginning of my speech, but it is a major issue. Recruitment difficulties in the NHS and teaching are also affected by people's inability to travel quickly in and out of the area where they need to be.



**Victoria Prentis:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for mentioning public services. As he knows, because of what is, we hope, the temporary downgrade of Horton General hospital, people from both our constituencies need to gain access to essential public services in Oxford, which is very difficult to reach at times of peak traffic demand.

**Robert Courts:** My hon. Friend is right, and I entirely support her campaign to ensure that our important services are outside the centre of Oxford whenever possible so that that journey is not necessary. However, sometimes it is, and the A40, like other major roads, is sometimes impassable owing to congestion that poses not just an obstacle to business and public services but, in some instances, a safety threat to residents. That is clearly unacceptable.

I want to make a couple of points before, very gratefully, I allow the Minister to respond. I have spent much of the debate discussing the investment that I want to see in direct upgrades on the A40, but we must not forget—I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for The Cotswolds for his foreshadowing of the points that I now wish to make—the contribution to be made by West Oxfordshire’s railways in tackling A40 congestion. It is in everyone’s interests for fewer cars to use the A40 whenever possible, but we can see the modal shift that we need only if our railways can offer a feasible, practicable and reliable service as an alternative. If that is to happen, there is an urgent need for the remaining sections of the Cotswold line to be doubled, which would enable more frequent and more reliable trains to travel from Hanborough to Oxford.

I will continue to campaign for the reopening of the Cowley branch line for passengers, with a regular shuttle service to Hanborough, but if we improved bus and cycle links to and from Hanborough, we could create a public transport hub in West Oxfordshire, taking cars off the A40 and reducing congestion throughout our area. I want people to be able to leave their cars behind, and to use buses, trains and bikes whenever possible so that there is more room on the roads for those who must use cars. We need to build a truly integrated transport network in West Oxfordshire that will meet the needs of our area and enable residents and businesses to thrive in the years ahead.

For decades, congestion on the A40 has been one of the biggest issues facing West Oxfordshire, and I am determined to tackle it. We are moving in the right direction, with opportunities for investment from a number of central Government funds, so there is more cause for optimism than there has been for decades, but there is still much work to do if we are to deliver the improvements that are needed. Let me stress to the Minister that, as we have heard from everyone who has spoken in the debate, this is not just a matter of minor inconvenience for us; it is a blight on the lives of commuters, and a millstone around the necks of our businesses. It is vital that we work towards, and ultimately achieve, a final fix for the A40, because only then can West Oxfordshire, and the surrounding areas, achieve their full potential.

9.9 pm

**The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Jesse Norman):** I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Robert Courts) on securing the debate and

welcome the opportunity to speak about the A40 west of Oxford, although, unfortunately, such has been the Periclean—indeed Demosthenic—quality of his oratory that he has left me nine minutes of a 30-minute debate in which to respond. He and other colleagues raised many issues that it would be nice to touch on, so in a way it is a pity that there is not more time for the Government to give the account he seeks.

I understand the great importance of this road in the area and to the local people who regularly use it. It will be no secret to hon. Members that the A40 can experience congestion—at times severe congestion. It should be said that the chief glory of the road is that it leads to Herefordshire. I was astounded that my hon. Friend the Member for The Cotswolds (Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown) neglected to make that point when sketching the gap between Gloucestershire and Wales, thereby ignoring much—almost all—of what is of value in this.

There are considerable growth ambitions for the west of Oxford along this corridor and the debate is therefore timely. The county has a fast-growing and successful economy that contributes some £21 billion per year to national output. It competes well on a global stage as a centre of science and innovation, but infrastructure constraints there, as elsewhere across the country, are a barrier to housing development and job creation. That was why in November 2017 the Government announced that Oxfordshire would receive up to £215 million of new funding to support its ambition to plan for, and to support the delivery of, 100,000 homes by 2031. That is alongside a commitment to adopt an Oxfordshire-wide statutory joint plan by that year. This ambitious and comprehensive investment programme is designed to deliver sustainable development and growth, with a focus on the amenity, quality and liveability of the area and on affordable housing.

On 12 September 2018, the first of the planning flexibilities agreed as part of the deal was enacted by written ministerial statement. This has amended land supply policies for Oxfordshire, and the Government look forward to the county developing its joint statutory spatial plan, making use of these new flexibilities.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Witney acknowledged, the majority of local transport improvement schemes are funded through the local growth fund—it is not entirely a Department for Transport scheme. We are providing some £6.7 billion to that fund over the six years from 2015-16 to 2020-21. Funding also comes through local enterprise partnerships, with some 600 transport schemes being funded across England.

There is also considerable planned investment on the A40 through the local growth fund. The Oxford science transit scheme has been allocated £35 million of the fund to support the expansion of the integrated public transport system west of Oxford, including the provision of bus priority and of a 1,000-space park and ride at Eynsham, to which my hon. Friend referred. We hope that this will deliver major enhancements to the strategic route, connecting centres of innovation and economic growth. I understand that the county council aims to have the park and ride and bus lane open for use by April 2021. Improvements to public transport should provide a viable alternative to private car use and, as my hon. Friend rightly said, a substantial modal shift would help to address congestion and would also be of enormous public value in other ways. This scheme and other current and planned projects will provide congestion

relief in the short to medium term along the A40. Of course, there is also a £5.9 million local growth fund commitment to the Oxford North project, a package of measures to improve transport in the north of the city and to provide a new research space and new homes.

There are also wider aspirations to tackle congestion in the longer term. As my hon. Friend pointed out, a consultation has recently closed on plans for the first phase of these improvements, and my officials continue to work closely with Oxfordshire County Council to take the project forward.

The North Cotswold line is not strictly within the terms of this debate, but it has been raised and I am pleased to discuss it quickly. As with the road, its chief glory is that it leads to Herefordshire, so I have a certain stake in this issue, and of course colleagues representing constituencies along the line would like to see faster and more frequent services. Any proposals must be supported by a robust business case in accordance with the rail network enhancements pipeline. The Department will continue to provide advice to Lord Faulkner's taskforce, which has been established to develop a vision for the route between Worcester and Oxford—and, ultimately, of course to Herefordshire—and to develop proposals.

On the housing side, the autumn Budget provided an extra £500 million for the housing infrastructure fund, bringing the total funding available to £5.5 billion. In March 2018, the Government announced the areas that are being taken forward through co-development, where the Government work with local authorities to further develop their proposals. Oxfordshire is one of the designated areas for co-development. The Department works closely with other Departments and local partners to take forward these proposals. Final funding awards for the proposals will be determined by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government following the assessment of detailed business plans. I understand that Oxfordshire County Council intends to submit its own proposals early this year.

My hon. Friend has raised the issue of maintenance and potholes on many occasions, and indeed he secured a debate on the subject in July last year. As he will know,

the Government have since allocated a further £420 million of new money for local highways maintenance—not necessarily entirely as a result of that debate. That means an additional £7.4 million of funding for local roads in Oxfordshire, which adds to existing committed funding sources totalling some £28.2 million for the county.

My hon. Friend rightly mentioned the major road network. Oxford does have a section of the A40 that is eligible for the local roads network, in that it fits the criteria that we have set for that. It is now for local partners to gather evidence that demonstrates which improvements are priorities for their respective areas, and to bid for support. This is a major new Government initiative to create a package of support for schemes that are eligible along the future major road network. It therefore provides an opportunity across the country, not just in Oxfordshire. The Oxford to Cambridge expressway has also been raised, and my hon. Friend will know that considerable investment is being made in that area to improve transport connectivity and growth not just across Oxfordshire and the region, but for the benefit of the UK as a whole.

I think that my hon. Friend will recognise from this quick canter through the various pots of money and opportunities available that his county has done well and that if the bids can pass muster in this very competitive process, they will stand every chance of an attractive outcome. He knows that a series of bids have been placed, or are due to be placed, in front of the Government for those different pots, and I urge him, his county council and local partners to continue to build robust and compelling cases that can demonstrate to the Government that investment in key infrastructure is well worth while and will deliver the key targets that they have specified, along with benefits for current users and future growth and success.

*Question put and agreed to.*

9.18 pm

*House adjourned.*





# House of Commons

*Wednesday 9 January 2019*

*The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock*

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## Oral Answers to Questions

### INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### Syria

1. **Simon Hoare** (North Dorset) (Con): What steps she is taking to provide humanitarian assistance to people in Syria. [908413]

14. **Royston Smith** (Southampton, Itchen) (Con): What steps she is taking to provide humanitarian assistance to people in Syria. [908426]

**The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Alistair Burt):** The United Kingdom is at the forefront of the humanitarian response and has been providing life-saving support to millions of people across Syria from the start of the conflict. To date, we have committed £2.71 billion, our largest ever response to a single humanitarian crisis. This includes the provision of more than 27 million food rations and 10 million relief packages since 2012.

**Simon Hoare:** I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. Just before Christmas, I had the rather humbling honour of meeting two Syrian families who fled the horror of that country to find sanctuary in Shaftesbury in my constituency, where they are making their new home. The pictures that they showed me and the stories that they told were indeed horrible. Will my right hon. Friend assure me that, notwithstanding everything else that is going on, Her Majesty's Government has not forgotten Syria and the underlying and ever pressing need for peace?

**Alistair Burt:** I can assure my hon. Friend that no one in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office or the Department for International Development has forgotten Syria. We are all shocked and moved by the plight of those who have suffered so much, and I am familiar with some of the pictures that my hon. Friend describes. We are engaged diplomatically and in humanitarian terms every day in relation to Syria.

**Royston Smith:** Although Daesh is significantly weakened in Syria, a US departure could leave a vacuum that could cause more misery. Does the Minister expect the focus of humanitarian assistance in Syria to change as a result of the withdrawal of US troops?

**Alistair Burt:** The full details of the impact of the US withdrawal have yet to be worked through. Our focus on humanitarian aid will not be changed, and we continue to monitor the situation closely as it develops. Our focus on providing humanitarian assistance to millions of people displaced both externally and internally will remain.

**Stephen Twigg** (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab/Co-op): The possibility of a US withdrawal raises serious concerns about civilian protection. Will the Minister tell us what the Government are doing to work with agencies on the ground to ensure that, particularly in the Kurdish-controlled areas and in Idlib, as much as possible is done to protect civilians?

**Alistair Burt:** Yes indeed. To reassure the hon. Gentleman, who is the Chair of the Select Committee, we are very concerned about the potential implications, particularly on the Turkish-Syrian border. We are in constant contact with our partners in relation to this and with humanitarian agencies, which are fully abreast of the consequences of actions that have not yet happened. Everything is being done to try to encourage a peaceful resolution of the political conflicts there.

**Ann Clwyd** (Cynon Valley) (Lab): Are any plans in place to deal with what will be, I suspect, the increasing humanitarian needs of Syrian Kurds in particular, especially if they are attacked by the Turkish military?

**Alistair Burt:** As I indicated to the Chair of the Select Committee, we are all extremely concerned about the potential implications of US withdrawal and what it might mean on the Turkish border in relation to Kurdish areas. Humanitarian agencies are very alert to this, but politically we are doing what we can with partners to minimise any risk of confrontation there.

**Alex Chalk** (Cheltenham) (Con): What assessment is it possible to make of the number of lives that have been saved in Syria as a result of the historic financial contribution to the aid effort by the United Kingdom?

**Alistair Burt:** It is difficult to put full figures on this, to be honest. We believe, as I indicated earlier, that we have provided 27 million food rations, 40 million medical consultations, 10 million relief packages, and 10 million vaccines. If we look at all those whose lives have been protected—the 3.5 million in Turkey, the 1.5 million in Lebanon and the 1 million in Jordan—we can see that United Kingdom aid has played a significant part in that.

**Chris Law** (Dundee West) (SNP): Last year the UK Government cut funding to aid programmes in rebel-held Syria, instead shifting focus to this valuable humanitarian work in the region. None-the-less, groups such as the Free Syrian police, whom we supported throughout the conflict, continue to face a number of threats from the regime as they continue their valuable work. Will the Secretary of State assure me that her Department has not simply abandoned these people and that their ongoing protection is still a matter of serious concern for the UK Government?

**Alistair Burt:** DFID's aid has always been focused on humanitarian need, regardless of who has been in control of territory. Provided we can be assured that aid and support are not diverted for terrorist or extremist purposes but get through to those who are in need, that is the guiding principle on which we work, and will continue to be the principle on which DFID will provide humanitarian aid.

### Gender Equality

2. **Nigel Huddleston** (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to improve gender equality for women throughout the world. [908414]

**The Secretary of State for International Development (Penny Mordaunt):** Gender equality is considered in the design of all DFID's programmes, and is essential to achieving the sustainable development goals. Between 2015 and 2018, UK aid provided 16.9 million women and girls with modern methods of family planning, and helped 5.6 million girls to gain access to a decent education.

**Nigel Huddleston:** Action on Poverty, a charity based in my constituency, has done some tremendous work in Africa and Asia, including helping thousands of women to set up their own businesses. What more can the Department do to assist charities such as Action on Poverty?

**Penny Mordaunt:** I pay tribute to the work that Action on Poverty has done, and, indeed, to my hon. Friend's support for that organisation. We are currently helping it, through UK Aid Direct, to improve livelihoods and food security in Sierra Leone, but, more widely, we want to increase the number of small and medium-sized charities and other organisations with which we work to deliver the global goals.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Let me ask the Secretary of State a pertinent question about empowering women. Does she agree that all the research shows that allowing them to start their own businesses and have control over their own lives is one of the best ways of empowering them, and that that often means giving them the finance that will enable them to start a small business?

**Penny Mordaunt:** I could not agree more with the hon. Gentleman. Not only the future of womankind but the future of mankind depends on that happening.

**Sir David Evennett** (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend share my concern about the fact that in many parts of the world women and girls are still not being given the education that they deserve, or the same education as men and boys? What is her Department doing to help to alleviate that discrimination and highlight the need for equal opportunities?

**Penny Mordaunt:** Globally, 63 million girls between the ages of five and 15 are out of school. Under the auspices of the Minister of State, Department for International Development, my hon. Friend the Member for West Worcestershire (Harriett Baldwin), we are supporting the global education partnership and, within that, the education challenge. We have refreshed our own education

strategy to ensure that it is not just about girls in classrooms, but about the quality of education that they are receiving. Only through a concerted effort in that respect, and by asking other partners to step up, will we ensure that every woman and girl has a decent education.

**Dan Carden** (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): I welcome the Secretary of State's ambitious strategy on gender equality, which is a heartening step towards Labour's feminist approach to international development, but these commitments will remain just warm words if, as we learned last month, 20%—600—of DFID's staff are to be reassigned to other Departments to help to manage the Tories' Brexit shambles. Will the Secretary of State tell the House very specifically what impact she expects that huge cut to have on her gender equality strategy, and, indeed, on all her Department's work?

**Penny Mordaunt:** I welcome the hon. Gentleman to his new role and sincerely wish him well in it, but his assertion is incorrect. That is not the number of staff who have been redeployed. I think that, currently, the grand total of DFID staff who are helping other Departments is 25. However, if the hon. Gentleman is concerned about a no-deal situation, he knows what he needs to do: he needs to vote for the Prime Minister's deal.

**Dan Carden:** I am grateful to the Secretary of State for her warm words, but I note that she did not rule out the possibility of 600 staff leaving the Department.

Many Members will have been deeply concerned by reports in the media last week that DFID's independence may once again be up for debate in this summer's comprehensive spending review, although merging DFID with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office would fly in the face of the evidence of how our aid budget can make the greatest impact. Given that more UK aid money is already being spent by other Departments, given the brazen attempts to use aid to win trade deals, and given that 600 staff are on their way out, is the Secretary of State not overseeing the managed decline of the Department for International Development?

**Penny Mordaunt:** The hon. Gentleman quotes many statistics and figures at me, so I will help him by quoting some back. All of what he says is not true so, as he starts his new role, I encourage him to talk about the 17 global goals that I hope everyone on both sides of the House is looking to deliver. What he said is not correct.

### HIV/AIDS

3. **Gillian Keegan** (Chichester) (Con): What steps she is taking to help eradicate HIV/AIDS in developing countries. [908415]

**The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Alistair Burt):** The United Kingdom is a world leader in efforts to end the AIDS epidemic, including through our major investment in the Global Fund, which provided 17.5 million people with treatment in 2017. We are working to expand access to treatment while reducing new infections, particularly among adolescent girls, women and other groups who face stigma and discrimination.

**Gillian Keegan:** I thank the Minister for his answer. Along with medication, education has been transforming the spread of HIV in the UK, with infections falling by 28% since 2015. In sub-Saharan Africa, however, three in four new infections among 15 to 19-year-olds affect girls, and globally young women are twice as likely to be infected with HIV as men their age. What steps is my right hon. Friend taking to curb HIV infections within the most vulnerable and susceptible groups?

**Alistair Burt:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that question. Women and young girls are indeed a vulnerable group in relation to AIDS. Ending AIDS as a public health threat by 2030 is a priority for the UK, which I was able to re-emphasise when speaking at the International AIDS Conference in Amsterdam earlier this year. Tackling AIDS is possible only if we target the most vulnerable populations, which we are doing by focusing on adolescents in the sexual and reproductive health programmes that we support.

**Preet Kaur Gill** (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab/Co-op): Analysis from the STOPAIDS coalition shows that, despite increased funding to multilaterals, overall DFID funding for HIV programmes has been falling, with bilateral funding for HIV programming falling from £221 million in 2009 to just £13 million in 2017. What steps is the Department taking to fill the funding gap created by that cut? If the Secretary of State is to shift spending to multilateral mechanisms, will the Minister confirm whether the Department will continue to invest in the Global Fund at the sixth replenishment conference in October 2019?

**Alistair Burt:** I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her questions. There is sometimes a difficulty with comparing spending when taking a snapshot, because programmes last for different lengths of time, but she is right to recognise our strong commitment to the Global Fund. We invested £1.2 billion in the current replenishment process, and we also provided extra assistance to the Robert Carr civil society Networks Fund during the course of this year. We will ensure that funding continues to go to programmes, and we do our best to track it when it goes into the wider programmes where the AIDS spending will actually happen. That remains a priority for us.

10. [908422] **Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield) (Con): The Uganda Virus Research Institute does a huge amount of work on HIV/AIDS and, of course, was jointly set up with the British Government back in 1988. What work is the institute doing? What can the Government do to strengthen both that work and the institute's Ebola research?

**Alistair Burt:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for mentioning that programme. In fact, my hon. Friend the Minister for Africa visited the programme recently and was able to see its valuable work on both AIDS and Ebola. That sort of ministerial commitment demonstrates our support on the ground, which will continue and intensify.

#### Afghanistan: Hazara Community

4. **Mr Adrian Bailey** (West Bromwich West) (Lab/Co-op): What steps her Department has taken to provide humanitarian support to civilians from the Hazara community displaced by the Taliban's recent offensive in central Afghanistan. [908416]

**The Secretary of State for International Development (Penny Mordaunt):** UK aid provided 2 million people in Afghanistan with life-saving support last year, including members of the Hazara community. The provision of humanitarian assistance is based on need and is delivered across the country, and it includes food, shelter and clean water. Humanitarian partners have been assisting displaced people in central Afghanistan, but they have not requested new funding.

**Mr Bailey:** On 4 December, the Minister for Asia and the Pacific said that British embassy staff had met Afghan Government representatives from the affected area to discuss the situation. Can the Secretary of State update us on the progress made on the humanitarian front and on any developments since that meeting?

**Penny Mordaunt:** Obviously I do not know the precise meeting to which the hon. Gentleman refers, because of course we frequently meet regional representatives, as well as meeting representatives based in Kabul. We are assisting people, particularly in that region, because of the territorial changes and the new pressures. At the moment there has not been a further call on us to provide any further assistance in that respect, although in other areas of Afghanistan we have leaned in because of the drought.

#### SDG10: Reducing Inequality

5. **Danielle Rowley** (Midlothian) (Lab): What steps her Department is taking to ensure that the UK meets sustainable development goal 10 on reducing inequality. [908417]

**The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Harriett Baldwin):** The Department for International Development's mission is to reduce inequality by ending extreme poverty.

**Danielle Rowley:** We often talk in this place, at least on this side of the House, about the importance of universal public services like the NHS and inclusive education in ensuring that everyone, regardless of income, has access to essential services, which will bring about more equal societies. What is the Department doing to ensure that UK aid better supports the development of universal free public services in the countries in which it works?

**Harriett Baldwin:** The hon. Lady is absolutely right that that forms a core part of our work not only on ending extreme poverty but in providing access to essential, lifesaving services. Whether it is helping with infants and preventing maternal mortality or providing 12 years of quality education, the Department is working around the world on those opportunities.

**Sir Oliver Heald** (North East Hertfordshire) (Con): My hon. Friend will be aware that I am a member of the independent commission on sexual misconduct set up by Oxfam following the Haiti issues and that the commission is about to produce its interim report. Does she agree that the way in which staff are treated by non-governmental organisations, showing proper respect and reducing inequality, is an important step towards meeting this development goal?



**Harriett Baldwin:** I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for the work he is doing on this important issue. Last year the Department took a leadership role on addressing such issues not only within the Department but within the providers we work with around the world.

11. [908423] **Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): What progress has the Department made in engaging with children and young people to achieve sustainable development goal 16.2 to end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against children?

**Harriett Baldwin:** Through our own work, through the International Citizen Service and through our work with many of our partner organisations, including UNICEF, we are working extensively on this issue. I am glad to be able to tell the hon. Gentleman that the UK is the largest donor to the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children.

**Dame Caroline Spelman** (Meriden) (Con): Does the Minister agree that it will be impossible to meet sustainable development goal 10 unless people with disabilities are included in all our humanitarian and development work?

**Harriett Baldwin:** My right hon. Friend is absolutely right to highlight this, which is why last year the UK held the disability summit and launched the disability strategy to make sure that those people are truly included in all our development work.

### Topical Questions

T1. [908463] **Bambos Charalambous** (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

**The Secretary of State for International Development (Penny Mordaunt):** The current Ebola virus outbreak has claimed 377 lives in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to date, and more than 600 people have tested positive for the disease. The response effort has been good, but it has been hampered by terrible insecurity in the region, with many humanitarian workers under fire while trying to initiate vaccinations. More than 200 people have survived the virus and the rate of infection is slow. Yesterday, I spoke to Dr Tedros of the World Health Organisation, who has just returned from the country, about what more we can do to contain the outbreak over the next several months. The UK has stepped up its support in response to the situation in the DRC and its preparedness throughout the region. It is a critical time for other nations to do the same.

T3. [908465] **Andrew Rosindell** (Romford) (Con): The good news is that once we leave the European Union we can get rid of tariffs on products from our friends in the African world. What discussion have the Government had with African countries about increasing trade and development after Brexit?

**Mr Speaker:** We have not heard from Mr Charalambous. We must hear from the feller!

**Bambos Charalambous:** The all-party group on vaccinations for all, of which I am a member, will release a report next week that highlights the fact that globally one in 10 children do not receive any of the 11 essential World Health Organisation-recommended vaccines. Does the Secretary of State agree that ensuring that all children are fully immunised should be a priority of this Government and vital organisations such as Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance?

**Penny Mordaunt:** I am extremely glad that the hon. Gentleman got to ask that question, because Gavi is our highest performing multilateral partner. It is absolutely right that we keep the programme strong. I shall visit Gavi's Bognor Regis facility next week. Between 2016 and 2020, UK Aid will have vaccinated 76 million children, saving 1.4 million lives.

Mr Speaker, I believe that my hon. Friend the Minister for Africa is ready to answer Topical Question 3 without its having to be repeated.

**Mr Speaker:** Indeed. Let us hear from the Minister for Africa.

**The Minister for Africa (Harriett Baldwin):** May I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell) that there will indeed be scope not only to copy across the existing favourable trade arrangements but to increase the favourability in terms of access to the UK market for many of the poorest countries in the world post Brexit.

T2. [908464] **Bridget Phillipson** (Houghton and Sunderland South) (Lab): Pregnancy and childbirth are incredibly dangerous times for women throughout the developing world, where the vast majority of maternal deaths take place. What more will the Secretary of State be doing this year to ensure that pregnant women and those in childbirth receive the same basic level of healthcare support that many of us here are able to take for granted?

**The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Alistair Burt):** Our commitment to global health is designed to ensure that focus is placed on the most vulnerable, and our support for sustainable health systems ensures that the work that is going on to improve maternity and pregnancy services in so many parts of the world is supported and bolstered by the work that we do both in country and multilaterally.

T5. [908467] **Will Quince** (Colchester) (Con): Sadly, Ethiopia has one of the worst neonatal mortality records in the world. Will the Minister join me in thanking all those in Colchester, including the CHUFT Blanketeers, who have been busy knitting in support of my campaign to send thousands of knitted hats for newborn babies in Ethiopia?

**Harriett Baldwin:** Ethiopia is one of the countries in which the Department for International Development has extensive programmes. I am very pleased to hear that the good folk of Colchester are supplementing that work with this wonderful project to knit hats for babies.

T4. [908466] **Gareth Snell** (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): Without realising it, many Members of this House will own an item of clothing made by a slave from an overseas country. What more will the Secretary of State do to make sure that her Department, along

with the Department for International Trade and its independent trade policy, tackles modern slavery not only at home but abroad?

**Penny Mordaunt:** Under the leadership of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, we have led the charge on tackling modern slavery globally, including at the United Nations General Assembly this year where we increased our financial contribution to £200 million to combat the issue. Critically, we have also held events with the private sector, because it is only with the private sector and by ensuring transparency, knowledge and security across all of its supply chains that we can eradicate this terrible practice from the world.

T7. [908469] **Trudy Harrison** (Copeland) (Con): Will the Minister explain to the House what steps she is taking to improve primary education in Pakistan?

**Harriett Baldwin:** As the House will know, we work worldwide, including extensively in Pakistan, to fund education. Literally millions of children are accessing 12 years of quality education thanks to the work of the Department for International Development.

T6. [908468] **Daniel Zeichner** (Cambridge) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State tell the House how much of the international development budget has been diverted to the Ministry of Defence?

**Penny Mordaunt:** I have good news for the hon. Gentleman because, even with our immense skills, it is impossible to spend any of the 0.7% on anything that is not official development assistance-eligible. I encourage all Opposition Members, as they hopefully join us to deliver the global goals, to start working for a change with the private sector and the armed forces, without which we will not be able to deliver the humanitarian relief that we wish to deliver or achieve those goals.

**Richard Graham** (Gloucester) (Con): The US decision to stop funding the United Nations Relief and Works Agency support to Palestine risks vital education and healthcare services there. I welcome DFID's decision to increase funding in the short term, but is that sustainable in the longer term?

**Alistair Burt:** We and other donors have moved very rapidly this year to seek to cover a shortfall in UNRWA funding. Work is going on to ensure that, in the long term, UNRWA is sustainable. Ultimately, though, the issue is not UNRWA, but the unresolved situation of refugees.

T8. [908470] **Jo Swinson** (East Dunbartonshire) (LD): Does the Secretary of State see the huge contradiction between the vital work that DFID does helping countries to mitigate and adapt to climate change and UK Export Finance continuing to subsidise billions of fossil fuel projects?

**Harriett Baldwin:** I assure the hon. Lady that, on climate change, we continue to improve access to clean energy for millions of people worldwide. That is an important part of the work that we do within our UK aid budget.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Just before we begin Prime Minister's questions, I hope that colleagues across the House will want to join me in welcoming to the House of Commons today the former Member of Parliament for Glasgow Central and now the Governor of the Punjab, our friend Mohammad Sarwar. Welcome Mohammad.

## PRIME MINISTER

*The Prime Minister was asked—*

### Engagements

Q1. [908398] **Drew Hendry** (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): If she will list her official engagements for Wednesday 9 January.

**The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May):** I am sure that the whole House would like to join me in paying tribute to Lord Paddy Ashdown who sadly died last month. From his service in the Royal Marines through to his time in this House and then as High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, he served his country with passion and distinction and he will be sorely missed.

In recent days, we have seen instances of threats of violence or intimidation against Members of this House, including my right hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry), and members of the media. I know the whole House will join me in condemning those threats. Politicians and the media should be able to go about their work without harassment and intimidation.

This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House, I shall have further such meetings later today.

**Drew Hendry:** I echo the Prime Minister's comments on Lord Paddy Ashdown and, of course, on the disgraceful behaviour and threats to politicians and journalists going about their business.

Like those in the rest of the UK, 235,000 EU nationals in Scotland were treated to a Christmas removal threat via social media from the UK Home Office telling them to register if they want to stay in the UK after December 2020. Friends, neighbours, colleagues—people vital to the Scottish economy—were shamefully told to pay to stay in their own homes. Will the Prime Minister confirm what will happen to those not registered by December 2020? Does she realise that, for those affected, this feels less like a hostile environment and more like a xenophobic one?

**The Prime Minister:** We recognise the huge contribution that EU citizens have made to our economy and our society, and we want them to stay. The EU settlement scheme will make it simple and straightforward for them to get the status that they need. EU citizens have until June 2021 to apply and the cost of applying is less than the cost of renewing a British passport, but if the hon. Gentleman is concerned about the interests of EU citizens, he can back the deal, which enshrines their rights.

Q3. [908400] **Tom Pursglove** (Corby) (Con): The Government's commitment to the armed forces covenant is commendable, as is their focus on reducing reoffending.

Care after Combat is doing remarkable work in this area, and its veterans have a reoffending rate of 8% compared to a national average of 45% on leaving prison, saving the Government £20 million. Will my right hon. Friend therefore convene a cross-Government effort not only to shore up Care after Combat's work, but to look to expand it nationally?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend raises a very important issue. I pay tribute to those who have served in our armed forces for their courage and commitment. I also pay tribute to the vital work undertaken by Care after Combat; my hon. Friend is absolutely right about that. We have a range of measures in place to support those who have served in the armed forces who then find themselves in the criminal justice system, and prisons tailor rehabilitative work to individuals' needs, helping to reduce the risk of reoffending when they are released from prison. The point that my hon. Friend makes about the excellent record of Care after Combat is a good one, and I am sure that a Minister from the Ministry of Justice will be happy to meet him to discuss the matter further.

**Jeremy Corbyn** (Islington North) (Lab): I join the Prime Minister in paying tribute to Paddy Ashdown, who was elected to Parliament at the same time as me in 1983. He was a very assiduous constituency MP and a very effective Member of Parliament, and he and I spent a lot of evenings voting against what the Thatcher Tory Government were doing at that time.

I agree with the Prime Minister on the point that she made about the intimidation of Members of Parliament and representatives of the media outside this building, as happened a few days ago when the right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry) and Owen Jones of *The Guardian* were intimidated outside this building. I send my support and sympathy to both of them. We also have to be clear that intimidation is wrong outside this building as it is wrong in any other aspect of life in this country, and we have to create a safe space for political debate. [*Interruption.*] You see what I mean, Mr Speaker; I am calling for a safe space for political debate.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. We have a long way to go. The questions will be heard and the answers will be heard. No amount of heckling or noise will make any difference to that simple fact.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** I am sure that the whole House will join me in wishing a speedy recovery to the two British soldiers who were injured in Syria last week.

The Prime Minister scrapped the Brexit vote last month, and promised that legally binding assurances would be secured at the December EU summit; she failed. She pledged to get these changes over the recess; she failed. Is the Prime Minister not bringing back exactly the same deal that she admitted would be defeated four weeks ago?

**The Prime Minister:** First, I absolutely agree with the right hon. Gentleman that there is no place for intimidation in any part of our society. Politicians do need a safe space in which to express their opinions, many of which are passionately held. I hope that he will now ask his shadow Chancellor to withdraw or apologise for the

remarks that he made about the former Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, my right hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Ms McVey).

Let me update the House on the matter of Brexit. The conclusions of the December European Council went further than before in seeking to address the concerns of this House, and they have legal status. I have been in contact with European leaders since then about MPs' concerns. These discussions have shown that further clarification on the backstop is possible, and those talks will continue over the next few days, but we are also looking at what more we can do domestically to safeguard the interests of the people and businesses of Northern Ireland. That is why this morning we published a package of commitments that give Northern Ireland a strong voice and role in any decision to bring the backstop into effect.

We have also been looking at how Parliament can take a greater role as we take these negotiations on to the next stage. So I can tell the House that, in the event that our future relationship or alternative arrangements are not ready by the end of 2020, Parliament will have a vote on whether to seek to extend the implementation period or to bring the backstop into effect. The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union will be saying more about this during his opening speech in the forthcoming debate.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** No amount of window-dressing is going to satisfy Members of this House. They want to see clear legal changes to the document that the Government presented to this House.

The Foreign Secretary said that the Prime Minister has not been asking for anything new in her discussions with the EU. Does not that tell us that the Prime Minister has been recklessly wasting time, holding the country to ransom with the threat of no deal in a desperate attempt to blackmail MPs to vote for her hopelessly unpopular deal?

**The Prime Minister:** The right hon. Gentleman can say what he likes about no deal, but he opposes any deal that the Government have negotiated with the European Union. He opposes the deal—[*Interruption.*] He opposes the deal that the EU says is the only deal, and that leaves him with no deal. The only way to avoid no deal is to vote for the deal. If the right hon. Gentleman is uncertain about what I am saying, perhaps I can give him a tip—he might like to use a lipreader.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** The Prime Minister says that it is the only deal available. If that is the case, why was it not put to a vote on 11 December in this House? Why has there been a delay of five weeks on this?

The Prime Minister said she hopes to get "written assurances" before the vote next week, so can I ask her this: will the changes she is looking for be made to the legally binding withdrawal agreement itself?

**The Prime Minister:** As I said earlier in my remarks and I have said previously, there are three elements that we are looking at. One is the undertakings and assurances that we are looking for from the European Union, and we intend that those will be available to the House before the House votes at the end of the debate. We are also looking at what more we can do domestically.



I have set out, and the Secretary of State will set out more clearly and in more detail, what we are going to do in relation to the powers for Northern Ireland and on the question of the role of Parliament for the future. We are also looking to ensure that we can provide the assurance and confidence that this House needs on the question of the backstop which has been at the forefront of Members' concerns. We put a good deal on the table, but yes, we are looking for those clarifications—clarifications which I am sure will ensure that Members of this House know that the backstop need never be used and that if it is used it will be only temporary.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** Well, in the midst of that very long answer I did not hear the words “legal changes to the document”. That was my question.

The Environment Secretary has said that no deal would damage the UK farming sector. The Foreign Secretary has said that no deal

“is not something any government”

would

“wish on its people”,

and £4.2 billion of public money is being wastefully allocated to no-deal planning. Will the Prime Minister listen to the clearly expressed will of the House last night, end this costly charade, and rule out no deal?

**The Prime Minister:** I have made it clear to the right hon. Gentleman that if he wants to avoid no deal, he has to back a deal, and back the deal. He stands there and complains about money being spent on no-deal preparations. Today, Wednesday, he is saying that we should not be spending money on no-deal preparations; on Monday, he said that no-deal preparations were “too little, too late.” He cannot have it both ways: either we are doing too much or we are doing too little. So perhaps he can break his usual habit and actually give us a decision—which is it?

**Jeremy Corbyn:** This is the first time since 1978 that a Prime Minister has been defeated on a Finance Bill in the House of Commons. Last night, the House made it clear, in supporting the amendment in the name of my right hon. Friend the Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), that no deal should be ruled out. That is the position of this House.

The UK automotive industry wrote to the Prime Minister in December asking her to take the no-deal option

“off the table or risk destroying this vital UK industry.”

Given that this House has now rejected no deal, will the Prime Minister protect thousands of skilled jobs in the automotive industry and others and rule out no deal?

**The Prime Minister:** I recognise that the right hon. Gentleman welcomed the leadership given by the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford on that issue. I want to be clear that that amendment does not change the fact that the UK is leaving the European Union on 29 March, nor does it stop the Government collecting tax.

The right hon. Gentleman asks once again about the question of no deal and protecting jobs. We have negotiated a deal with the European Union that protects jobs. What is raising concerns, he says, is the prospect of

no deal. It is absolutely sensible for this Government to prepare for no deal, and those preparations are even more important given the position taken by the right hon. Gentleman. With an Opposition Front-Bench team who are opposed to any deal the Government negotiate with the European Union, it is even more important that we prepare for no deal. The deal protects jobs and security and delivers on the referendum, and he should back it.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** Instead of backing industries in this country and protecting thousands of jobs in manufacturing and service industries, the Transport Secretary is awarding millions of pounds of contracts to ferry companies with no ferries, to run on routes that do not exist and apparently will not even be ready by the beginning of April. That is the degree of incompetence of this Government in dealing with the whole question of relations with the EU.

The Prime Minister has spent the last week begging for warm words from EU leaders and achieved nothing. Not one single dot or comma has changed. She has already squandered millions of pounds of public money on last-minute, half-baked planning for no deal, which was rejected last night. If her deal is defeated next week, as I hope and expect it will be, will the Prime Minister do the right thing—let the people have a real say and call a general election?

**The Prime Minister:** No. We have put a good deal on the table that protects jobs and security. I noticed in all of that that we still do not know what Brexit plan the right hon. Gentleman has. I was rather hoping, as he went through, that he might turn over a page and find a Brexit plan. What do we know about the right hon. Gentleman? He has been for and against free movement. He has been for and against the customs union. He has been for and against an independent trade policy. He was a Eurosceptic. Now he is pro the EU. He wanted to trigger article 50 on day one; now he wants to delay it. He did not want money spent on no deal; now he says it is not enough. The one thing we know about the right hon. Gentleman is that his Brexit policies are the many, not the few.

**Q4. [908401] Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con):** The NHS long-term plan is hugely welcome, particularly its recognition that GPs are the bedrock of the NHS. Does the Prime Minister agree that it is vital that we do all we can to support GPs in staying in general practice, and that the education and training budget be urgently prioritised, to enable a wide range of healthcare professionals to support GPs in their practices?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend raises an important point about GPs. If he looks at the long-term plan for the NHS, which was launched on Monday and is being made possible by the £20.5 billion extra that we will be putting into the NHS by 2023-24, he will see that support for the workforce, including GPs, is a very important part of that plan. Indeed, a greater focus on primary care, which will help to keep people out of hospital—at any point in time, 20% to 30% of people in hospital do not need to be there—is an important part of the plan. GPs are an essential element of that, and I assure my hon. Friend that they will be part of that important workforce planning.

**Ian Blackford** (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): I concur with the Prime Minister in her remarks on Paddy Ashdown. I make the point that all of us collectively have a responsibility to make sure that there is no intimidation in our public life.

The Prime Minister delayed the doomed Brexit vote last year on the promise of written concessions from Brussels. Prime Minister, where are they?

**The Prime Minister:** I set out the position in my first response to the Leader of the Opposition. I suggest the right hon. Gentleman should have listened to it.

**Ian Blackford:** We are used to not getting an answer, and there we have it again. What the Prime Minister promised was that we would get written concessions, and that Parliament would have the opportunity to vote on them; nothing has materialised. A month has passed, and nothing has changed.

Last night, the Prime Minister suffered another humiliating defeat. When will the Prime Minister face the facts? There is little support for her deal or no deal in this House. The new year began without concessions; the Dublin talks failed without concessions; the debate on her deal restarts today without concessions. The Prime Minister is frozen in failure, asking MPs to write a blank cheque for her blindfold Brexit. MPs should not be debating without the full facts. Is it this, or will there be the concessions, not just clarifications? When will the Prime Minister guarantee that the House will see the full details before we start the debate this afternoon?

**The Prime Minister:** As I said in response to the right hon. Gentleman's first question, I set out the position earlier. I referenced, as he will know, the conclusions of the December European Council, which went further in relation to the issues that I have raised with the European Council than they had gone before, and those have legal status, but we are of course working further on those issues.

The right hon. Gentleman cannot get away from the fact that if he wants to avoid no deal, he has to be willing to agree a deal. The deal that is on the table, which the EU has made clear is the only deal, is the one that the United Kingdom Government have negotiated with the European Union. If he really wants, and is concerned about ensuring that we can look ahead to, a bright future across the whole of the United Kingdom, he should back that deal.

#### Employment: West Midlands

Q11. [908408] **Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield) (Con): What discussions she has had with the Mayor of the west midlands on the creation of employment in that region; and if she will make a statement.

**The Prime Minister:** I was pleased to meet the Mayor of the west midlands last October, when my right hon. Friend the Chancellor and I visited the Kings Norton headquarters of adi Group and saw at first hand the opportunities that apprenticeships can afford. That is why we are seeing annual investment in apprenticeships double to nearly £2.5 billion by 2020. It was also an excellent opportunity to see a successful west midlands company doing its bit to give young people a career. I am pleased to say that the latest statistics show employment in the west midlands has risen by 276,000 since 2010.

**Michael Fabricant:** That is fantastic news, but I think the Prime Minister will agree with me that transport is also key to employment. I want to raise the question of the rail line that lies between Lichfield and Burton, which is currently used only for freight. It passes the National Memorial Arboretum, which gets about half a million visitors a year, but at the moment they all have to come by road, along the busy and congested A38. May I ask the Prime Minister that this rail line be upgraded to a passenger service, providing a valuable east-west connection from Birmingham? Would she also allow me to take her personally around the National Memorial Arboretum?

**The Prime Minister:** I of course recognise the important role that transport links play in relation to prosperity and economic growth. Our rail strategy, "Connecting people", which we have published, actually does look at how we can restore lost capacity where that unlocks housing growth, eases crowded routes, meets demand and offers good value for money, of course. It is for local authorities and local enterprise partnerships to determine whether a new station or train service is the best way to meet local transport needs, but we work closely with local authorities and local enterprise partnerships to take forward the schemes that they are interested in progressing.

In relation to the arboretum, I will of course consider a visit in the future, and I think my hon. Friend has probably given me an invitation it is very difficult to refuse.

#### Engagements

Q2. [908399] **Martyn Day** (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): UK officials at Dover process 10,000 lorries every day from the EU, bringing in food, medicines and other goods. Has the UK Government's experiment on Monday with 89 lorries in a Kent car park given the Prime Minister confidence in her Government's ability to handle a no-deal Brexit?

**The Prime Minister:** The Government are doing exactly what it is necessary and sensible for a Government to do, which is to make preparations for no deal and ensure that we test those preparations. I come back to the point that if the hon. Gentleman is worried about the consequences of no deal, he should back the deal.

**Mr Kenneth Clarke** (Rushcliffe) (Con): It seems plain to anyone who has listened to most of the debates in this House that there is no majority for any proposition on our future relationship with the European Union in this House of Commons, except the majority that is clearly against leaving with no deal. I propose to vote for the Prime Minister's withdrawal agreement, but I doubt it will pass. If it is passed and we get into a transition, there is no majority or consensus on what the Government are supposed to negotiate for in the years that follow to settle our future political and economic relationships with Europe. The Prime Minister has to be flexible on some things, so if she loses the debate next Tuesday, will she consider moving to the obvious step in the national interest of delaying or revoking article 50, so that we have time to consider what the British actually want?

**The Prime Minister:** My right hon. and learned Friend referenced the withdrawal agreement and said that there was no position on what the future relationship should be. Of course, the framework for that future relationship, which is in greater detail than many had expected, is set out in the political declaration, which gives the instructions to the negotiators for the future. In that circumstance, it is right that we consider the role that Parliament will play as the negotiations go forward to ensure that we get the future relationship right. I believe it is possible to have a future relationship with the European Union that is deep and close, but that gives us the freedom to do what we want to do, which is to have an independent trade policy and to develop trade agreements and trade arrangements with the rest of the world.

Q5. [908402] **John Spellar** (Warley) (Lab): I welcome the crackdown on cold-calling to fleece pensioners out of their hard-earned pension pots, but is that not just dealing with the symptoms, rather than the underlying cause, which is the ill-judged free-for-all pension changes introduced by the Prime Minister's friend, the previous Chancellor George Osborne, which gave the green light to the shysters and the spivs? What is she going to do about that?

**The Prime Minister:** The changes introduced by the previous Chancellor of the Exchequer gave pensioners more flexibility and freedom in relation to how to use their own money.

**Dame Cheryl Gillan** (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): Every Member of this House knows that drivers and commuters want greater investment to repair our roads and upgrade our railway services, yet we are wasting money on a deeply unpopular project, where the management has failed and the costs are out of control. It will end up costing the taxpayer more than £100 billion—that is about £300 million per mile of track. Why can we not face up to reality, Prime Minister, cancel HS2 and spend the money on the people's priorities for transport, rather than on this overpriced project that will never deliver value for money for the taxpayer?

**The Prime Minister:** First of all, we recognise the concerns that people have about roads, particularly issues such as potholes in their roads, which is precisely why my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has made more money available to address those issues.

On the question of HS2, it is not just about a high-speed railway; it is about ensuring that we have the capacity that is needed on this particular route, because we are already reaching capacity on the west coast main line. We are already seeing HS2 spreading prosperity. It is encouraging investment and rebalancing our economy, and that is 10 years before the railway even opens. We have seen 7,000 jobs created across the UK, and 2,000 businesses across the UK are delivering HS2. It will bring tens of billions of pounds' worth of benefits to passengers, suppliers and local communities up and down the route.

Q6. [908403] **Sir Edward Davey** (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): I thank the Prime Minister for her words about Lord Ashdown, our friend Paddy. Paddy was loved on these Benches, and I believe he was respected across the House and across the country. We will miss him deeply.

An unusual thing happened last night: Conservative MPs and Opposition MPs united, and leavers and remainers united. They united to back my proposal for a review of retrospection in a law called the loan charge, which offends against the rule of law and has caused misery to tens of thousands of people. In her role as First Lord of the Treasury, will the Prime Minister agree to meet me and a cross-party delegation of MPs to discuss the new review of the loan charge?

**The Prime Minister:** First of all, the right hon. Gentleman is absolutely correct: the late Lord Ashdown was deeply respected across this House, across Parliament as a whole and widely across the country. On the question he puts about the review of the loan charge—[*Interruption.*] I get the point he was trying to make, but may I just make this point? He talked about Opposition and Government MPs uniting. Actually, the Government accepted his review into the loan charge. I think the first stage might be for the Chancellor of the Exchequer to sit down with him and a group of cross-party MPs to look at how that review is being taken forward.

**Mr Iain Duncan Smith** (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): Mr Speaker, I am not going to ask about Brexit. You may be pleased about that. [*Interruption.*] And happy new year to all of you as well.

I recently had the immense privilege of shadowing Dr Imran Zia at our accident and emergency department at Whipps Cross University Hospital. It was a humbling experience to witness the dedication and fantastic skill of our doctors and nurses. However, they work in buildings that are now well over 100 years old and they know they need better facilities. I have to say to my right hon. Friend that while the NHS set the development of Whipps as the top north-east London priority, in December it announced programmes for investment across London, and yet again north-east London was not included. Will my right hon. Friend please visit Whipps Cross Hospital to see how important and vital it is to the area? Will she work with our excellent Health Secretary, on the basis of a fantastic announcement on Monday, to invest in those buildings and facilities?

**The Prime Minister:** I will certainly look at the possibility of taking my right hon. Friend up on that invitation. He makes an important point about the announcement we made on Monday. Our right hon. Friend the Health Secretary has heard what he says about the particular requirements at Whipps Cross Hospital, and will be happy to sit down and talk with him in more detail about that. I will certainly look at my diary and look at his invitation.

Q7. [908404] **Layla Moran** (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): I would like to add mention of my own sadness at the passing of Paddy. In his final weeks, he was very concerned about the way that Brexit would play into Britain's place in the world.

**Andrew Bridgen** (North West Leicestershire) (Con) From the grave.

**Hon. Members:** Shame!

**Layla Moran:** Brexit, for example, is clearly in Russia's geopolitical interest. It was chilling to hear Vladimir Putin parroting exactly the words of the Prime Minister on why we should not hold a referendum but instead "fulfil the will of the people".



Meanwhile, poll after poll shows there is a majority for a referendum, because people can see that the Prime Minister's flailing deal is not in our national interest. So whose side is this Prime Minister on: Putin's or the people's?

**The Prime Minister:** I am on the side of the people, to whom this Parliament gave a vote on the decision as to whether to stay in the European Union. We will be delivering on and respecting the result of that referendum, and delivering on Brexit.

**Maggie Throup** (Erewash) (Con): I am delighted that we have been able to deliver on our manifesto commitment to introduce an energy price cap. Will my right hon. Friend outline how that price cap will benefit my constituents across Erewash?

**The Prime Minister:** The fact that the energy price cap has now come in is a very important step that this Government have taken. Something like 11 million households will benefit from the price cap. Households will save money as a result of what this Government have done. We recognise the concern people had about energy prices. It is this Government who have acted to deliver, and my hon. Friend's constituents in Erewash will see a benefit as a result.

Q8. [908405] **Gill Furniss** (Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough) (Lab): Many of my constituents are employed in the Sheffield steel sector—a beacon of innovation and manufacturing. UK Steel, the body representing steel companies, has been clear that a no deal would be nothing short of a disaster for the sector. Will the Prime Minister confirm that she will not be so irresponsible as to consider the option of a no deal, and reassure my constituents, who are worried about their jobs and their future?

**The Prime Minister:** I absolutely respect and recognise the role that the steel industry plays in the United Kingdom. Over recent years, the Government have taken steps to support the steel industry. The hon. Lady talks about the issue of whether we should leave the European Union without a deal. I have been working to ensure that we have a good deal when we leave the European Union. That is the deal that is on the table, and anybody who does not want no deal has to accept that the way to ensure that there is not no deal is to accept and vote for the deal.

**Huw Merriman** (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): On Tuesday I shall vote for the Prime Minister's withdrawal agreement, but may I ask the Prime Minister to consider one particular aspect, for which I must declare a rather rash—[*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The question from the hon. Gentleman must be heard. As I scarcely heard what he said, I think he should start again—[*Interruption.*] Yes, he should start again and deliver it in full.

**Huw Merriman:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am wearing my Arsenal tie, and unfortunately those on the terraces here are not quite as well behaved as those at the Emirates.

As I was saying, on Tuesday I will vote for the Prime Minister's deal. I would like her to look at one particular aspect, for which I have to declare a rather rash

financial interest. It relates to page 33 of the withdrawal agreement. Citizens' residency can be provided either for free by the UK Government or for an amount commensurate with existing costs. At a Brexit meeting in Bexhill, I was so confident that the Government would provide it for free that, rather foolishly, I offered to pay the charge for one particular European citizen who was not quite as confident. Given that this was a decision by the UK public, surely we should welcome our friends, neighbours and essential workforce from the EU, and offer citizens' residency free of charge, so that they can stay in this country at our cost.

**The Prime Minister:** Obviously, I recognise the concern raised by my hon. Friend. The £65 fee to apply for status under the scheme is in line with the current cost of obtaining permanent residence documentation, and it will, of course, contribute to the overall costs of the system, but applications will be free of charge for those who hold valid permanent residence documentation or valid indefinite leave to enter or remain, and for children being looked after by a local authority. Where an application is granted pre-settled status under the scheme, there will, from April 2019, be no fee for applying for settled status. As I said in an earlier response to another Member, the EU settlement scheme will make it simple and straightforward for people to get the status that they need.

Q9. [908406] **Stephen Kinnock** (Aberavon) (Lab): This week, our cross-party Norway Plus group published "Common Market 2.0", a clear plan that respects the 52:48 mandate, addresses concerns about free movement, protects jobs in my Aberavon constituency, and helps to reunite our deeply divided country. If the Prime Minister's deal is rejected on Tuesday, will she give the House the opportunity to vote on a range of options, including "Common Market 2.0", and will she give Members on her Benches a free vote on those options?

**The Prime Minister:** As the hon. Gentleman knows, I am working to ensure that the deal that has been negotiated by the UK Government with the European Union is voted on positively by this Parliament. It is a good deal. It does what he wants: it protects jobs and security. It also delivers in full on the referendum result, which is a key issue. We owe it to people to deliver what they wanted, which was control of money, borders and laws, and that is what the deal does.

**Jack Lopresti** (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for ensuring that our manifesto commitment to scrap tolls on the Severn bridge crossings has been met. That will put £1,400 a year into the pockets of thousands of motorists, many of whom are my constituents. Does she agree that will help transform the economies of the south-west and south Wales?

**The Prime Minister:** This is an important step that the Government have taken. It was advocated by individual Members and the Secretary of State for Wales, and I believe it will indeed have a very positive economic effect on Wales, on the south-west and on constituencies such as my hon. Friend's.

Q10. [908407] **Mr Clive Betts** (Sheffield South East) (Lab): The Local Government Association has produced figures showing that councils of all political persuasions overspent

their children's services budgets by £800 million last year. The figure for Sheffield was £12 million. That is totally due to the fact that the number of children in care has risen to a 10-year high. In the light of that pressure, does the Prime Minister accept that the £84 million over five years offered by the Chancellor in the Budget is totally inadequate? Without extra funding, either these vulnerable children will not get the care they need, or other important services, such as parks and libraries, will get further cuts at a time the Prime Minister has told us that austerity has come to an end.

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Gentleman quoted £84 million. That was actually for a pilot, which is about keeping more children at home with their families safely. We announced an extra £410 million overall at the Budget for social care, which includes children, and spending on the most vulnerable children has increased by more than £1.5 billion since 2010. We are also taking a number of other steps, such as the work we are doing to increase the number of children's social workers, the appointment of a chief social worker for children, introducing Frontline and Step Up, and getting quality candidates into social care careers. Those are important steps. The hon. Gentleman talks about money; actually, it is about ensuring that the service that is provided is the right one. That is why we do it across the board, and that is why we are looking at those issues around social workers.

**Sir David Amess** (Southend West) (Con): I refer the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. Ever since former President Gayoom introduced democracy to the Maldives, its legitimacy has been challenged. Just like we have seen with the prophets of doom around Brexit, the recent elections went ahead with no violence and President Solih was elected with a great majority. Will my right hon. Friend redouble her efforts to increase trade, education and cultural links?

**The Prime Minister:** I can tell my hon. Friend what I hope is news that he will welcome, which is that a new embassy is being opened in the Maldives. As we look around the world in relation to trade, we will of course see what we can do to improve our trade with a number of countries.

Q12. [908409] **Pete Wishart** (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): Parliamentary defeats are now a regular feature of the Prime Minister's Government. She has lost a quarter of her Cabinet, and 117 of her Back Benchers want her gone. Her deal is as dead as the deadest dodo. How many more indignities can this Prime Minister endure before she realises that she is the biggest part of the problem? For goodness' sake, just go!

**The Prime Minister:** The UK Government have negotiated a deal with the European Union that delivers on the referendum result. I know the hon. Gentleman does not want to deliver on the referendum result. He wants to ensure that the UK stays inside the European Union, at the same time—talking about the economy—as he supports taking Scotland out of the Union of the United Kingdom, which is much more important economically for the people of Scotland. The people of Scotland know that remaining in the United Kingdom is their best future.

**Mrs Anne Main** (St Albans) (Con): Volunteering services are enormously important, and none more so than the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, who put their lives at risk and often rescue people who make perilous crossings to try to get into this country. Is it not time that we looked at the RNLI's funding? Many people think it is funded by the Government, and it is time we gave some money towards it.

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right about the vital role that the RNLI plays. As she says, many people do not realise that it is funded entirely by voluntary contributions. I pay tribute to all those across the country who raise funds for the RNLI, including, if she will allow me, the Sonning branch in my constituency.

Q13. [908410] **Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): York has been in shock as we have learned that 11 homeless people in our city died last year. While we know that this is an issue across the nation, we also know that substance misuse services have been cut, that social housing has not been built in our city, and that mental health services are desperately underfunded and understaffed.

Prime Minister, I do not want to hear what you have done, because it has clearly failed. I want to know what you are going to do differently, so that no homeless person dies this year.

**The Prime Minister:** Every death of someone while homeless or sleeping rough on our streets is one death too many, which is why we have made a commitment to end rough sleeping by 2027 and halve it by 2022. The hon. Lady says that she does not want to know what we have done, but we have committed more than £1.2 billion to tackling homelessness and rough sleeping. She mentioned mental health services, and asked what we would do in the future. What we will be doing in the future is putting an extra £2.3 billion into mental health services, to ensure that we provide them for the people who, sadly, are not currently able to access them.

**Paul Scully** (Sutton and Cheam) (Con): More Londoners voted to leave the EU than voted for the current Mayor of London, who is swanning around Europe talking about Brexit rather than his responsibilities, such as crime, housing and transport. Does my right hon. Friend agree that if he insists on being a Brexit diva, he should concentrate on telling his side to vote for this deal—*[Interruption.]*

**The Prime Minister:** I absolutely agree. What the Mayor of London should be doing is looking at what delivers on the overall vote of the people of London—the vote to which my hon. Friend referred—and at what delivers in a way that protects the best interests of Londoners, and that is to vote for this deal.

Q14. [908411] **Meg Hillier** (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): The Prime Minister has had 20 dancing rebels, has promised five golden trade agreements and has had one big defeat, and yet she still cannot find her withdrawal agreement. Has she checked her pear tree?

**The Prime Minister:** It was a good attempt, but Christmas happened a couple of weeks ago.

**Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): According to that invaluable website TheyWorkForYou, the Prime Minister has assured the House on no fewer than 74 previous occasions that we will be leaving the EU on 29 March. Will she categorically confirm today that there is absolutely no question at all of delaying that date?

**The Prime Minister:** I am happy to repeat what I have said previously—that we will be leaving the European Union on 29 March. I want us to leave the European Union on 29 March with the good deal that is on the table.

Q15. [908412] **Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck** (South Shields) (Lab): My constituents Sarah and Chris Cookson lost their little boy Charlie in 2013. Since then, they have devoted their lives to helping other families and children with life-limiting conditions via their charity, the Charlie Cookson Foundation. On Boxing Day, Sarah gave birth to Carter John Cookson. He had three cardiac arrests in one day. After an unsuccessful operation, he is now fighting for his life, in need of a heart transplant. Carter has been given only a matter of

weeks to live. Will the Prime Minister join me today in raising awareness to help us to find a heart for little baby Carter?

**The Prime Minister:** Let me first join the hon. Lady in commending the work that the Cooksons have done with the Charlie Cookson Foundation in raising funds for children and babies with life-threatening conditions. I am sure that the sympathies of the whole House are with the family at this very, very difficult time. The hon. Lady has outlined some of the specifics of the case, but I will ensure that the relevant Minister at the Department of Health and Social Care meets her to discuss the issue further.

We do want to change the culture on organ donation in order to save more lives. That is why we are planning to introduce a new opt-out system in England in 2020. The new law will be known as Max and Keira's law, in honour of Max Johnson, who received a heart from Keira Ball, and Keira, who sadly lost her life in a car accident. However, the hon. Lady has outlined a tragic case, and I will ensure that a Minister from the Department speaks with her about it.



## Points of Order

12.49 pm

**Layla Moran** (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. As you are aware, at the beginning of Prime Minister's questions when I was expressing my deep sadness at the loss of Lord Ashdown and his concern for the state of where we are now, the hon. Member for North West Leicestershire (Andrew Bridgen) loudly shouted from a sedentary position, "From the grave." I find such a comment disgraceful, and I ask for guidance on how the hon. Gentleman might, for example, retract such a statement and on whether it was becoming of the sort of conduct that we should expect from Members of this House.

**Mr Speaker:** I did hear those words. I did not hear a particular Member, and I did not see a Member mouth those words, but I did hear those words. I think it was most unfortunate that that was said. People sometimes say things instinctively and rashly, but it was most unfortunate. The hon. Lady was perfectly properly paying tribute to an extremely distinguished former Member of this House and someone that many would regard as an international statesperson. What was said should not have been said. If the person who said it wishes to take the opportunity to apologise, it is open to that person to do so.

**Andrew Bridgen** (North West Leicestershire) (Con): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. I will apologise for my remarks if any offence was caused to any Member of the House.

**Mr Speaker:** The hon. Gentleman's words stand, and I thank him for what he has said.

**Mr Peter Bone** (Wellingborough) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. As you know, I have always regarded you as an exceptional Speaker and a defender of Parliament, which I continue to do. However, I also regard the Clerks of the House in exactly the same light. I went to the Table Office late last night to look at the Business of the House (Section 13(1)(b) of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018) (No. 2) (Motion) to see what shenanigans the Government were up to. It had been published, and I thought of proposing an amendment, but I was told that that would be totally out of order and that no other amendments had been tabled. However, there is an amendment to that motion on the Order Paper today, which puts me in something of an unfortunate position, so could you rule on what action might be taken?

**Mr Speaker:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his point of order. First, let me thank him for his kind remarks that prefaced his inquiry. This is the first that I have learned of the matter, and that makes it difficult for me to give immediate advice. It is a matter upon which I may need to reflect before giving him what I would call substantive advice.

Obviously, I was not aware of the hon. Gentleman's visit to the Table Office, of which he has now informed me. I understand that he is telling me that he was advised that the motion was unamendable, and I do not know whether he went into the Table Office before the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield

(Mr Grieve) or after. All I know is that in my understanding the motion is amendable—I am clear in my mind about that—so insofar as the hon. Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone) is disappointed that he was unable to table an amendment, I understand that. Whether there is an opportunity for him to do so now seems doubtful. I would have had no objection to him seeking to table an amendment, but I was unaware that he was attempting to do so. That is my honest answer to him. I absolutely accept that he is a person of complete integrity and will always try to do the right thing, and the same goes for me. I am trying to do the right thing and to make the right judgments. That is what I have tried to do and will go on doing.

**Eddie Hughes** (Walsall North) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I hope you will bear with me because, as a relatively new Member who has never raised a point of order before, there may be some inaccuracy in the process. Given the comments that you have just made, I wonder whether you could point me towards the precedent that would allow for what seems to be an unamendable motion to be amended.

**Mr Speaker:** I am immensely grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I am not in the business of invoking precedent, nor am I under any obligation to do so. I think the hon. Gentleman will know that it is the long-established practice of this House that the Speaker in the Chair makes judgments upon the selection of amendments and that those judgments are not questioned by Members of the House. I am clear in my mind that I have taken the right course of action.

By way of explanation to the hon. Gentleman and to the House, the motion in the Prime Minister's name is indeed a variation of the order agreed by the House on 4 December. Under paragraph (9) of that order, the question on any motion to vary the order "shall be put forthwith." I interpret that to mean that there can be no debate, but I must advise the House that the terms of the order do not say that no amendment can be selected or moved. I cannot allow debate, but I have selected the amendment in the name of the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield. At the appropriate point, I will invite him to move it once the motion has been moved. That is the position.

**Mr Mark Francois** (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. For the convenience of the House, I have brought with me a copy of the original business motion, which was passed by this House on 4 December 2018, and paragraph (9) states:

"No motion to vary or supplement the provisions of this Order shall be made except by a Minister of the Crown; and the question on any such motion shall be put forthwith."

That was a motion of the House.

Now, I have not been in this House as long as you have, Mr Speaker, but I have been here for 18 years and I have never known any Speaker to overrule a motion of the House of Commons. You have said again and again that you are a servant of this House, and we take you at your word. When people have challenged you in points of order, I have heard you say many times, "I cannot do x or y because I am bound by a motion of the House." You have done that multiple times in my experience, so why are you overriding a motion of the House today?

**Mr Speaker:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his point of order and for his characteristic courtesy. The answer is simple. The right hon. Gentleman referred to a motion and said that no motion in this context, for the purposes of precis, may be moved other than by a Minister of the Crown. 'Tis so. We are not treating here of a motion but of an amendment to a motion.

**Mr Francois:** That's ridiculous.

**Mr Speaker:** I am sorry, but there is a distinction between a motion and an amendment. What the right hon. Gentleman says about a motion I accept, but it does not relate to an amendment. That is the answer.

**Mr Francois:** Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker.

**Mr Speaker:** No, there is no further.

**Mr Francois:** I am sorry, but that is utter sophistry.

**Mr Kenneth Clarke** (Rushcliffe) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. In recent years—[*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The Father of the House is on his feet; let us hear the right hon. and learned Gentleman.

**Mr Clarke:** In my opinion, in recent years this House has seen a considerable diminution of its powers and has often seemed rather indifferent to the eroding of some of the powers we used to have to hold Governments to account. You, Mr Speaker, have been assiduous in maximising the opportunities for the House to hold what happens to be the Government of the day to account and in giving the opportunity for debate and for voting. I find it unbelievable that people are putting such effort into trying to exclude the possibility of the House expressing its opinion on how it wishes to handle this matter, and I suggest to some of my hon. Friends—the ones who are getting somewhat overexcited—that perhaps they should don a yellow jacket and go outside.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Of course I will come back to other colleagues. I thank the right hon. and learned Gentleman for his point of order, which I think requires no response from me; it stands on its own.

**Mr Chris Leslie** (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. You are in an invidious position: you have an extremely difficult job to do, but can you confirm in relation to your rulings—whichever way they go; sometimes we will agree, and sometimes we will disagree—that it would not be in order for you simply to respond to the loudest voice at a particular point of time, or in any way to be pushed by a minority view because some are acting in a co-ordinated way to attempt to overrule your rulings?

**Mr Speaker:** I note what the hon. Gentleman says, and he will not be surprised to know that I share his judgment in the matter. For the avoidance of doubt and the understanding of people who are not Members of the House but are attending to our proceedings, and are possibly even present in the Palace of Westminster today, let me say this so that it is crystal clear from the

vantage point of the Chair: what the Chair is proposing to do is select an amendment because in my honest judgment it is a legitimate selection. It is for the House to vote upon—[*Interruption.*] Order. It is for the House to vote upon that amendment, and indeed to vote upon the motion. The Chair is simply seeking to discharge the responsibility of the holder of the office to the best of his ability. That is what I have always done, and no matter what people say or how forcefully they say it, or how many times they say it or by what manner of co-ordination it is said, I will continue to do what I believe to be right.

**Sir William Cash** (Stone) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Will you confirm that no amendment to the European withdrawal motion can have any legislative effect and therefore cannot override the express repeal of the European Communities Act 1972 in any shape or form, which was passed under section 1 of the withdrawal Act by this House and by Parliament on 26 June this year?

**Mr Speaker:** The short answer is yes, the hon. Gentleman is right. [*Interruption.*] The hon. Gentleman is right: only statute can overrule statute. As usual the hon. Gentleman's exegesis of the situation is entirely correct. [*Interruption.*] Somebody chuntered from a sedentary position, "Not as usual"; well, that was my evaluative comment on the hon. Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) based on long experience of him, and on this particular point I absolutely accept that he is right.

**Alison McGovern** (Wirral South) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. You have often drawn our attention not just to what goes on within the House but the view the public might take of the priorities we hold, so may I ask you to confirm what I believe you just said: if people do not like the amendment you have selected, the simple answer is to vote against it?

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Yes. A point of order now from Sir Bernard Jenkin.

**Sir Bernard Jenkin** (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. May I ask you to rule on a different matter, regarding Standing Order No. 118 on how delegated legislation is dealt with in this House, which states at paragraph (6):

"The Speaker shall put forthwith the question thereon"

after orders have been debated upstairs and brought to the Floor of the House? That has always been thought and understood to mean that these motions are unamendable: "forthwith" means unamendable. Why have you changed your interpretation of that word in this case?

**Mr Speaker:** My understanding is that the motion today, and the amendment, are undebatable: there is to be no debate on them. I have not made, as the hon. Gentleman suggests, a change of judgment specifically for today. I understand what the hon. Gentleman tells me in respect of the traditional treatment of delegated legislation, upon which he may himself be a considerable authority. I think it reasonable to say by way of response

that I cannot be expected to make a comprehensive judgment on that related question now, but I stand by the view I have expressed to the House. I completely respect the fact that the hon. Gentleman takes a view that differs from my own, but that is in the nature of debate and argument.

**Stephen Doughty** (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. The Government have a track record on this: they have a track record of trying to prevent this House from having its say over all aspects of the Brexit process, and what the public cannot see is the Chief Whip sitting there at the end of the Treasury Bench feverishly briefing journalists and texting Members in a co-ordinated attempt to undermine your judgment, Mr Speaker. The hon. Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone)—[*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty) is raising a point of order and he is entitled to be heard, and he will be heard.

**Stephen Doughty:** The hon. Member for Wellingborough made a reasonable point about going into the Table Office and being able to table an amendment. Is there not a problem here, Mr Speaker, as the fact is that the Government have had four weeks to get this right, but did not table the Business of the House motion until well gone 6 o'clock last night? Indeed, Members of this House were sitting in a meeting with the Prime Minister and Chief Whip and there was complete confusion about whether the Business of the House motion had gone down; there was a deliberate attempt to prevent amendments from being tabled and the House knowing what was going on. Do you agree that that is not acceptable, Mr Speaker?

**Mr Speaker:** My understanding is that the Business of the House motion was tabled yesterday afternoon by the Government; I confess I do not know at precisely what time, but my recollection and understanding are that it was tabled yesterday afternoon. It is for Members to judge in the light of the chronology of events of recent weeks whether that was altogether helpful. Clearly the Government Chief Whip will do what he judges to be right on behalf of his Prime Minister and his Government; I acknowledge that. Whether Members elsewhere in the House found it particularly helpful is perhaps an essay question which I leave to others.

**Heidi Allen** (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I have to tell you that I am absolutely hopping mad. When I became an MP three years ago I was determined that I would not become part of the establishment. Do people in this House have any idea how out of touch the general public think we are most days? We are talking about 79 days to potentially crashing out of Europe without a deal; our focus should not be on the detail of, and arguments about, the process in this place; it should be about getting on with a plan B if Parliament decides next week that the Government's plan is not the one for the people. When are we going to start acting like public servants and doing the right thing and having the debate and getting on with it?

**Mr Speaker:** I have the highest respect for the hon. Lady, as she knows. I take on board what she says and I do not dissent from it. Equally, however, if Members raise points of order it is my responsibility to deal with them as fairly and effectively as I can. Clearly there will, I think, be a desire at some stage to proceed to the substance of the matters with which we are supposed to be dealing, but if there are further points of order, of course I will hear them and do my best to respond.

**Vicky Ford** (Chelmsford) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. In my previous job in the European Parliament I often found that I was being asked to vote on amendments that had not been debated, and one of the things I really like about this House is that, before we vote on amendments, we get a chance to debate them. Can you confirm that, if this amendment is put to a vote today, we will have had a chance to debate it?

**Mr Speaker:** No, for the very simple reason that the terms for today, specified by the Government Chief Whip, specify no debate. If the hon. Lady asks me whether there will be a debate, the honest answer is no, but that is not my fault.

**The Leader of the House of Commons (Andrea Leadsom):** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. You will appreciate that there are Members around the House who have concerns about your decision today. I think it would be very helpful to the House if you could confirm that your decision was taken with the full advice and agreement of the Clerk of the House of Commons and, perhaps to help the House, you might agree to publish that advice so that the House can understand the reasons for your decision. [*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Forgive me, colleagues, but I want to hear the right hon. Lady's point of order. I heard the start of it, but I did not hear its continuation, so please let us hear it.

**Andrea Leadsom:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. As you will have heard today, there are some concerns about the decision you have taken in the context of the Business of the House motion. Could you therefore please confirm that your decision was taken with full advice from the Clerk of the House of Commons and other senior parliamentary advisers and whether, under these circumstances, you might consider publishing that advice?

**Hon. Members:** Publish it.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I thank the Leader of the House for her point of order, and what I say to her is twofold. First, of course I consult the Clerk of the House and other senior Clerks, and I hear their advice. That advice is tendered to me privately, and that is absolutely proper, but it is also true that I had a written note from the Clerk of the House, from which I quoted in responding to an earlier point of order.

If the right hon. Lady is inquiring whether there is what she might consider to be, in governmental terms, full written advice, a paper or a written brief, or whatever, there is none such. I have just told her what the situation is, I quoted from what was provided to me by the Clerk of the House and I have given my ruling. That is the situation.



**Andrea Leadsom:** Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. I am grateful for your reply. My question really is, did the Clerk of the House of Commons propose that your solution is acceptable, or did the Clerk advise against it?

**Mr Speaker:** The answer is that I have discussed the matter with the Clerk of the House. [HON. MEMBERS: “Ah!”] Order. The Clerk offered me advice, and we talked about the situation that faces the House today. At the end of our discussion, when I had concluded as I did, he undertook to advise me further in the treatment of this matter—that seems to me to be entirely proper. That is the situation, and I think that is what colleagues would expect.

**Angus Brendan MacNeil** (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Just before I begin, I wish Michel Barnier a happy 68th birthday today. The contention in which this amendment is held is surely all the justification required for Members to vote on it and to decide one way or the other, and you are correct in what you are doing.

**Mr Speaker:** Thank you.

**Mr Iain Duncan Smith** (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con) *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** On account of his seniority I will take a further point of order from the right hon. Gentleman, but I hope he will not push his luck.

**Mr Duncan Smith:** Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. As you know, I respect the Chair and I would never push my luck with you. I do not challenge the decision by any means, and it is your right to make it from the Chair, but over the past 24 or 25 years I have on a number of occasions, particularly during the Maastricht debates, asked the Clerks whether we could amend a Business of the House motion. I was always told categorically that precedent says it is not possible and, therefore, there was no point seeking to do so—I say that only as a statement.

Because this has a big impact on the Government’s ability to get their business, regardless of Brexit, will the instruction go to the Clerks that, in future, a Back Bencher wishing to amend a “forthwith” motion will now have such an amendment allowed and accepted against any business in the House?

**Mr Speaker:** It seems entirely reasonable for me to say to the right hon. Gentleman that I would like to reflect on that matter. [HON. MEMBERS: “Ah!”] Order. Members cavil as though there is an assumption that there should be immediate and comprehensive knowledge of all circumstances that might subsequently unfold. It may be that there are Members who feel they possess such great wisdom and, if so, I congratulate them upon the fact. I do not claim that wisdom, so I am giving what I absolutely admit is a holding answer to the right hon. Gentleman. I will reflect on the point, but if he is asking whether I think it is unreasonable that people might seek to amend a Business of the House motion, I do not think it is unreasonable. If, in future, Back Benchers were to seek to do so, it would seem sensible to me to say, “Let us look at the merits of the case.”

Finally, in attempting to respond not only to the right hon. Gentleman but to some of the concerns that have been expressed, I understand the importance of precedent, but precedent does not completely bind, for one very simple reason. [*Interruption.*] I say this for the benefit of the Leader of the House, who is shaking her head. If we were guided only by precedent, manifestly nothing in our procedures would ever change. Things do change. I have made an honest judgment. If people want to vote against the amendment, they can; and if they want to vote for it, they can.

**Sir Christopher Chope** (Christchurch) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Can I remind the House that, further to what you have just said, it was because of your courage in allowing an amendment to a Loyal Address, which enabled a referendum test to be applied in this House, that we had the referendum in due course and we are where we are? Let nobody suggest that you, by your actions, have been undermining Brexit. It would seem to me to be an absolute own goal for this House if we started undermining your position in the Chair. As an independently-minded Government Back Bencher, I strongly resent the fact that the Government pairing Whip, my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Andrew Stephenson), who is on the right-hand side of your Chair, has been trying to orchestrate objections to your decision.

**Mr Speaker:** Let me say this to the hon. Gentleman. So far as his last remark was concerned, I think I can cope with that. Government Whips going about their business in their own way is something to which the Chair is very well and long accustomed. The notion that a Government Whip might now and again do things that are unhelpful to the Chair is not entirely novel. I have broad shoulders and I am not going to lose any sleep over that—never have done, am not doing so and never will.

I thank the hon. Gentleman for his characteristic courtesy and his sense of fairness. He recalls the record accurately: I did indeed select an additional amendment to the Humble Address, if memory serves me correctly, in 2013, and that was in the name of Mr John Baron. That amendment was on the subject of a referendum on British membership of the European Union, so what the hon. Gentleman says is true.

The fact is that there is a responsibility on the Chair to do their best to stand up for the rights of the House of Commons, including the views of dissenters on the Government Benches—that is to say, independent-minded souls who do not always go with the Whip—and to defend the rights of Opposition parties and very small parties, as well. I have always sought to do that, and on the Brexit issue, as on every issue, what the record shows, if I may say so—and I will—is that this Chair, on a very, very, very big scale, calls Members from across the House with a very large variety of opinions. Ordinarily, as colleagues will acknowledge, when statements are made to the House, my practice, almost invariably, is to call each and every Member, whether the Government like it or not. That is not because I am setting myself up against the Government, but because I am championing the rights of the House of Commons.

**Ms Angela Eagle** (Wallasey) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Do you agree that over the past few years we have seen a big evolution in the way the

Government treat motions in this House? That was partly brought about by the Wright reforms, but we have seen the widespread ignoring of motions passed in this House, and the beginning of a practice of not voting on motions—especially Opposition motions—that the Government feel are somehow awkward for them. Do you agree, Mr Speaker, that this has taken away from the importance of the decisions that this House of Commons makes? Do you therefore also agree that allowing this House of Commons to vote on more issues, in a context in which those votes have to be taken and put into effect, empowers this House of Commons and demonstrates that it is taking back control? As Speaker, you have an absolute duty to ensure that this House of Commons is taken seriously, which is why I commend you for the decision you have taken today.

**Mr Speaker:** Rather than deal in detail with what the hon. Lady has said, I will say that I agree with her assessment of recent events, and of course I thank her for agreeing with me.

**Simon Hoare** (North Dorset) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. The advice of the Clerks is entirely properly between you and the Clerks—that is an accepted principle—but if this place is to operate properly and effectively, it has to be on an established, rules-based system, as referred to by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith). May I ask you, Sir, to reflect on two things? First, if there is to be what one would consider to be a fairly seismic change in the definition of terms in this place, the role of the Procedure Committee in that should be taken into account. Secondly, I say this to you personally, Mr Speaker. We need to reflect in this place not on the personalities or the politics, but on the dignity of the office of Speaker and the dignity of the Chair. I think we are—I say this with sadness—in pretty choppy and dangerous waters at the time in our nation's affairs when, frankly, we can least afford it.

**Mr Speaker:** I am extraordinarily grateful for the point of order from the hon. Gentleman; I know he is deeply versed in the affairs of the House and takes his responsibilities to it very seriously indeed. I shall reflect most carefully on every word of what he has said to me today. I agree that there could well be a role for the Procedure Committee in relation to this matter, and thank him for what he has said.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** I will come to other colleagues, if that is what colleagues wish.

**Hilary Benn** (Leeds Central) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Given the crisis that the country is facing over Brexit, the fact that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) has just said, the House of Commons is taking back control is to be welcomed, rather than feared. Mr Speaker, you have made your ruling; it is clear; the House should respect it. I wonder whether you could advise us on how we could now move on to the business of the day, to which I think the nation expects us to turn our attention.

**Mr Speaker:** The short answer to the right hon. Gentleman is that I am in the hands of colleagues, and I think he knows me well enough to know that I have

never ducked a challenge. That is not in my nature; it has been no part of my DNA, either since I have been in this House or in all my life before I came into Parliament. *[Interruption.]* The right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field) says from a sedentary position words to the effect of “Let’s get on.” I would like to move on, but I do wish to treat colleagues with courtesy. *[Interruption.]* Somebody said “You can,” but I will take a few remaining points of order if people wish to raise them. I say very gently to the hon. Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare), who just raised his point of order and talked about the dignity of the Chair and the importance of our procedures, that if people are going to invoke that importance, it would be helpful if they did not undermine that self-same point by continuous and repetitive dispute.

**Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg** (North East Somerset) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I have two points on which I would be grateful for clarity. First, section 9 of the order of the House that sets out the terms of the debate says that no motion may be made other than by a Minister of the Crown, and you have interpreted that to mean that an amendment can be made to the motion. The question on that motion, as amended, then has to be put, and that is the motion that, under the order, needs to be moved by a Minister of the Crown. Is it therefore the case that the question may not be put on the motion, if amended, unless the motion is adopted by a Minister of the Crown?

I then have a second point. *[Interruption.]* If I may come to the second point, which is the precedential—*[Interruption.]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I have heard the hon. Gentleman's first point and I would like to hear his second.

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** The second point relates to the interpretation of the word “forthwith” and, for the benefit of the Commons *Journal* tomorrow, how it is to be understood in future when such matters arise. Page 458 of “Erskine May”, which I am sure you have, Mr Speaker, says that such questions

“must be put forthwith without any possibility of amendment”.

That reads as a single set, rather than as though “forthwith” was simply being qualified. The question that then arises is on the other important Standing Orders that are affected by the “forthwith” question. I think particularly of Standing Order No. 44, relating to disorderly conduct, which states that the question must be put forthwith but makes no mention of amendment one way or another. It seems to me that it would be deeply troublesome if “forthwith” came to allow amendments under such circumstances, so I think that the precedential effect of your ruling needs to be clarified.

**Mr Speaker:** I am happy to reflect on the second point, which is not altogether dissimilar to that raised earlier by the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith). It is a very serious question and it warrants a serious reply. I am not sure whether it is reasonable to expect a full reply today—I am not sure whether that is what the hon. Gentleman is seeking—but if the hon. Gentleman is saying to me in his typically courteous way that this is an important matter and that we need a judgment on it,

[Mr Speaker]

either from the Chair alone or from the Chair acting on the advice of, for example, the Procedure Committee, I agree with him.

On the hon. Gentleman's first point, the answer is that if the motion has been moved, the question on it must then be put. For the avoidance of doubt, I say that on the basis of specialist advice.

**Pete Wishart** (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. My point is equally important constitutionally. Are there any means available to this House of communicating to the Conservative party that we are all now bored and tired of all these points of order? The nation is increasingly embarrassed by them. How do we therefore get on with today's debate?

**Mr Speaker:** The hon. Gentleman has made his point, and I am grateful to him.

**Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I must say that I never bore of the proceedings of this House and of doing my job, even if others do. A few moments ago, you said that only statute can overrule statute. The section of the Act to which this motion relates specified a period of 21 calendar days for the Government to come back. This motion specifies three sitting days. Which one has precedence and why did you select this amendment?

**Mr Speaker:** I have already explained the situation that appertains to the amendment. I do not wish to be unkind to the hon. Gentleman, but if, after all these exchanges, he is still not clear about my rationale for the selection of the amendment, I am not sure, frankly, whether I can greatly help him. I think I am right in saying that the reference to 21 days, as I have just been advised from a sedentary position by the Clerk of the House, is a 21-day maximum. When the hon. Gentleman enquires about supremacy—which of the two takes precedence—I simply make the point that that which is governed by statute is a matter of legal fact. Earlier in this series of exchanges, the hon. Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) asked me to confirm his legal understanding, and I did. That seems to me to treat of the point that concerns the hon. Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster).

**Luciana Berger** (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. There will be times in this House when we agree and times when we disagree, but I respect the ruling that you have made today. How can we put on the record that it is reprehensible that there are right hon. and hon. Members in this House who have often advocated our taking back control, but who are now doing the complete opposite in seeking to challenge your ruling? Let us not forget that this amendment seeks to decrease the uncertainty currently being experienced by millions of people across our country—our constituents, our public services and our businesses. How can we make it known to people outside the House who are watching our proceedings that the majority, I believe, of this House respect your ruling, and do not believe that what we are experiencing in this House is any way for us to conduct our affairs?

**Mr Speaker:** I am very grateful to the hon. Lady. She, like many others, has made her position very clear, and that stands on the record for people to scrutinise. On the issues to be voted on today, I return to the point that I was making earlier: I hope that colleagues and those attending to our proceedings outwith the Chamber will understand me when I say that these issues are for the House to decide. I am simply making a selection and then inviting Members of the House of Commons to vote and reach their conclusions. I expect many people feel that it would be seemly and advantageous if we were to do so relatively soon; we have another piece of business first.

**Mr Shailesh Vara** (North West Cambridgeshire) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. You have said that you consulted the Clerks. For the sake of clarity, will you kindly inform the House whether the decision that you have arrived at is different from the initial advice provided to you by the Clerks?

**Mr Speaker:** I am not confirming or denying that. I am saying what I said earlier, which is that I had a discussion with the Clerk and with other Clerks. We discussed the situation, the various scenarios and the proffering of advice, and I stand by what I said. I have nothing to add to that. It is perfectly proper for the Speaker to consult and hear the views of the Clerks who serve at the Table, and sometimes other Clerks as well.

**Martin Whitfield** (East Lothian) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I really seek your guidance for myself and perhaps for others in this House. There is a difference between a motion and an amendment. If the Government had wished to prevent amendments, would not a better worded motion a few weeks ago have relieved them of the problem that they find themselves with today?

**Mr Speaker:** I am not sure whether I want to speculate on that, but the hon. Gentleman has obviously applied his beady eye to the material on the Order Paper, and he has reached that conclusion. Others may also do so.

**Nigel Huddleston** (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. You and your deputies have a well deserved reputation for being absolute sticklers for protocols, processes and conventions in this place, which occasionally I find quite frustrating, but which I utterly respect. To that end, would it be in order for you, in considering this important matter, to consult with your deputies as to the appropriateness of accepting this amendment?

**Mr Speaker:** I am extremely grateful to the hon. Gentleman, but the short answer is no, and I shall tell him why. The clue is in the title, "The Speaker in the Chair". The Speaker is elected to discharge his responsibilities to the House to the best of his ability. That is what I have done, diligently, conscientiously and without fail for the past nine and a half years. Mine is the responsibility. I do not seek to duck it.

**Mr David Lammy** (Tottenham) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Do you agree that in all our experiences in this House, it is extremely unwise to thrust civil servants and officials, who give their advice in confidence



and are neutral, into the public domain in this way? When it has happened in the past, it has often ended very badly indeed for those individuals. The House should stop that. It is extremely inappropriate for a Leader of the House to lead that charge.

**Mr Speaker:** The right hon. Gentleman makes his own point in his own way with considerable force and alacrity. I respect him and I respect what he said. As to how others choose to go about their work, that is a matter for them. As far as I am concerned, I am a member of the legislature. I am the Speaker of the House of Commons, a very important part of Parliament. My job is not to be a cheerleader for the Executive branch; my job is to stand up for the rights of the House of Commons, and the Speaker will assuredly do so.

**James Cleverly (Braintree) (Con):** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. In your response to the point of order from my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall North (Eddie Hughes), you said that this was an unprecedented thing. In response to the point of order from my hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg), you said that you did not necessarily intend this to set a future precedent. It is clear that it is important that you are, and that you are seen and believed to be, impartial. Clearly, there is a huge appetite to explore the implications of this decision. Might it not be wise not to implement this decision at such a contentious point in time, to reflect on both—*[Interruption.]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Had the hon. Gentleman completed his remarks?

**James Cleverly** *indicated dissent.*

**Mr Speaker:** Please finish.

**James Cleverly:** Would it not be appropriate to take time to reflect on the precedent that this decision might set, and instead to make a decision in slower time at a less contentious moment in the business of this House?

**Mr Speaker:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his point of order. I respect his sincerity, but—I hope he will see this point even if he does not agree with it—the responsibility is mine, and it is not tomorrow, next week, next month, next year; it is now. The Chair has to make his best judgment there and then. That is what I have done, honourably and conscientiously in the firm and continuing conviction that I am right. So while I respect the hon. Gentleman and his sincerity in his point of order, the short answer to him is no.

**Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab):** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Any of our constituents watching this now will be deeply worried about the future of our country and will not be impressed by this spectacle. A number of the points of order have articulated a series of finely detailed points, but they amount to the same thing: a tedious repetition. Is there anything in the rules of the House that prevents the abuse of the time made available to this House by making the same point over and over again?

**Mr Speaker:** Well, I do not think it is helpful when people just make the same point over and over and over again, but as I myself have often observed, it is not unprecedented. *[Interruption.]* The point has just been made elegantly and eloquently from a sedentary position by the hon. Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner) that continued repetition is not entirely a novel phenomenon in the House of Commons, so I will deal with it. However, there is a ten-minute rule motion with which to deal, and the hon. Member for Aldershot (Leo Docherty) is waiting to present that ten-minute rule motion, and we do then have important business to dispatch. Unless people really feel that they have something new to raise by way of a point of order, I ask them in all courtesy to consider not doing so at this time.

**Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con):** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. First, may I ask you to confirm that Members have an absolute right to raise points of order with you and to challenge you in the excellent job that you do as a servant of the House? This afternoon we have been told that we are reprehensible by some Members, and have been accused of wasting time and of being part of a co-ordination. I am part of no co-ordination in this place and never will be.

Secondly, with the greatest respect to you, Mr Speaker—I am agnostic on the decision that you have made and believe you have the absolute right to make it—we talk about the public out there, and there are a lot of people who believe that there is a conspiracy and a procedural stitch-up taking place by a House of Commons which, on the substantive issue of leaving or remaining in the European Union, is grossly out of touch with the referendum result. With that in mind, although I accept your decision and would indeed be more than happy to support you in it, may I again ask that any advice proffered on this matter should be put into the public domain so that the public can make their own decision about that?

**Mr Speaker:** The Clerk has just said to me that advice to the Speaker is private, but I do have two things to say to the hon. Gentleman. First, perhaps I can concur with him; I know him, and his whole political background and track record in this place prove that he is not part of co-ordinated efforts. He is very much his own person, and he knows that I have always respected him for that as well as for a number of his other qualities.

Secondly, the hon. Gentleman refers to a perception out there. To some degree, this brings us back to earlier points of order. I often have to explain this point to constituents and to people I meet around the country, so let me again say this and let me say it explicitly: it is not for the Chair either to try to push a policy through or to prevent a policy being pushed through. That is not the role of the Speaker of the House. The role of the Speaker of the House is to chair as effectively as he or she can in the Chamber and in the management of the day-to-day business, including the selection of amendments, new clauses and so on. What the House chooses to do is a matter for the House. If that applies across the piece, manifestly it applies to the subject of Brexit. What happens on this subject is not a matter for me; I am simply seeking to facilitate the House in deciding what it wants to decide. That has always been my attitude, it remains my attitude and it will continue to be my attitude. Let the House decide on the policy.

**Yasmin Qureshi** (Bolton South East) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I was not intending to make a point of order, but it is important for me to place on record that in the eight and a half years I have been in this place, every time I have had an occasion to speak to any of the House officials—the Table Office, the Clerks, the Public Bill Office or the Private Bill Office—I have been given the most brilliant advice from everyone. It is really improper for Members here to be saying that advice given to you by the Clerks in the execution of their duty should be revealed publicly. That is most inappropriate and is putting the Clerks in an invidious political position.

**Mr Speaker:** I thank the hon. Lady for what she has said. I do not know whether there is any precedent for such advice having been issued, but my understanding is that it has not previously been issued. I said what I did in response to an earlier point of order on the basis, once more, of clerky advice. I know that the Clerk would concur with that view, as I do.

**Crispin Blunt** (Reigate) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. This year will be 30 years since we first met in the final of the competition to be selected for Bristol South, and both of us have been on something of a journey since then. When you were elected as Speaker, you said you would serve for nine years. There has been the controversy of the recommendations of the Dame Laura Cox inquiry into the House of Commons, and you have been defended, particularly by two right hon. Opposition Members, on the importance of your being sustained in position beyond the nine years in order to oversee the discussions and denouement of the Brexit issue.

The uncomfortable conclusion, Mr Speaker, given the points made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith) and my hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) and the implications of the precedent that you have set with this ruling today, is that many of us will now have an unshakeable conviction that the referee of our affairs, not least because you made public your opinion and your vote on the issue of Brexit, is no longer neutral. I just invite you to reflect on the conclusion that many of us inevitably will have come to.

**Mr Speaker:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his point of view. He is quite right that we met, I think, in the anteroom of the Bristol Conservative Association headquarters at 5 Westfield Park, Redland, Bristol in July 1989, so we have known each other for a long time and I take in a perfectly good spirit what the hon. Gentleman has said.

I have explained in response to previous points of order and adduced evidence in support of my argument, including that proffered by the hon. Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope), that I have always done my conscientious best to champion the rights of Members wishing to push their particular point of view on a range of issues and, perhaps most strikingly, on this issue. That is what the record shows. I have always been scrupulously fair to Brexiteers and remainers alike, as I have always been to people of different opinions on a miscellany of other issues. That has been the case, it is the case and it will continue to be the case.

As for the other point that the hon. Gentleman made, he will know that I was re-elected unanimously by this House on, I think, 13 June 2017, for the Parliament. If I have a statement on that matter to make, I would of course make it to the House first. I think that most people would accept that that is entirely reasonable.

**Jess Phillips** (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I never thought that I was going to be one of the people who would care about the procedures of this House. I scoffed at people who talked of procedure. When I arrived here, I realised that actually it is the procedures of this House, and protecting and developing them, that will make our democracy considerably better. I wonder if you agree with me, Mr Speaker—I have seen two occasions this week of what I am about to say—that people only care about the procedures, and protecting and conserving the procedures, when they do not like the outcome of the thing that is about to happen, and never when it is going in their favour.

**Mr Speaker:** The hon. Lady has made her own points with force and style. I think we all know—*[Interruption.]* Let me put it like this; I will not get into that. I think we all know from our own constituencies that people are inclined to complain about a process when they do not like a result. In this case, to be fair, the result will come only when we have votes on an amendment and a motion. If what the hon. Lady is implying is that people are complaining because they do not like the amendment that has been selected, well, she has made her own point, and that may very well be so. I certainly would not impugn for one moment the integrity of Members of this House who have challenged me today, as they are absolutely entitled to do, and made their own points. I hope that throughout these exchanges today it will be demonstrably obvious to everybody that no matter what point people have made, and how forcefully they have made it, I have heard it, I have heard it fully, I have heard it with courtesy, and I have responded to it with courtesy. That has been my approach and it will always be.

**Charlie Elphicke** (Dover) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. May I join with many others in saying that I appreciate and respect the extent to which you listen to everyone and ensure that everyone is given a courteous, fair and proper hearing, and that the voices and votes of all people should be listened to? That includes, of course, the 17.4 million people who voted leave and will be watching these proceedings and worried about the direction of the House of Commons.

On the substantive question, may I ask for your advice and guidance on the amendment in the name of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve)? The reason I raise this is that I am wondering why you selected it, as it seems to me to be defective. It says that

“a minister of the crown shall table within three sitting days a motion under section 13”.

However, there is no sanction if a Minister of the Crown does not table such a motion; nor indeed does it say which Minister of the Crown it needs to be; and if a motion were to be tabled within three sitting days, there is nothing to force it actually to be taken, because it

could end up in the “Remaining orders and notices” section indefinitely. So why are we having this sort of amendment when actually, it seems to me, it does not have any effect?

**Mr Speaker:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for what he said at the start of his remarks and for his usual courtesy. What I would say to him on the substance of the issue is as follows. The judgment for the Chair is whether an amendment—in this context we are talking about an amendment—is orderly and selectable. It is not incumbent upon the Chair to seek to interpret the amendment. That is not my responsibility. If the hon. Gentleman is quizzical on that point—if he believes it to be, as he put it, I think, ineffective, or not effective—his inquiry on that matter should, if I may say so, be lobbed, gently or otherwise, in the direction of his right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), whose amendment it is. That—I am very clear intellectually on this point—is not a matter for me. It may well be very important to the hon. Gentleman, and perhaps to other people, but it is a matter to raise either personally with the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield or in an indirect way.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** I will take remaining points of order from the Government Benches.

**Adam Holloway** (Gravesham) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Further to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt), we have all noticed in recent months a sticker in your car that makes derogatory comments about Brexit—[HON. MEMBERS: “Oh.”] No, this is a serious point about partiality. Have you driven that car with the sticker there?

**Mr Speaker:** Order. [*Interruption.*] I think the record will show—and I have the highest regard and affection for the hon. Gentleman—that I have listened to all the points of order. The only reason why I interrupt him at this point—I hope he will forgive my doing so—is that there was a factual error in his opening remarks. I am sure it was an inadvertent error, and I mean that most sincerely, but it was a factual error. He said that in recent months it had been noticed that there was a sticker in my car. That sticker on the subject of Brexit happens to be affixed to, or in the windscreen of, my wife’s car. [*Laughter.*] Yes, it is. I am sure the hon. Gentleman would not suggest for one moment that a wife is somehow the property or chattel of her husband. She is entitled to her views. That sticker is not mine, and that is the end of it.

**Mr Nicholas Brown** (Newcastle upon Tyne East) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I think the House is now ready to move on. We have a long day ahead of us, and I beg to move that we proceed to the next business.

**Mr Speaker:** Well, that is not a motion that I can accept, but I would like to propose that we come now to the ten-minute rule motion. I call Mr Leo Docherty.

## Armed Forces (Derogation from European Convention on Human Rights)

*Motion for leave to bring in a Bill (Standing Order No. 23)*

1.57 pm

**Leo Docherty** (Aldershot) (Con): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require Her Majesty’s Government to derogate from the European Convention on Human Rights in its application to the conduct of members of the armed forces participating in combat operations overseas; and for connected purposes.

I seek this Bill to ensure that our armed forces are protected from legal pursuit and that the resolve and capability of our armed forces to deliver hard fighting power when needed—[*Interruption.*]

**Richard Benyon** (Newbury) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

**Mr Speaker:** We are on a ten-minute rule motion, so no.

**Richard Benyon:** I just wish that people would be quiet.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. We will start again. The right hon. Gentleman—

**Richard Benyon:** This is very important.

**Mr Speaker:** The right hon. Gentleman is a person of unfailing courtesy in this House, and I think he also knows our procedures. There are no points of order during a ten-minute rule motion, but he is absolutely right that the speech should be heard, I hope, with courtesy and respect. I thank him for helping the Chair. Let us stop the clock and start again. I call Mr Leo Docherty.

**Leo Docherty:** Thank you, Mr Speaker.

I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require Her Majesty’s Government to derogate from the European Convention on Human Rights in its application to the conduct of members of the armed forces participating in combat operations overseas; and for connected purposes.

I seek this Bill to ensure that our armed forces are protected from legal pursuit and that the resolve and capability of our armed forces to deliver hard fighting power when needed around the world is undiminished. The legal pursuit of our soldiers and veterans is a particularly painful chapter in our country’s history and must be urgently resolved.

I relate as illustration a conversation I had last year in my constituency, in the Aldershot garrison, with a senior soldier who had just left the Army after three decades of distinguished service in the most elite units, in the most brutal and demanding theatres of operation. His experience of sustained legal pursuit in relation to operations in Afghanistan left him with a deep sense of betrayal. Even though he was the son of a soldier and had himself served for 30 years, he told me, “My sons



[*Leo Docherty*]

will not serve.” That pained me, because soldiers do not wish to be above the law; they just want to be under the correct laws.

It has been the case for generations that the law of armed conflict and the Geneva conventions have governed warfare in the modern age carried out by our soldiers. That was the case up until 1998 and the unintended consequences of the Human Rights Act and the European convention on human rights, which has led to a catalogue of injustice involving hundreds of soldiers from all operational theatres. Those cases go on today. No other country has such a perverse situation in which soldiers who have done their duty and done no wrong face this kind of sustained legal pursuit. Indeed, 10 countries, including France and Spain, have in effect opted out of certain aspects of the European convention on human rights, so there is a way forward, and we must do the same.

I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat) for his terrific work on bringing this issue to the fore and getting it the attention it deserves since his election to this place in 2015. The excellent Policy Exchange report “Clearing the Fog of Law”, which he co-authored, makes clear the alarming manner in which the British military is today entangled in human rights law, to the extent that the European convention on human rights applies wherever and whenever a British soldier employs force. That means that foreign nationals, including enemy combatants, can sue the United Kingdom for a breach of the European convention on human rights in courts both here in London and in Strasbourg following military operations. To prevent that, we must, as other countries have done, derogate from the European convention on human rights.

I also pay tribute to my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer), who has tackled headlong the outrageous scandal of the Iraq Historic Allegations Team. Since coming into this place, he has been instrumental, along with other members of the Defence Committee, in rightly urging my right hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Sir Michael Fallon) to close down IHAT.

The Defence Committee, led by our right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis), continues to investigate the scandal of legal pursuit. We have heard recently from witnesses that the Army is “running scared of the law.”

That must end, and it must end not only because of legacy cases and the past, but because of our concern for the viability of future operations.

Getting the legal basis of military operations right underpins the central mission of our national defence at

this time, which is the rejuvenation of our armed forces to meet a complex new range of manifold threats. It is also part of the process of moving our armed forces from the era of counter-insurgency towards a more conventional posture, which we have lost by necessity through our long engagement in Iraq and Afghanistan. We must state with confidence that we need conventional fighting power. It is not a luxury.

Some commentators suggest that the era of military intervention overseas is over. Whatever the judgment of Members in this House about the wisdom of various past entanglements, the clear lesson of history is that, whether we like it or not, we will need in the future to deploy our soldiers abroad to fight on our behalf—and it will be to fight. We need to be honest with ourselves about that. Soldiers are extremely versatile and adaptable. They can be superb peacekeepers, first-class aid workers, accomplished policemen and effective diplomats. They can do all those roles very well, but they are first and foremost soldiers whose task is to deliver hard fighting power to kill and destroy our enemies. They must have the correct basis in law to do that, in situations where domestic human rights law is completely and utterly inapplicable.

To conclude, we must bring an end to the entanglement of our armed forces in human rights law. We should do that because it is the right thing to do, and we should do it because we have promised to do it; it is on page 41 of our manifesto. We should do it because we need to be honest with our constituents and our society about the role of our armed forces and the fact that they need to fight on our behalf. Our armed forces need to know that they can deploy and fight on our behalf while adhering to the Geneva conventions and the law of armed conflict. They need to know that they can deploy and fight on our behalf and will not then face spurious legal accusations years and decades after the event. Our armed forces need to know that they can deploy and fight on our behalf with the full confidence of our Government and our society, allowing them to serve in good faith and with pride for the safety of our people and the defence of our nation.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Ordered,*

That Leo Docherty, Sir Nicholas Soames, Sir Henry Bellingham, Dr Julian Lewis, Johnny Mercer, Tom Tugendhat, Mr Mark Francois, Sir Mike Penning, Richard Benyon, James Heappey, Jim Shannon and Gavin Robinson present the Bill.

Leo Docherty accordingly presented the Bill.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 8 March, and to be printed ( Bill 312 ).*

**BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE (SECTION 13(1)(b)  
OF THE EUROPEAN UNION (WITHDRAWAL)  
ACT 2018) (NO. 2)**

*Motion made, and Question proposed forthwith ( Order, 4 December ),*

That the Order of 4 December (Business of the House (Section 13(1)(b) of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018)) be varied as follows:

1. Leave out paragraph (2) and insert:

“(2A) The House shall sit on Friday 11 January.

(2B) The allotted days shall be Tuesday 4 December, Wednesday 5 December, Thursday 6 December, Monday 10 December, Wednesday 9 January, Thursday 10 January, Friday 11 January, Monday 14 January and Tuesday 15 January.”

2. In paragraph (3):

- a. after “this day” insert “and the fifth allotted day”, and
- b. leave out “the Business of the House (Section 13(1)(b) of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018) motion” and insert “a Business of the House (Section 13(1)(b) of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018) motion”.

3. In paragraph (4) leave out “and fourth” and insert “fourth, sixth and eighth”.

4. In paragraph (6) leave out “up to six amendments” and insert “any number of amendments”.

5. Leave out paragraph (7) and insert:

“(7) On the final allotted day, the Speaker shall put the questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the European Union withdrawal motion at 7.00pm; and such questions shall include the questions on any amendments selected by the Speaker in accordance with the provisions of paragraph 6 of this Order which may then be moved.”

6. After paragraph (9) insert:

“(9A) Notwithstanding the practice of this House, a Member may be called to speak twice to the Question on the European Union withdrawal motion without the leave of the House.”—*(Jeremy Quin.)*

*Amendment proposed:* (a), at end, add

“7. In the event of the motion under Section 13(1)(b) being negated or amended so as to be negated, a Minister of the Crown shall table within three sitting days a motion under Section 13, considering the process of exiting the European Union under Article 50.”—*(Mr Grieve.)*

*Question put forthwith,* That the amendment be made.

*The House divided:* Ayes 308, Noes 297.

**Division No. 291]**

**[2.7 pm**

**AYES**

Abbott, rh Ms Diane	Boles, Nick
Abrahams, Debbie	Brabin, Tracy
Ali, Rushanara	Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Allen, Heidi	Brake, rh Tom
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena	Brennan, Kevin
Amesbury, Mike	Brock, Deidre
Antoniazzi, Tonia	Brown, Alan
Ashworth, Jonathan	Brown, Lyn
Austin, Ian	Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Bailey, Mr Adrian	Bryant, Chris
Bardell, Hannah	Buck, Ms Karen
Beckett, rh Margaret	Burden, Richard
Benn, rh Hilary	Burgon, Richard
Berger, Luciana	Butler, Dawn
Betts, Mr Clive	Byrne, rh Liam
Black, Mhairi	Cable, rh Sir Vince
Blackford, rh Ian	Cadbury, Ruth
Blackman, Kirsty	Cameron, Dr Lisa
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta	Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Blomfield, Paul	Carden, Dan

Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair	Goodman, Helen
Champion, Sarah	Grady, Patrick
Chapman, Douglas	Grant, Peter
Chapman, Jenny	Gray, Neil
Charalambous, Bambos	Green, Kate
Cherry, Joanna	Greening, rh Justine
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth	Greenwood, Lilian
Clwyd, rh Ann	Greenwood, Margaret
Coaker, Vernon	Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
Coffey, Ann	Griffith, Nia
Cooper, Julie	Grogan, John
Cooper, Rosie	Gwynne, Andrew
Cooper, rh Yvette	Gyimah, Mr Sam
Corbyn, rh Jeremy	Haigh, Louise
Cowan, Ronnie	Hamilton, Fabian
Coyle, Neil	Hanson, rh David
Crausby, Sir David	Hardy, Emma
Crawley, Angela	Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Creagh, Mary	Harris, Carolyn
Creasy, Stella	Hayes, Helen
Cruddas, Jon	Hayman, Sue
Cryer, John	Healey, rh John
Cummins, Judith	Hendrick, Sir Mark
Cunningham, Alex	Hendry, Drew
Cunningham, Mr Jim	Hepburn, Mr Stephen
Daby, Janet	Hermon, Lady
Dakin, Nic	Hill, Mike
Davey, rh Sir Edward	Hillier, Meg
David, Wayne	Hobhouse, Wera
Davies, Geraint	Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Day, Martyn	Hollern, Kate
De Cordova, Marsha	Hosie, Stewart
De Piero, Gloria	Howarth, rh Mr George
Debbonaire, Thangam	Huq, Dr Rupa
Dent Coad, Emma	Hussain, Imran
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh	Jardine, Christine
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan	Jarvis, Dan
Docherty-Hughes, Martin	Johnson, Diana
Dodds, Anneliese	Johnson, Joseph
Doughty, Stephen	Jones, Darren
Dowd, Peter	Jones, Gerald
Drew, Dr David	Jones, Graham P.
Dromey, Jack	Jones, rh Mr Kevan
Duffield, Rosie	Jones, Sarah
Eagle, Ms Angela	Jones, Susan Elan
Eagle, Maria	Kane, Mike
Edwards, Jonathan	Keeley, Barbara
Efford, Clive	Kendall, Liz
Elliott, Julie	Khan, Afzal
Ellman, Dame Louise	Killen, Ged
Elmore, Chris	Kinnock, Stephen
Esterson, Bill	Kyle, Peter
Evans, Chris	Laird, Lesley
Farrelly, Paul	Lake, Ben
Farron, Tim	Lamb, rh Norman
Fellows, Marion	Lammey, rh Mr David
Fitzpatrick, Jim	Lavery, Ian
Fletcher, Colleen	Law, Chris
Flint, rh Caroline	Lee, Karen
Fovargue, Yvonne	Lee, Dr Phillip
Foxcroft, Vicky	Leslie, Mr Chris
Frith, James	Letwin, rh Sir Oliver
Furniss, Gill	Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Gaffney, Hugh	Lewis, Clive
Gapes, Mike	Linden, David
Gardiner, Barry	Lloyd, Stephen
George, Ruth	Lloyd, Tony
Gethins, Stephen	Long Bailey, Rebecca
Gibson, Patricia	Lucas, Caroline
Gill, Preet Kaur	Lucas, Ian C.
Glindon, Mary	MacNeil, Angus Brendan
Godsiff, Mr Roger	Madders, Justin

Mahmood, Mr Khalid  
 Mahmood, Shabana  
 Malhotra, Seema  
 Mann, John  
 Marsden, Gordon  
 Martin, Sandy  
 Maskell, Rachael  
 Matheson, Christian  
 Mc Nally, John  
 McCabe, Steve  
 McCarthy, Kerry  
 McDonagh, Siobhain  
 McDonald, Andy  
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm  
 McDonald, Stuart C.  
 McDonnell, rh John  
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat  
 McGinn, Conor  
 McInnes, Liz  
 McKinnell, Catherine  
 McMahan, Jim  
 McMorrin, Anna  
 Mearns, Ian  
 Miliband, rh Edward  
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew  
 Monaghan, Carol  
 Moran, Layla  
 Morden, Jessica  
 Morgan, rh Nicky  
 Morgan, Stephen  
 Morris, Grahame  
 Murray, Ian  
 Nandy, Lisa  
 Neill, Robert  
 Newlands, Gavin  
 Norris, Alex  
 O'Hara, Brendan  
 Onn, Melanie  
 Onwurah, Chi  
 Osamor, Kate  
 Owen, Albert  
 Peacock, Stephanie  
 Pearce, Teresa  
 Pennycook, Matthew  
 Perkins, Toby  
 Phillips, Jess  
 Phillipson, Bridget  
 Pidcock, Laura  
 Platt, Jo  
 Pollard, Luke  
 Pound, Stephen  
 Powell, Lucy  
 Qureshi, Yasmin  
 Rashid, Faisal  
 Rayner, Angela  
 Reed, Mr Steve  
 Rees, Christina  
 Reeves, Ellie  
 Reeves, Rachel  
 Reynolds, Emma  
 Reynolds, Jonathan  
 Rimmer, Ms Marie  
 Rodda, Matt  
 Rowley, Danielle

Ruane, Chris  
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd  
 Ryan, rh Joan  
 Sandbach, Antoinette  
 Saville Roberts, Liz  
 Sharma, Mr Virendra  
 Sheerman, Mr Barry  
 Sheppard, Tommy  
 Sherriff, Paula  
 Shuker, Mr Gavin  
 Slaughter, Andy  
 Smeeth, Ruth  
 Smith, Angela  
 Smith, Cat  
 Smith, Eleanor  
 Smith, Jeff  
 Smith, Laura  
 Smith, Nick  
 Smith, Owen  
 Smyth, Karin  
 Snell, Gareth  
 Sobel, Alex  
 Soubry, rh Anna  
 Starmer, rh Keir  
 Stephens, Chris  
 Stevens, Jo  
 Stone, Jamie  
 Streeting, Wes  
 Sweeney, Mr Paul  
 Swinson, Jo  
 Tami, rh Mark  
 Thewliss, Alison  
 Thomas, Gareth  
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick  
 Thornberry, rh Emily  
 Timms, rh Stephen  
 Trickett, Jon  
 Turley, Anna  
 Turner, Karl  
 Twigg, Derek  
 Twigg, Stephen  
 Twist, Liz  
 Umunna, Chuka  
 Vaizey, rh Mr Edward  
 Vaz, Valerie  
 Walker, Thelma  
 Watson, Tom  
 West, Catherine  
 Western, Matt  
 Whitehead, Dr Alan  
 Whitfield, Martin  
 Whitford, Dr Philippa  
 Williams, Hywel  
 Williams, Dr Paul  
 Williamson, Chris  
 Wilson, Phil  
 Wishart, Pete  
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah  
 Yasin, Mohammad  
 Zeichner, Daniel

**Tellers for the Ayes:**  
 Alison McGovern and  
 Guto Bebb

#### NOES

Adams, Nigel  
 Afolami, Bim  
 Afriyie, Adam  
 Aldous, Peter  
 Allan, Lucy

Amess, Sir David  
 Andrew, Stuart  
 Argar, Edward  
 Atkins, Victoria  
 Bacon, Mr Richard

Badenoch, Mrs Kemi  
 Baldwin, Harriett  
 Barclay, rh Stephen  
 Baron, Mr John  
 Barron, rh Sir Kevin  
 Bellingham, Sir Henry  
 Benyon, rh Richard  
 Beresford, Sir Paul  
 Berry, Jake  
 Blackman, Bob  
 Blunt, Crispin  
 Bone, Mr Peter  
 Bottomley, Sir Peter  
 Bowie, Andrew  
 Bradley, Ben  
 Bradley, rh Karen  
 Brady, Sir Graham  
 Braverman, Suella  
 Brereton, Jack  
 Bridgen, Andrew  
 Brine, Steve  
 Brokenshire, rh James  
 Bruce, Fiona  
 Buckland, Robert  
 Burghart, Alex  
 Burns, Conor  
 Burt, rh Alistair  
 Cairns, rh Alun  
 Campbell, Mr Gregory  
 Cartlidge, James  
 Cash, Sir William  
 Caulfield, Maria  
 Chalk, Alex  
 Chishti, Rehman  
 Choqe, Sir Christopher  
 Churchill, Jo  
 Clark, Colin  
 Clarke, Mr Simon  
 Cleverly, James  
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey  
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse  
 Collins, Damian  
 Costa, Alberto  
 Courts, Robert  
 Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey  
 Crabb, rh Stephen  
 Crouch, Tracey  
 Davies, Chris  
 Davies, David T. C.  
 Davies, Glyn  
 Davies, Mims  
 Davies, Philip  
 Davis, rh Mr David  
 Dinenage, Caroline  
 Docherty, Leo  
 Dodds, rh Nigel  
 Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.  
 Donelan, Michelle  
 Double, Steve  
 Dowden, Oliver  
 Doyle-Price, Jackie  
 Drax, Richard  
 Duddridge, James  
 Duguid, David  
 Duncan, rh Sir Alan  
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain  
 Dunne, rh Mr Philip  
 Ellis, Michael  
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias  
 Elphicke, Charlie  
 Eustice, George  
 Evans, Mr Nigel

Evennett, rh Sir David  
 Fabricant, Michael  
 Fallon, rh Sir Michael  
 Field, rh Frank  
 Field, rh Sir Mark  
 Ford, Vicky  
 Foster, Kevin  
 Francois, rh Mr Mark  
 Frazer, Lucy  
 Freer, Mike  
 Gale, rh Sir Roger  
 Garnier, Mark  
 Gauke, rh Mr David  
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat  
 Gibb, rh Nick  
 Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl  
 Girvan, Paul  
 Glen, John  
 Goldsmith, Zac  
 Goodwill, rh Mr Robert  
 Gove, rh Michael  
 Graham, Luke  
 Graham, Richard  
 Grant, Bill  
 Grant, Mrs Helen  
 Gray, James  
 Grayling, rh Chris  
 Green, Chris  
 Green, rh Damian  
 Hair, Kirstene  
 Halfon, rh Robert  
 Hammond, rh Mr Philip  
 Hammond, Stephen  
 Hancock, rh Matt  
 Hands, rh Greg  
 Harper, rh Mr Mark  
 Harrington, Richard  
 Harrison, Trudy  
 Hart, Simon  
 Hayes, rh Sir John  
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver  
 Heapey, James  
 Heaton-Harris, Chris  
 Heaton-Jones, Peter  
 Henderson, Gordon  
 Herbert, rh Nick  
 Hinds, rh Damian  
 Hoare, Simon  
 Hollingbery, George  
 Hollinrake, Kevin  
 Hollobone, Mr Philip  
 Holloway, Adam  
 Howell, John  
 Huddleston, Nigel  
 Hughes, Eddie  
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy  
 Hurd, rh Mr Nick  
 Jack, Mr Alistair  
 James, Margot  
 Javid, rh Sajid  
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil  
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard  
 Jenkyns, Andrea  
 Jenrick, Robert  
 Johnson, rh Boris  
 Johnson, Dr Caroline  
 Johnson, Gareth  
 Jones, Andrew  
 Jones, rh Mr David  
 Jones, Mr Marcus  
 Kawczynski, Daniel  
 Keegan, Gillian



Kennedy, Seema  
 Kerr, Stephen  
 Knight, rh Sir Greg  
 Knight, Julian  
 Kwarteng, Kwasi  
 Lamont, John  
 Lancaster, rh Mark  
 Latham, Mrs Pauline  
 Leadsom, rh Andrea  
 Lefroy, Jeremy  
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward  
 Lewer, Andrew  
 Lewis, rh Brandon  
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian  
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian  
 Lidington, rh Mr David  
 Little Pengelly, Emma  
 Lopez, Julia  
 Lopresti, Jack  
 Lord, Mr Jonathan  
 Loughton, Tim  
 Maclean, Rachel  
 Main, Mrs Anne  
 Mak, Alan  
 Malthouse, Kit  
 Mann, Scott  
 Masterton, Paul  
 May, rh Mrs Theresa  
 Maynard, Paul  
 McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick  
 McPartland, Stephen  
 McVey, rh Ms Esther  
 Menzies, Mark  
 Mercer, Johnny  
 Merriman, Huw  
 Metcalfe, Stephen  
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria  
 Mills, Nigel  
 Milton, rh Anne  
 Moore, Damien  
 Mordaunt, rh Penny  
 Morris, Anne Marie  
 Morris, David  
 Morris, James  
 Morton, Wendy  
 Mundell, rh David  
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll  
 Murrison, Dr Andrew  
 Newton, Sarah  
 Nokes, rh Caroline  
 Norman, Jesse  
 O'Brien, Neil  
 Offord, Dr Matthew  
 Opperman, Guy  
 Paisley, Ian  
 Parish, Neil  
 Patel, rh Priti  
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen

Pawsey, Mark  
 Penning, rh Sir Mike  
 Penrose, John  
 Percy, Andrew  
 Perry, rh Claire  
 Philp, Chris  
 Pincher, rh Christopher  
 Poulter, Dr Dan  
 Prentis, Victoria  
 Prisk, Mr Mark  
 Pritchard, Mark  
 Pursglove, Tom  
 Quin, Jeremy  
 Quince, Will  
 Raab, rh Dominic  
 Redwood, rh John  
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob  
 Robertson, Mr Laurence  
 Robinson, Gavin  
 Robinson, Mary  
 Rosindell, Andrew  
 Ross, Douglas  
 Rowley, Lee  
 Rudd, rh Amber  
 Rutley, David  
 Scully, Paul  
 Seely, Mr Bob  
 Selous, Andrew  
 Shannon, Jim  
 Shapps, rh Grant  
 Sharma, Alok  
 Shelbrooke, Alec  
 Simpson, David  
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith  
 Skidmore, Chris  
 Smith, Chloe  
 Smith, Henry  
 Smith, rh Julian  
 Smith, Royston  
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas  
 Spelman, rh Dame Caroline  
 Spencer, Mark  
 Stephenson, Andrew  
 Stevenson, John  
 Stewart, Bob  
 Stewart, Iain  
 Stewart, Rory  
 Streeter, Sir Gary  
 Stride, rh Mel  
 Stuart, Graham  
 Sturdy, Julian  
 Sunak, Rishi  
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond  
 Swire, rh Sir Hugo  
 Syms, Sir Robert  
 Thomas, Derek  
 Thomson, Ross  
 Throup, Maggie

Tolhurst, Kelly  
 Tomlinson, Justin  
 Tomlinson, Michael  
 Tracey, Craig  
 Tredinnick, David  
 Trevelyan, Anne-Marie  
 Truss, rh Elizabeth  
 Tugendhat, Tom  
 Vara, Mr Shailesh  
 Vickers, Martin  
 Villiers, rh Theresa  
 Walker, Mr Robin  
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben  
 Warburton, David  
 Warman, Matt

Watling, Giles  
 Whately, Helen  
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather  
 Whittaker, Craig  
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John  
 Wiggin, Bill  
 Williamson, rh Gavin  
 Wilson, rh Sammy  
 Wood, Mike  
 Wragg, Mr William  
 Wright, rh Jeremy  
 Zahawi, Nadhim

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
**Amanda Milling and**  
**Rebecca Harris**

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

*Main Question, as amended, put forthwith and agreed to.*

*Ordered,*

That the Order of 4 December (Business of the House (Section 13(1)(b) of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018)) be varied as follows:

1. Leave out paragraph (2) and insert:

“(2A) The House shall sit on Friday 11 January.

(2B) The allotted days shall be Tuesday 4 December, Wednesday 5 December, Thursday 6 December, Monday 10 December, Wednesday 9 January, Thursday 10 January, Friday 11 January, Monday 14 January and Tuesday 15 January.”

2. In paragraph (3):

a. after “this day” insert “and the fifth allotted day”, and

b. leave out “the Business of the House (Section 13(1)(b) of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018) motion” and insert “a Business of the House (Section 13(1)(b) of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018) motion”.

3. In paragraph (4) leave out “and fourth” and insert “fourth, sixth and eighth”.

4. In paragraph (6) leave out “up to six amendments” and insert “any number of amendments”.

5. Leave out paragraph (7) and insert:

“(7) On the final allotted day, the Speaker shall put the questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the European Union withdrawal motion at 7.00pm; and such questions shall include the questions on any amendments selected by the Speaker in accordance with the provisions of paragraph 6 of this Order which may then be moved.”

6. After paragraph (9) insert:

“(9A) Notwithstanding the practice of this House, a Member may be called to speak twice to the Question on the European Union withdrawal motion without the leave of the House.”

7. In the event of the motion under Section 13(1)(b) being negatived or amended so as to be negatived, a Minister of the Crown shall table within three sitting days a motion under Section 13, considering the process of exiting the European Union under Article 50.

## European Union (Withdrawal) Act

[5TH ALLOTTED DAY]

*Debate resumed (Order, this day).*

*Question again proposed,*

That this House approves for the purposes of section 13(1)(b) of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, the negotiated withdrawal agreement laid before the House on Monday 26 November 2018 with the title ‘Agreement on the withdrawal of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland from the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community’ and the framework for the future relationship laid before the House on Monday 26 November 2018 with the title ‘Political Declaration setting out the framework for the future relationship between the European Union and the United Kingdom’.

2.27 pm

**The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Stephen Barclay):** Before Christmas, the Government presented to Parliament a comprehensive deal for the UK’s withdrawal from the EU. We continue to believe that this is the best deal to honour the referendum result and deliver certainty for our businesses, our citizens and our security. It was clear that there was much that Members agreed with, but we listened to the views of the House, which in particular expressed concerns in relation to the backstop. We therefore paused the debate to enable those concerns to be discussed with EU leaders.

**Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP):** In the intervening month from when the meaningful vote was delayed to the debate restarting just now, not very much has changed. On Monday, I asked the Secretary of State whether he had brought forward any plan B contingency work, and he ignored that question. In the light of the motion and the amendment that have just been passed, it is rather more contingent on the Government to have a plan B—and rather urgently. Will he explain to us now what work has been going on?

**Stephen Barclay:** We have a very good early illustration in this debate of the attitude of Scottish National party Members, because even before I get into my statement setting out what measures have been taken since the pause in the debate, they have already decided that they have reached their judgment on those measures.

**Neil Gray:** Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Stephen Barclay:** The hon. Gentleman has already had one go. Let me enlighten him on some of the developments that have happened since the pause in the debate.

Today, we have published a document entitled “UK Government commitments to Northern Ireland and its integral place in the United Kingdom”, which sets out the domestic reassurances we can provide. As the Prime Minister has said, these are one aspect of our strategy to reassure the House.

**Several hon. Members rose—**

**Stephen Barclay:** I will take interventions in a moment.

Another aspect of our strategy is our commitment to work in a more targeted way and more closely with Parliament in the next phase of negotiations. I will

return to that later. I reassure colleagues that, whatever the outcome of this debate, we will respond rapidly, recognising that we must provide Parliament with as much security as possible.

**Frank Field (Birkenhead) (Ind):** Amendment (n) deals with what further information the Government might put before the House to ensure that, should we need to use the backstop, this House can decide alone to leave it, without Europe deciding it with us. I had a quick word with the Attorney General, because the amendment involves him. It states that he should report to the House should the Government say that they have new arrangements whereby sovereignty resides in this House in respect of whether we should leave the backstop. Might the Government accept that amendment, please?

**Stephen Barclay:** The right hon. Gentleman raises an important question: what will the role of this House be in the event that the backstop has to be triggered? As he knows, there are safeguards that will mitigate the need for the backstop. It is in neither side’s interest to have the backstop, not least because it breaks the four freedoms that the EU has always rigorously sought. I will come on in my speech to some of the safeguards that apply.

**Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab):** The Secretary of State says that he was listening to the debate, which is why he paused it and came back with answers on the backstop. If he did listen to the debate, he will know that concerns relating to importing, manufacturing and security were mentioned as many times as, if not more than, the backstop. What reassurances and changes has he delivered on those things?

**Stephen Barclay:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that there are concerns about issues such as security. That is the very essence of why we need the deal. It will provide confidence on issues such as security and it will secure the implementation period so that things such as security measures will remain in place.

It was clear in the debate before Christmas that there were many views in the House about what trade deal we should enter into with the EU. The possible trade deals included no deal, no deal plus, Norway, Norway plus, Canada, Canada plus, Norway for now and Norway forever. There is a whole spectrum of deals that different Members cling to, but the reality is that whatever deal is to be put in place, it requires the winding down of our 45-year relationship with the European Union. Therefore, whatever deal is put in place requires a withdrawal agreement, and that withdrawal agreement requires a backstop.

**Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con):** The Secretary of State made a comment about working more closely with Parliament. I ask him to reflect on the fact that this place is grossly out of touch with the public on the fundamental issue of whether we are a member of the European Union. This House is not representative of the people. The Executive are a legitimate branch of government, so can we be assured that in whatever way they increasingly work with Parliament, the Executive will not give up their responsibility to implement the will of the people, which is a much greater body of sovereignty than this place?

**Stephen Barclay:** I think it is fair to say that there is a range of views in this House, and that those views are held sincerely by Members of Parliament. As I just alluded to, those views cover a vast range of different deals. I think the point of substance my hon. Friend is referring to is that the clear majority of the House voted to give the public the decision on whether we stayed in or left the European Union, and indeed the majority of the House voted to trigger article 50. It is therefore incumbent on Members of the House not simply to say what they are against, but to be clear what they are for.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Stephen Barclay:** I will make a little more progress, then I will happily take further interventions.

The withdrawal agreement addresses many of the key issues that Members, including Opposition Members, have spoken about. For example, it protects citizens' rights: it protects the 3 million EU citizens in the UK and the 1 million UK citizens in the EU. It provides a financial settlement that honours our legal obligations. Not to do so, as Opposition Members have often pointed out, would undermine our international position. It guarantees an implementation period that means that businesses will have one change to make as we enter a new trade deal, as opposed to two. Most importantly—this is an issue on which the Opposition rightly have a proud record, because they played a key part in the peace process in Northern Ireland—the withdrawal agreement enables us to preserve that hard-won peace and ensure that the commitments that were made in the Belfast agreement are honoured.

**Sammy Wilson** (East Antrim) (DUP): Does the Secretary of State realise that the withdrawal agreement and especially the backstop arrangement, which would forcibly remove Northern Ireland from the rest of the United Kingdom because laws would be made in Brussels rather than in Westminster and the Northern Ireland economy would be cut off from trade deals that the United Kingdom entered into with the rest of the world, have put in jeopardy the fine balance in the Belfast agreement? That is not helped by the Secretary of State's reported comments to the Cabinet yesterday that a refusal to vote for the withdrawal agreement would be likely to lead to a referendum on a united Ireland.

**Stephen Barclay:** I recognise the genuine concerns the right hon. Gentleman has about the backstop. I will come on to address some of those concerns, although I readily concede that I do not expect to address all of them with the areas of movement I cover today.

This is about assessing the balance of risk. The backstop does not cover 80% of our economy, as the services economy is outside it. Many in the business community in Northern Ireland see huge benefits in the certainty that is offered through the withdrawal agreement. Indeed, it is not our intention to enter into the backstop, not least because many businesses in Northern Ireland will have access to both the EU and UK markets. That is one of the attractions, and it is actually one of the reasons why Labour's sister parties in the north of Ireland—the Social Democratic and Labour party—and

in the south actually support the withdrawal agreement, as well as because it will secure the commitments on peace, as I mentioned.

**Stewart Malcolm McDonald** (Glasgow South) (SNP): The Scottish Government have for quite some time made known a number of concerns they have about the agreement. Since December, when the UK Government cancelled the debate to go away and listen, what has changed in the agreement to make the Scottish Government support it?

**Stephen Barclay:** Again, I will come on to that. As we move from dealing with the winding-down arrangements to the trade negotiation—that will be the second phase of the negotiations, because leaving the European Union is not a single event but a process—there will be a significant opportunity to recognise the fact that Scotland voted differently, as did other parts of the United Kingdom, and to engage with Parliament, as the Prime Minister referred to in her interview on “The Andrew Marr Show” at the weekend. We will be looking to work with Parliament in different ways, and particularly in a targeted way with the Select Committees, and to work more closely with the devolved Administrations, because there are different interests. The trade negotiation phase will allow us to explore that.

I think that “show not tell” is important in politics. My very first meeting in this role—I prioritised this—was with the lead Ministers in the Scottish and Welsh Governments to discuss their concerns, so that we could move from having regular meetings to making them more effective and more targeted.

We know that there is no future trade agreement and no implementation period without a withdrawal agreement, as that agreement contains the guarantee on citizens' rights, the financial settlement and the backstop, but let us just look at the Opposition's position. The Leader of the Opposition rejects that on the basis that he can first trigger a general election and then negotiate a new deal that secures things the EU has consistently ruled out, such as a third party having a say over its trade policy. He is then going to secure that new deal and pass the legislation to enact it, and he is going to do all of that before 29 March. So we are going to have a general election, a new trade agreement—even though the EU itself ruled that out and says this is the only deal on offer, he is going to uniquely secure a new deal—and he is going to pass the legislation to ratify that, all within the next 78 days. Yet Labour's sister parties actually support the withdrawal agreement, not least to recognise one of the proudest achievements of the Labour party, the peace process.

**Joseph Johnson** (Orpington) (Con): I obviously agree with the Minister's point about the fantasy policies of the Labour party, but I am afraid the Government themselves are indulging in fantasies. Is it not time that the Government set out a realistic basis for this debate? As the former permanent secretary to the Treasury, Sir Nick Macpherson, said the other day, there is no chance at all of us concluding a trade deal with the EU by 2020 and very little chance of doing so by 2022. A far more realistic prospect is that we might do so in the mid-2020s. Can we not conduct this debate on the basis of reality, rather than continued fantasy?



**Stephen Barclay:** I pay heed to my hon. Friend, because he is one of the most serious thinkers in our party and I know he engages very seriously on these issues. Of course, the former permanent secretary to the Treasury is also someone we all listen to intently. The point is that there are a number of things that are different in this instance. First, on trade deals, a significant amount of time is often taken up by the first phase of understanding the regulatory positions of both sides. Well, after 45 years of being part of the European Union that regulatory understanding is already there. Secondly, there is a difference because often there are six-week time lags in trade rounds. If people are flying back from Canada or the US, the physical geographical issues can constitute a delay. Clearly, our geographical relationship with Europe will allow us to inject much more pace into those trade rounds and accelerate them. Thirdly, the fact is that we have a political declaration that sets a framework for those trade discussions to take place.

Fourthly, there is also the issue of the incentives that the UK offers—I was going to come on to this point—including the position on security, which is obviously of interest to many member states in Europe, and the fact that the backstop is uncomfortable for the EU. On day one of the backstop fishing rights are lost, which is why President Macron may not be keen on entering into the backstop. There is also the fact that the backstop breaks the four freedoms, which have always been safely guarded by the European Union. The backstop is not a desirable place for the Europeans to enter, which is why there is an incentive for them to get momentum into the trade agreements.

**John Redwood** (Wokingham) (Con) *rose*—

**Stephen Barclay:** I will of course give way. May I also take this opportunity to congratulate my right hon. Friend on his recent honour?

**John Redwood:** I thank the Secretary of State. Will he now, as a matter of good contingency planning, urgently publish our schedule of tariffs for trading as an independent country? Can they please be lower tariffs than the EU schedule, and will there be zero tariffs for all imported manufactured components?

**Stephen Barclay:** My right hon. Friend will know, because he has often spoken in warm and glowing terms about trading on a no-deal WTO basis, that tariffs are just one aspect of our relationships, particularly given the UK economy's interest in services. Issues such as data adequacy are actually much more significant to our economy. The political debate often focuses on tariffs, but as a service economy issues such as data are much more serious to us. The WTO, which my right hon. Friend often advocates, actually does not address such issues. That is one reason why the WTO is not the land of milk and honey that some pretend.

**Chuka Umunna** (Streatham) (Lab): The problems with the withdrawal agreement extend far beyond the backstop. The Secretary of State talks about services. The fact is that the withdrawal agreement will substantially not help services in this country, which make up approximately 80% of our economy. He talks about certainty. At the end of the day, can he not agree that

this political declaration is a declaration of aspiration? We have absolutely no idea where we will be at the end of the trade negotiations, which EU officials will have told him will take at least three to four years.

**Stephen Barclay:** The hon. Gentleman has not been able to convince his own Front Benchers. Senior Opposition Front Benchers, such as the shadow Business Secretary, have spoken of the huge damage there would be to our democracy if we did what he advocates, which is to end the uncertainty by calling a second referendum. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] We hear the cheers from the Labour Benches. The policy in the manifesto on which Labour Members were elected was to honour the referendum, yet they cheer. It is on page 24 of the Labour manifesto on which the hon. Gentleman stood.

**Alex Chalk** (Cheltenham) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that there is a fundamental fallacy at the heart of the Opposition's position? On the one hand they say that there is zero appetite on behalf of the European Union to renegotiate the Government's deal, yet they claim there is somehow a huge appetite to negotiate another deal as yet unspecified. The reality is that unless they vote for this deal they will become the handmaiden of hard Brexit.

**Stephen Barclay:** I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. He alludes to the 78-day plan being put forward by the Opposition, which the EU has made clear is not credible, their sister parties have made clear is not desirable, and which I suspect many on their own Back Benches recognise is not doable. Yet they persist with it.

**Mr Shailesh Vara** (North West Cambridgeshire) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**Stephen Barclay:** I will make some progress and come back to my fellow Cambridge colleague very shortly.

The more material issue raised in the House on the backstop related to whether it damages the European Union or would be used in trade negotiations. It is for that reason that we have published the paper on Northern Ireland in respect of that. I recognise that that alone will not be sufficient for all the concerns colleagues may have, but I think it is a welcome step forward.

In the event that a subsequent agreement that meets the objectives of the backstop will not be ready by the end of 2020, we will face a choice of whether to seek to extend the implementation period or to bring the backstop into effect. We will provide in law for a mandatory process of consultation with the Northern Ireland Assembly in that scenario. Before any decision is taken on whether to seek to extend the implementation period, the Assembly would be given an opportunity, ahead of any parliamentary scrutiny, to express its view. Those views would then be brought before Parliament prior to a vote at Westminster. This procedure places a clear obligation on the UK Government, guaranteeing a strong voice for Northern Ireland. We will consult the parties in Northern Ireland on the details of those proposals and how best to provide for them.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Stephen Barclay:** I will just make progress on this section and then I will happily take further interventions.

Secondly, the protocol provides for alignment in Northern Ireland with a small fraction of EU single market rules. Where there is a proposal for a new EU law which is within the scope of the backstop but concerns a new area of regulation, that addition needs the consent of the United Kingdom. The EU cannot mandate the UK to accept that such a regulation must apply in Northern Ireland. We recognise that accepting new regulations for Northern Ireland under the backstop would be significant. Therefore, we plan to legislate in domestic law to ensure that a UK Minister will be required to seek the agreement of the Northern Ireland Assembly before reaching any agreement in the UK-EU joint committee to add additional rules to the scope of the protocol.

**Mr Vara:** With reference to the possibility of trading on WTO rules, does my right hon. Friend agree with what was said this morning on the “Today” programme by the president of the Port of Calais, Jean-Marc Puisseuseau:

“The trucks will be passing as they are doing today...there will not be a queue in Dover because there will not be control, so where is the problem?”

Does my right hon. Friend agree that rather than scaremongering from the comfort of these green Benches, we should take note of the person who is actually in charge of the Port of Calais and who knows what he is talking about?

**Stephen Barclay:** My hon. Friend raises an important point. Of course those representing a port will want to talk up the benefits of that port. The issue will be what legal obligations apply, not just what commercially they would want to do. I think he was talking more in terms of what flows into the UK than necessarily what is flowing back into France. In my remarks in response to my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (John Redwood), I referred to the fact that we have a political debate that tends to focus very heavily on goods, yet we have an economy that is predicated on services. On issues such as data and professional qualifications, there are many other issues that would not be addressed in a WTO scenario. That is the issue. Many Members are raising various different deals to which they feel most closely aligned, but the issue is that those deals would all require a withdrawal agreement and they would all need to address, as the EU has made clear, issues such as citizens, the financial settlement and a backstop, which is needed as a safeguard. It is not enough for the House to say what it is against; we have to say what is the deal, with a withdrawal agreement and a backstop, that we in this House can unite behind.

**Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP):** Clearly, the whole point of the backstop is to avoid a hard border between Ireland and Northern Ireland, so will the Secretary of State outline the Government’s timeframe for the invention, trial and deployment of the new technology needed for an invisible border with absolutely no infrastructure?

**Stephen Barclay:** The hon. Gentleman will know that the political declaration reflected the Prime Minister’s negotiation success—this point has been raised by a number of my hon. Friends—in terms of using technology to mitigate the issue of a hard border. In the interim,

the issue is whether we can do that to the timescale required to avoid a backstop. The political declaration allows us to explore that, but this is about having insurance to protect the very peace that so many on the Opposition Benches worked for and quite rightly should take pride in.

**Lady Hermon (North Down) (Ind):** I strongly support the Prime Minister’s Brexit deal, which also has considerable support in Northern Ireland among businesses, farmers’ organisations, community leaders and fishermen. I want the Secretary of State to take a few moments to explain to this House the very serious consequences that Northern Ireland could face in the event of the UK coming out of the EU on 29 March this year—it is a very short time away—without a deal. Sinn Féin’s seven MPs, who do not take their seats in this House, are sitting back thinking that all their Christmases have come at once. Will the Secretary of State confirm that they will use a hard border to agitate for a border poll, which could undermine the constitutional status of Northern Ireland? I think that is the issue he may have raised in Cabinet this morning. Will he elaborate on that?

**Stephen Barclay:** I am very grateful to the hon. Lady, first for her support for the Prime Minister’s deal, and secondly for the way in which she engages with such seriousness with issues of substance in Northern Ireland. I am conscious that there are genuine concerns among other Members in Northern Ireland, and we are seeking to address that. She is right to draw the House’s attention to the level of uncertainty that would flow from there not being a deal in place. The Prime Minister’s deal allows us to guarantee the hard-won progress of the peace process and, as the hon. Lady rightly says, many businesses and farming groups in Northern Ireland are very supportive of the deal.

**Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab) *rose*—**

**Stephen Barclay:** I will just make a little progress, and then I will give way to the hon. Gentleman.

On the backstop, some have asked whether the terms of the withdrawal agreement raise questions for the Union, but Members also need to consider the consequences to the Union of inaction. As the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) has said, if there is no deal, that in itself would pose a risk to the Union, and not just in Northern Ireland, but, as a number of my hon. Friends will know, in Scotland, because SNP Members will seek to exploit a no-deal situation in order to have a further independence referendum. Similarly, inaction that results in a second European referendum would carry risk for the Union, because SNP Members would say, “Well, if we can have a second European referendum so quickly after the first one, we can have a second referendum on independence.” I accept that Members across the House have concerns about the terms of the withdrawal agreement and the backstop—we are trying to mitigate those—but this is not a purity test. This is about balancing those risks with the risk to the Union of inaction and a second referendum being exploited by Opposition Members.

**Chris Bryant:** I hope that the Secretary of State understands that the issue for some Opposition Members is that there is no legal certainty in the next stage.

[Chris Bryant]

For instance, the Home Secretary has repeatedly said that we are going to have the best security arrangements that any third country has ever had with the European Union, but that does not mean anything. It does not mean that we will be in the European arrest warrant or that we will be able to secure proper extradition of paedophiles, murderers and terrorists from other countries to this country—or the other way around—to face justice. That is why some of us think that the Government are completely selling us a pup here. The evidence of the fact that nothing has changed since they pulled the debate is that we have exactly the same motion today and exactly the same deal—nothing has changed.

**Stephen Barclay:** I am in the process of setting out what has changed, and as I go through my speech, I hope I will have an opportunity to do so. The point is that this is a process, not a single event. The framework signals areas related to the trade negotiation, as I touched on in my remarks to my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Joseph Johnson).

Several hon. Members *rose*—

**Stephen Barclay:** I will just make some progress, and then I will happily take further interventions.

On the backstop, let me address colleagues' concerns about being trapped, which was raised in a previous debate. The Government are not shying away from the fact that the backstop is an uncomfortable situation for the United Kingdom, but it is also an uncomfortable situation for the EU, in terms of the break in the four freedoms and the fact that we have a mutual interest in avoiding entering into it.

Indeed, since the previous debate, progress was made in the December Council on the confirmation of its commitment to use best endeavours to negotiate and conclude a subsequent agreement. Indeed, the EU27 gave me a new assurance in relation to the future partnership with the UK, by stating that the EU

“stands ready to embark on preparations immediately after signature of the Withdrawal Agreement to ensure that negotiations can start as soon as possible after the UK's withdrawal.”

The hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) is busy checking his phone, but that relates to his point. Both sides intend to make early progress on the issues he raised.

**Angus Brendan MacNeil** (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): The right hon. Gentleman talked about the risks to the 96-year-old United Kingdom. I see this as an opportunity for independence, as underlined by the fact that this Government have shown more respect to, and have engaged more with, the Government of Ireland than they have to and with the Government of Scotland. That shows that independence gives you power, a voice and respect—something that the UK does not show the Scottish Government but that it does show in spades to the Government of Ireland, an independent country. The Celts who are independent are in a far better situation than the ones who are stuck with Westminster.

**Stephen Barclay:** There is a legitimate point as to how we engage with the House as a whole—with Members on both sides—as we move into the next phase. I have already touched on my desire, and the Prime Minister's

commitment, to look at how we do that with the devolved Administrations in a more targeted way. If we look at the first phase, we will see that a huge amount of hours have been spent on engagement. The Prime Minister has spent a huge number of hours at this Dispatch Box. There are opportunities for us to work in a much more targeted way, to listen to Members' concerns about issues such as citizens' rights and employment, and to look at how, through the Select Committees in particular, we can work in a much more targeted way. I think that the next phase lends itself to that approach. I gently say to the hon. Gentleman, however, that that also requires a dialogue both ways. If Members are going to jump in, before we have even responded, with a judgment on the withdrawal agreement or on measures that have been taken, that suggests a lack of engagement on their part to work in a collaborative way.

**Clive Efford** (Eltham) (Lab): I had my first consultation with the Prime Minister last night—two years into the process. The Secretary of State is talking about the backstop, but the DUP, which has a confidence and supply agreement with the Government, is vehemently opposed to what he is laying out. How did the Government get themselves into this position? The answer is that they did not consult. If they had taken on the view of this House earlier in the process, they could have negotiated with Europe something that could have been acceptable to this House. The Government have put themselves in this position.

**Stephen Barclay:** First, as we move into the next phase, there is an opportunity to operate in a much more targeted way with the House. Secondly, on the pause—[*Interruption.*] I am trying genuinely to answer the hon. Gentleman's question. The pause was about listening to the House's concerns about the backstop. Look at the comments yesterday by the Taoiseach, who said:

“We don't want to trap the UK into anything—we want to get on to the talks about the future relationship right away.”

That is because the Prime Minister has been listening to the House and relaying that. As we move from a phase that was about implementing the result into a phase that is about trade negotiations and how they align with the sectoral interests of both the different nation state economies and the Select Committees, there is scope for a different dialogue, and I am very keen to signal that.

**Nigel Huddleston** (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that by definition, if a backstop is to work, it has to be mutually uncomfortable, because there needs to be an incentive for both sides to get out of it? If not this backstop, then another backstop will be necessary. That, too, would have uncomfortable elements. We are not hearing any viable, practical alternatives.

**Stephen Barclay:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. This comes back to the point that businesses and our citizens want the certainty of a deal and want one set of changes in the implementation period. It is clear that that requires, after 45 years, a winding down of our relationship, and that involves a backstop, regardless of which deal—it is almost like cinema pick 'n' mix—is



on offer. It is almost like there is a deal with “plus” attached for every variant, but he is absolutely right that they all require a backstop.

**Emma Little Pengelly** (Belfast South) (DUP): Is it not a fact that the Republic of Ireland Government, this Government and the European Union have spent years rejecting all and any suggested alternatives to the backstop? What confidence should we have that the European Union, the Republic of Ireland or this Government will, two years after the commencement of this process, start seriously to consider alternatives? The reality is that the backstop will be the European Union’s and the Republic of Ireland’s Northern Ireland solution in a substantive deal.

**Stephen Barclay:** The answer is that we have already seen a signal of that in the political declaration—on the technology that a number of Members have highlighted, for example. There is a shared desire to avoid going into the backstop, for reasons I have already alluded to, such as the breaking of the four freedoms and the fact that under article 50, there is no legal underpinning for any permanence in the backstop.

Members also need to address the reality of this. Some say, “Well, we’ll pay for an implementation period.” That is another of the myriad deals that people suggest. The reality is that the legal underpinning of the implementation period is article 50, which requires it to be temporary, not permanent. We sought that clarification, and there was a reflection of that in the December Council. Of course I recognise that there are ongoing concerns, and I am very keen to work with colleagues on those.

**Sir Patrick McLoughlin** (Derbyshire Dales) (Con): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for the way he is taking us through the developments that have taken place. One of the things that a lot of us cannot understand is why, if everybody is so reluctant to go into the backstop—we are told the UK and the European Union are reluctant, and the DUP certainly is—it is not possible to get a legal undertaking about when it will end.

**Stephen Barclay:** My right hon. Friend brings me on perfectly to the next phase of my speech, which is about the role of Parliament, how we look at the decision on extending the implementation period, and how we avoid that. We will continue to work closely with Stormont, Holyrood and the Welsh Assembly, especially on the future frameworks, which will strengthen decision-making abilities and allow for decisions previously made at EU level to be made locally. Indeed, as I said, we want to learn from this and engage with Parliament in a much more targeted way. As the Prime Minister has made clear, the Government’s intention is to ensure a greater and more formal role for Parliament in the next stage of negotiations.

The withdrawal agreement provides that if the future relationship or alternative arrangements to supersede the backstop were not going to be ready by the end of 2020, either the Northern Ireland protocol would apply or the United Kingdom could seek to extend the implementation period for up to one or two years from the start of 2021, with any extension needing to be agreed by 1 July 2020. Should that situation arise, the

view of Parliament would be crucial. I am pleased to say that we will accept the amendment tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Sir Hugo Swire), which will cement Parliament’s role in that process by requiring a vote on whether to seek to extend the implementation period or bring the backstop into effect. On the point that my right hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire Dales (Sir Patrick McLoughlin) makes, by accepting that amendment, we give Parliament much more of a say on this issue of concern about the triggering of the backstop.

**Mr David Jones** (Clwyd West) (Con) *rose—*

**Suella Braverman** (Fareham) (Con) *rose—*

**Stephen Barclay:** I will happily take interventions from two former Ministers, both of whom served with distinction in the Department for Exiting the European Union.

**Mr David Jones:** Does my right hon. Friend not accept that extending the transitional period would merely amount to kicking the can down the road, and that to solve the problem of the Irish backstop, which it is generally agreed across the House is the most repugnant element of this withdrawal agreement, what is needed is a rewording of the withdrawal agreement? Has he agreed a rewording of that agreement?

**Stephen Barclay:** No, because, as I have said on a number of occasions, whichever deal we have will need the elements we have talked about in respect of the withdrawal agreement, including a backstop. Let us not forget what that is about. It is about asking, because of the unique circumstances of Northern Ireland—because it is the only part of the United Kingdom with a land border, and because of its history in terms of the peace process—how we provide a guarantee. It is like insurance; one does not want to have to call on it, but how do we ensure that there is a guarantee to address the concerns that the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) set out?

**Suella Braverman:** I applaud the Secretary of State and his excellent ministerial team in the Department for Exiting the European Union for all their efforts at this challenging time for the Government. In December, the Attorney General published his legal advice, which contains a statement on the backstop. He wrote that “despite statements in the Protocol that it is not intended to be permanent...in international law the Protocol would endure indefinitely until a superseding agreement took its place, in whole or in part”.

Is it the Secretary of State’s position that that legal position is unchanged, notwithstanding the reassurances that have been garnered to date, and does he agree that that means that in international law, we still risk being trapped indefinitely in the backstop?

**Stephen Barclay:** With characteristic aplomb, my hon. Friend alludes to one of the key issues in this debate: how one assesses the balance of risk. The Attorney General said in his statement to the House on 3 December, when these issues were explored in great detail, that how one assesses that balance ultimately is a political decision. In a way, the same point can be made about the concerns

[Stephen Barclay]

Members have expressed about the Union. There is a balance of risk in terms of concerns about the backstop, including the issue of that small section in the backstop where EU competence will continue. What is the risk of that? I have alluded to the safeguards. How does that risk elide with other risks, such as the risk of inaction?

The same is true of the assessment of my predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Esher and Walton (Dominic Raab), whom I hold in the highest regard. The difference there is an issue not of understanding—he understands these issues in great depth—but of how one assesses the balance of risk. The Attorney General dealt with that in some detail in his comments to the House.

**Jonathan Edwards** (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): I support the backstop. What concerns me is our future trade relations. We are essentially renegotiating access to our biggest market as a third-party country. Does that not leave the British state in an extremely vulnerable position?

**Stephen Barclay:** It is a statement of the legal position to say that to enter into a permanent arrangement, we need to be a third party. That reality is part of the difficulty of this situation. That is why we need an implementation period. We have in the political declaration a framework and in the business statements of the December Council a commitment. In “best endeavours”, we have something that gives legal force to ensuring momentum. It is a shared endeavour, too, because it is in neither side’s interests to trigger the backstop. There is, then, a mechanism, a framework and a process for addressing these concerns. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right, however, that there is further significant work to be done, and that will be the job of this House.

**David T. C. Davies** (Monmouth) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is somewhat inconsistent for Scottish National party and Plaid Cymru MPs to suggest that Britain would not be in a position to draw up a trade treaty with the rest of the EU as a third-party country, when both believe that an independent Wales and Scotland would be in a position to draw up trade agreements with the rest of the United Kingdom if, God forbid, they ever got independence?

**Stephen Barclay:** My hon. Friend is quite right to draw the House’s attention to the inconsistency that many of us are familiar with in the SNP’s position, particularly given that Scotland’s biggest market is the United Kingdom. It seems strange that it wants to sever itself from its largest market in that way—and strange also that it appears to want to remain within the remit of the European common fisheries policy.

**Vicky Ford** (Chelmsford) (Con): We are spending a lot of time talking about the risks of the backstop, but my constituents are concerned about the risks to their jobs, if they work in sectors not covered by the World Trade Organisation; to citizens’ rights, if they are married to an EU citizen; and to security. All these issues are covered by the implementation period and the breathing space of the withdrawal agreement. Does the Secretary

of State agree that it is important to focus on the benefits of the agreement in front of us, as well as the risks?

**Stephen Barclay:** My hon. Friend, as a former Member of the European Parliament, always speaks with great authority on these issues, and she is absolutely right. After 45 years, we are winding down a complex relationship with the EU, and certain things are incumbent on us in that process, including safeguarding citizens’ rights and honouring our legal obligations. As a Brexiteer who supported leaving on the basis that we should be trading with the rest of the world, I find it a strange idea that our first measure on leaving would be to walk away from our legal obligations. I do not think that other countries around the globe would find that persuasive.

I know that my hon. Friend is a huge champion of business in her constituency; it is important that we respond to the fact that businesses do not want a series of changes; they want one set of changes, and they want transitional arrangements in place to give them certainty as they go through that process. This is the challenge for the House. It is not enough for it simply to say what it is against, or to suggest that under WTO rules these risks could be mitigated.

**Liz Kendall** (Leicester West) (Lab): Is not the reality that the so-called implementation period will essentially keep us in the EU—in the single market and the customs union—so that we do not harm our economy and have more time to sort out what on earth we are going to do, and that the so-called backstop is about aligning Northern Ireland with the EU, so that there does not have to be a hard border and we do not threaten peace in Northern Ireland? The Secretary of State talks about the House having to make up its mind. Why is he not more honest? Why does he not admit that this is essentially about keeping us in until we can make up our minds what on earth we are going to do? If that is the case, what is the point?

**Stephen Barclay:** No, I do not accept that, not least because 80% of the economy is outside the backstop. The political declaration is quite clear that the country will get control of its trade policy. That is one of the inconsistencies in the position of the Leader of the Opposition, who seeks both to be in a customs union and to have an independent trade policy. The shadow Business Secretary is on record as saying that is not a tenable position—[*Interruption.*] Sorry, the shadow International Trade Secretary.

The point is—this goes to the heart of the hon. Lady’s question—that we need to honour the result of the referendum, which was the biggest democratic vote in our history, in a way that gives us control over immigration through a skills-based system, and over agriculture and fishing, and in a way that allows us to put an end to sending vast sums of money to the EU. These were the key issues on which the British people voted. I recognise that some, in particular the Father of the House, did not vote for a referendum, but the vast majority of the House did, and the vast majority voted to trigger article 50. We need to honour that, but accept that we leave either with a deal or—by default, if the House does not support the deal—with no deal. We cannot run away from that reality.

**Julian Knight** (Solihull) (Con): As the Secretary of State will be aware, there are reports in the newspapers that Jaguar Land Rover will imminently implement a transformation plan. What that says to me is very simple. Parts for an average Land Rover cross between the UK and the EU 37 times, so it says to me that we need the withdrawal agreement to maintain that just-in-time movement of parts in a way that protects jobs in my constituency and the wider supply chain. This is a matter of urgency. Hon. Members need to think about that when deciding how to vote on the withdrawal agreement.

**Stephen Barclay:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right both to draw the House's attention to the urgency of this issue—we have 78 days before we leave the EU—and in his sectoral understanding of the flow of goods and how that impacts the key industries in his constituency. That is why so many business groups support the deal. They want that certainty.

**Gareth Thomas** (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): Further to the question from the right hon. and learned Gentleman, the Father of the House, to the Prime Minister earlier, and in the context of the House having voted against the Government twice over its concerns about the possibility of no deal, does the Secretary of State accept that it would be the Government's responsibility, if they were defeated next Tuesday, to bring forward legislation to suspend article 50?

**Stephen Barclay:** The hon. Gentleman raises an important point that many hon. Members have raised, but it does not address the legal position. The position of the courts is that we cannot unilaterally extend article 50. That requires the consent of the other 27 member states, and we do not know what conditionality would be attached, if it were sought. In particular, the courts were clear that the only way would be to revoke on the basis of a permanent decision. Given that more than 80% of the electorate voted for one of the two main parties, and that both parties' manifestos backed the decision to leave—that commitment is on page 24 of the Labour manifesto—I feel it would be divisive for our country to proceed in that way.

**Mike Gapes** (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): As somebody who did not vote to trigger article 50, I would ask the Secretary of State to consider this very carefully: if he genuinely does not want a no deal, as many Cabinet members do not, when the Government are defeated next week, should they not come forward with a specific proposal—he has made clear the difficulties of extending the process—either for a people's vote, so that the public can choose between staying in the EU and the Government's proposals, or for revoking article 50, so that we can have a national consultation, as they did in Ireland on abortion, and get this right?

**Stephen Barclay:** I respect the principled position that the hon. Gentleman took in his vote on article 50, but if one recognises the majority opinion of the House, which is what he says we should do next week, it would be only consistent to recognise also that the majority decision of the House was to trigger article 50, and that set a timetable. For the sake of consistency, he needs to accept that. The consequence of triggering article 50 is

that we either leave with a deal—the EU has made it clear that the Prime Minister's deal is the only deal, so it is not logical for Labour to say it could negotiate another deal in the time remaining—

**Mike Gapes** *indicated assent.*

**Stephen Barclay:** The hon. Gentleman nods. I think many other Labour Members would agree. Members have to accept the risk of a no deal, therefore, and as a Government, we have to be responsible. We certainly do not want a no deal; I join him in not wanting that. Some Members are very relaxed about a no deal; I do not agree that we should be relaxed about it, because of issues such as data and qualifications, which I think they need to address.

**Rushanara Ali** (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab) *rose—*

**Stephen Barclay:** I will take one more intervention, and then I will wind up my speech.

**Rushanara Ali:** Yesterday, outside the House, the Secretary of State said that he was beginning to get used to being a punch bag in the House, so I shall try not to metaphorically punch him.

The Secretary of State has said that no deal would be irresponsible. In the light of the recent votes, I hope that he can rule it out, because it would be catastrophic. The Bank of England's analysis shows that, in a worst-case scenario, the economy would be 8% worse off and unemployment would be 6.5% higher, and the current deal—the Government's deal—would make our economy nearly 4% worse off. Neither of those are good prospects for our country. Can the Secretary of State at least keep an open mind about a public vote if all else fails?

**Stephen Barclay:** I respect the concern that the hon. Lady feels, but it is not in the power of an individual Minister to say that that will not happen, because the House has to decide what it is for; it is very good at saying what it is against. The reality is that having triggered article 50, we either leave with a deal or we do not. I do not think it is credible to say that we can negotiate another deal in 78 days, as Opposition Front Benchers have suggested. I think that the alternative would pose a risk to the peace process, which is a fine achievement that should be cherished, but it cannot be ruled out. That is why the deal on the table is the right deal, and one that we should support.

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Stephen Barclay:** I must draw my speech to a close.

With just 78 days before we leave the European Union, the House should now give citizens and businesses the certainty that they seek, and the way in which to do so is to back the deal that, after two years of hard-fought negotiation, the Prime Minister has secured. It is for that reason that I commend the deal to the House, and I hope that all Members, mindful of the risks of uncertainty that will otherwise flow, will respond by backing it.

3.21 pm

**Keir Starmer** (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): It is a pleasure finally to be able to resume this debate.



[Keir Starmer]

Thirty days ago, on 10 December, the Prime Minister told the House that the meaningful vote would be deferred. She did, of course, do so without consulting the House on the issue. The ground that she laid out on 10 December was that if the Government “went ahead and held the vote”,

which was due to take place the next day, “the deal would be rejected by a significant margin.”—[*Official Report*, 10 December 2018; Vol. 651, c. 23.]

That was her judgment call. She said that she would do everything possible “to secure further assurances”, particularly over the issue of the Northern Ireland backstop.

The Leader of the House went further, saying: “going back to the EU and seeking reassurances, in the form of legally binding reassurances” was “absolutely doing the right thing”.

The implication was that this was a pause to allow further assurances—legally binding reassurances, according to the Leader of the House. The International Trade Secretary, with his usual foresight, said:

“It is very difficult to support the deal if we don’t get changes to the backstop.

I am not even sure the Cabinet will agree for it to be put to the House of Commons.”

That was his assessment.

Those were senior members of the Cabinet, indicating to Parliament and to the country that the deal, the proposition before the House, needed to be changed if it were to be voted on and not defeated by a substantial majority. They were, of course, challenged. They were challenged on the basis that this was just a way of delaying and avoiding a humiliating defeat, and they were running down the clock. Now, 30 days on, those rebuttals ring hollow.

The Prime Minister is often mocked for saying that nothing has changed, but this time nothing has changed. The proposition before the House today is the same proposition as the one that the Prime Minister put before the House on 5 December, when she opened the initial debate. I have my own copies of these two documents, but the two copies that I have here were laid on the Table at the beginning of the debate. They are the proposition that is before the House, and, as everyone in the House knows, they are precisely the same two documents that were put before the House on 5 December. When we go through the Lobby next Tuesday, we will be voting for or against these two unchanged documents.

**Lady Hermon:** Given that the right hon. and learned Gentleman has just picked up the withdrawal deal, I am sure that, being the learned gentleman he is, he has read, on page 307, the guarantee and the protection for the Good Friday agreement—the Belfast agreement—and the consent principle. Twenty years ago, his party, the Labour party, was the architect—thank the Lord—of that agreement, which put an end to the appalling violence of more than 30 years in Northern Ireland, when 302 police officers lost their lives and thousands of innocent people lost theirs in the terrorist campaign. Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman explain to the House, and to the Irish diaspora in Labour constituencies, how it is that the Labour party is voting down a deal that guarantees the agreement?

**Keir Starmer:** Let me take that point head on, because it is very important. Our party—both parties—played an important part in the peace process, and I genuinely think that there is a consensus, or a near-consensus, across the House on the importance of that agreement. We have been very proud of upholding it. Even in the course of these debates over the last two years, every time it has come up there has been a reiteration of the principles. I myself worked in Northern Ireland for five years, with the Policing Board, implementing some of the recommendations of the Good Friday agreement, and I therefore have first-hand knowledge of how both communities see it, what the impact was before change, and what it is now. However, I do not think it fair to characterise anyone who says that these two documents are not the right deal for our country as undermining the Good Friday agreement. That simply means that there can be no criticism, no issue, no challenge to the Government, which cannot be right.

In addition, I have stood at this Dispatch Box and moved amendment after amendment whose objective was a customs union and a single market deal, which I genuinely believe constitute the only way of securing no hard border in Northern Ireland. On every occasion, the Government voted those amendments down. To say at this stage that we have tried to do nothing to protect the position is simply not right. [*Interruption.*] I will come to the issue of the need for a backstop—I will tackle that issue—but I wanted to deal with the intervention.

**Mr Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe) (Con):** I do not think that the right hon. and learned Gentleman has answered the key question asked by the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon). I cannot understand why the Labour party is joining in the criticisms of the Irish backstop. The right hon. and learned Gentleman has repeated his commitment to a permanently open border. He has also repeated—and I agree with him about this—that there can only be a permanently open border if there is a customs union and regulatory alignment. If they are to be permanent, that must be kept permanently.

What the critics on this side of the House are saying about the backstop agreement is “We are not allowed to cancel it unilaterally.” If they are given that power, it is no longer a permanently open border. With the greatest respect, it does smack of opportunism that the Labour party is joining opponents of the backstop with whom it has no agreement whatever politically. The answer is to have the same open border for the whole United Kingdom and for the United Kingdom to be in a single market and regulatory alignment, and that is not inconsistent with the referendum.

**Keir Starmer:** That suggests that the customs arrangements under the backstop are the same as customs arrangements that we have currently, but they are not. I have read the document in detail several times, and I know what the customs union that we are in looks like and I know that the one under the backstop is fundamentally different. It is fundamentally different from the amendments that we have been faithfully tabling for 12 or 18 months. It is therefore unfair to say that because it is called a “customs arrangement” or a “customs union” that it is all the same; it obviously is not. The arrangements for Northern Ireland are different from those for England, Wales and Scotland, and even the arrangements for England, Wales and Scotland are not the same as the customs union that we are in now.

Among the deficiencies is that we would not have any say over future trade agreements during any period in the backstop, which has not been built in because the Government are pretending that any period would not last long. I will address the point about having a say, but we would not be able to strike our own agreements and would take no advantages from trade agreements struck by the EU. That is a fundamental deficiency of being in the backstop. It is not right or fair to pretend that such issues do not exist, that we cannot seriously engage with them, or that the importance that the Labour party puts in the Good Friday agreement is somehow undermined. That just removes the ability to challenge. The withdrawal agreement is a serious document, and it is what the Government have put before us to analyse and vote on, so we are entitled to say that it is not good enough. However, that does not mean in the next breath that we do not stick by the commitments in the Good Friday agreement.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Keir Starmer:** I will make some progress and then take further interventions.

The withdrawal agreement is the same document that was before the House when the Prime Minister announced that she was postponing the vote. It is the proposition that she said she thought would be defeated by a significant margin. No changes have been made either to the 585-page, legally binding withdrawal agreement or to the incredibly vague political declaration. There is no new text for this House to consider.

Some of us expected the Prime Minister to make a statement on Monday to tell the House what had happened while we were in recess, to update us on any meetings or discussions that she may have had—we read about them in the press—and to say whether anything had changed. She did not come to make a statement. The Brexit Secretary handled an urgent question, the central thrust of which was about what progress had been made and what changes there had been. The Brexit Secretary defended his position with a smile, attacking the Opposition, as he always does, by asking, “What’s your proposition?” while ignoring the fact that we are voting on the withdrawal agreement, not on what anyone else is saying. He smiled, attacked the Opposition and swerved challenges, but he did not answer the question, and the reason why is that there has been no meaningful change.

**Stephen Doughty** (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

**Keir Starmer:** I will just make this point and then give way.

I was here for Prime Minister’s questions today, and I carefully noted what the Prime Minister said in answer to the first question from my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition. First, she said that the changes that she is now relying on are the results of the December European Council summit, at which the EU agreed that it would use “its best endeavours” to secure the future relationship as quickly as possible. What else could it say? Of course, we would hope that it would do that.

However, the EU also said at the same summit that the withdrawal agreement cannot be renegotiated, so that does not take us very far.

Secondly, the Prime Minister said that further clarifications might be “possible” by Tuesday, so we are in exactly the same position as we were on 10 December, with a hope for possible assurances—there may be something coming.

Thirdly, the Prime Minister referred to the paper on Northern Ireland published this morning, and the Brexit Secretary referred to it, too. Members may not have had the chance to read this 13-page document, but I have read it. I do not dismiss anything that marks a step towards ensuring that the concerns in Northern Ireland and across the whole United Kingdom are addressed, whatever they are, so I am not dismissing this document. However, on my reading—if I am wrong, I will correct this or be corrected—I think I am right in saying that the document does not contain any new commitments. It brings together the unilateral commitments made in other places at other times into one document. I have been going through the document as I have been in the Chamber, so if I am wrong, I will be challenged but, as far as I can see, it just builds on the unilateral commitments in paragraph 50 of the phase 1 joint report document from December 2017 and adds the commitments that the Prime Minister has made in Belfast and other places. I am not saying that those commitments are not important or are without significance. I do not dismiss them, but we need to see the document for what it is, which is a bringing together of existing commitments. The position has not changed between 10 December and today.

The fourth thing that has been relied upon as a change that the House needs to take into account is that it is now said that Parliament will have a role in July 2020 when we must choose whether to apply for an extension of the transition or to go on to the backstop. There are several points about that, one of which is that it does not change the options, and I will develop why I think that those options will have to be exercised. Arguably, it is the logic of the article 50 case in the Supreme Court, certainly if we go on to the backstop, because the whole argument in the Supreme Court was that if we change the rights of individuals in this country as a matter of international law then we have to have a vote in this House, so I am not sure that this is much of a gift or concession from the Government.

The other point is the practical reality, which we have seen today and yesterday: the idea that the Prime Minister or anybody else was going to get away with freezing Parliament out of that decision in July 2020 is misconceived. We were always going to have a say on that, because it is such an important position. So the proposition on the table is not altered. The Brexit Secretary did not answer substantively on Monday because the December summit does not really take us anywhere: further clarifications may be possible but they are still long awaited, the Northern Ireland paper is a bringing together of existing commitments that does not change anything, and Parliament was always going to find a way of having a say in July 2020 as to which option we take.

**Stephen Doughty** *rose*—

**Sir Oliver Letwin** (West Dorset) (Con) *rose*—

**Keir Starmer:** I promised earlier to take an intervention from my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty), so I will give way to him first.

**Stephen Doughty:** I concur with my right hon. and learned Friend that nothing has changed. Does he therefore agree that the Prime Minister's decision to delay was not only wrong, but irresponsible, because on every single day that has gone by during that time we have seen the Treasury spending more and more taxpayers' money to prepare for a no deal that it says it does not want, businesses cancelling investment plans, and jobs being put at risk? All of that is deeply irresponsible, particularly when nothing has changed.

**Keir Starmer:** I agree with that, because if the Prime Minister's own judgment is right that this deal as it was on 10 December is likely to go down by a significant margin, that brings into sharp focus the role of this House in debating and deciding what happens next, and the more time we have for that, the better. We have just been deprived of 30 days of that because we will not now get on to it, probably, until next week.

**Sir Oliver Letwin:** The right hon. and learned Gentleman has listed a series of things that have not changed. One thing that I note has not changed are the terms of his and the Leader of the Opposition's amendment in calling for

“a permanent UK-EU customs union”,

a perfectly clear phrase that we all understand completely, and a “strong single market deal”. I am one of those in this House who would like in some way or another at some point or another in the not too distant days to arrive at some cross-party agreement about something we could actually go forward with, and therefore I ask the right hon. and learned Gentleman to explain to the House what kind of “strong single market deal” would need to be delivered in order to get an agreement.

**Keir Starmer:** I can deal with that because, as Members know, I have been talking to the EU and the EU27 for quite a long time now, not to undermine the Government's position—it was actually facilitated by the first Brexit Secretary of State in some respects—but to explore what other options are possible. At present the customs union operates on the basis that the Council sets the mandate for the Commission, the Commission does the negotiating, and Parliament then has a role. So if we want a customs union that replicates the benefits of the current customs union and we want the UK to have a say in that we must find something that is similar to that, but obviously not the same as it, and the central question I have been addressing is whether the EU would be interested in a discussion about what that sort of working customs union would look like. *[Interruption.]* I actually had the discussion. *[Interruption.]* It is very easy for Members on the Treasury Bench to chunter, but I have been responsible and actually gone and had the conversation asking whether there is a basis for a discussion about a customs union that would work in that way. I have been very clear that if it ended up as something akin to the Turkey customs union—which works for Turkey—that really would not be good enough.

As for a single market deal, my own view is that there are advantages in what we call the Norway model but that there are also disadvantages in that, and therefore it must be possible—again, I have had discussions—to explore a close economic relationship that keeps alignment, with, of course, oversight and enforcement mechanisms to go with it, but which is not simply the EEA.

I say all that in some detail in order to reassure the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin) that when we talk about a close economic relationship, a customs union with a say, and a close single market deal, we are talking about concepts that I have surfaced only after I have had discussions with EU27 countries and the EU about their possibility. I am not going to stand here and pretend that that will be easy; rather, I am standing here saying that we have been pressing for at least 12 or 18 months to have that. One of the major problems—this is at the heart of the debate and the fractiousness about it—is that the Prime Minister and the Government have pushed Parliament away. They had a choice—

**The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Mr David Lidington) rose—**

**Keir Starmer:** I will give way in a moment, but I want to make this point because it is very important.

I campaigned to remain; I wanted to remain.

I agonised over whether we should trigger article 50, but I worked out that, having accepted the result of the referendum, it was not open to me to stop the Prime Minister starting the negotiations. What I wanted is for this House to have a proper role—by consensus, or at least by majority, if possible—in finding a way forward.

It was obvious that the sorts of arguments that are happening in the House, particularly among Conservative Members, if I may say so—I do not think that is controversial—would break out. It was obvious because for 30 years there has been a discussion, for want of a better word, in the Conservative party about not just the relationship with Europe but the vision for our country. That argument was always going to break out, and it was always going to divide Conservative Members. That is obvious, and it is not just an Opposition point. In those circumstances, a different Prime Minister might have said, “I can see what is going to happen down the line, and I need to bring Parliament into this.” That has been refused at every twist and turn.

Let us be honest that we are having a vote on Tuesday only because we fought to have it. I coined the phrase “meaningful vote”, and, working across parties, we got the amendment, which was resisted by the Government. They went through the Lobby to say no. We said, “You have to publish a plan,” and the only reason we got a plan was that we won an Opposition day motion—the Government were going to oppose that motion. We said that we wanted to know what the impact would be, and the Government said, “You can't.” We had to get it via a Humble Address. We have seen the Supreme Court and the idea of even voting on article 50 in the first place, and then the Attorney General's advice. The Government have persistently voted down every motion. The one thing I remember the first Brexit Secretary saying to me, over and again, on the article 50 Bill was that he wanted



a clean Bill: “I want a clean Bill, and I will make sure that every amendment is voted down.” That was his avowed aim.

**Mr Lidington:** I completely accept the right hon. and learned Gentleman’s central point, which is that there is space for completely honourable debate within and between political parties in this House about the outcome of the negotiations on the future permanent relationship between this country and the EU27, and the various options, from Norway to Canada and every variation in between, have their champions in this place. But from his conversations with the EU institutions and with members of the 27 Governments, surely he will have accepted that the essential and unavoidable gateway to any such destination of a final agreement has to be the withdrawal agreement, which covers citizens’ rights, the Irish border and the financial settlement, which is the key document that we are being asked to endorse and ratify. What is his objection to that document?

**Keir Starmer:** I accept that there has to be a withdrawal agreement, and I accept that it has to cover citizens’ rights and that there are payments. I have on more than one occasion stood here and said that the progress on citizens’ rights under the withdrawal agreement is a step in the right direction, although it does not go far enough—we have quibbled about that, but there will always be an argument about whether we have gone far enough.

I have also stood here and said that we will have to fulfil our financial obligations, for the very reason the Brexit Secretary said, which is that we will not get very far in trying to reach trade agreements, or any agreements, with anybody else on the international plane if, at the same time, we are walking away from the international agreements or obligations that we have.

That does not mean I do not have concerns about the withdrawal agreement, and about the backstop in particular. The backstop has become the central issue for two reasons: first, the lack of progress on the future relationship, and I will develop that point in just a moment; and, secondly, the avowed aim of some Conservative Members to diverge as far as possible from EU alignment. It is that fear that has driven the debate on the backstop, and it could have been avoided months ago.

**Sir Oliver Letwin:** I am doubly grateful to the right hon. and learned Gentleman for giving way again. It is helpful to address this point after the intervention of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office.

Can the right hon. and learned Gentleman take this one stage further? If there were a cross-party agreement on the terms of an EU-UK customs union of the kind he describes, and if there were some variant of a “strong single market deal”—whether Norwegian or otherwise—is he saying it is the position of the Labour party that it would then co-operate with Her Majesty’s Government to arrive at an agreement about how to reshape the political declaration in such a way as to enable the withdrawal agreement and the political declaration to go forward so that we can exit on 29 March?

**Keir Starmer:** There is the customs union point and the single market deal point, and there are other issues relating to rights and protections, whether they are workplace rights or environmental rights and so on.

Obviously, at some stage, if we are to leave other than without a deal, there has to be a consensus in this House for something. That is why the wasting of the past 30 days has been so regrettable, because that is where we need to get to. At no point have the Government reached out across the House at all, even after the snap election. I actually personally thought that at some stage somebody might give me a ring and ask what would be the main features that we could at least begin to discuss, or whether it was worth even having a discussion about them.

The second point gives meat to this. Time and again we have tabled amendments along the lines I have been talking about, and time and again the Government have just blindly whipped against them, without any regard to whether they were good, bad or indifferent; they were just Opposition amendments, so they were going down.

**Clive Efford:** We know from the author of article 50 that it was drafted with the intention that it should never be used, so 29 March is an arbitrary date. It is only now that the Government have started to reach out and indicate that they might be willing to discuss Brexit with other parties in this House in order to get consensus, but we have run out of time. Surely the Government now have to listen and consider the fact that we may have to suspend article 50, or even to seek its revocation.

**Keir Starmer:** I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. I do accuse the Government of running down the clock, and it is a serious allegation. The article 50 window is two years—it is very short. The Government started the two years by having a snap general election, and lost two or three months. They then went through to the end of the phase 1 agreement, but it was not until June last year that we even had a Chequers plan, so the two-year window has in effect been run down. There is a question of the extension of article 50, which may well be inevitable now, given the position that we are in, but of course we can only seek it, because the other 27 have to agree.

The other serious question with which I have been engaging is about the appetite of the EU, after the negotiations have gone the way they have, to start again and to fundamentally change what is on the table. I have to say, with regret, that I genuinely think that the way the Government have gone about the negotiations, particularly in respect of the red lines that the Prime Minister laid down in the first place, has undermined a lot of the good will that would otherwise have been there.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Keir Starmer:** I will give way once more and then I really am going to get on, because I have been giving way for around half an hour.

**Mr Kenneth Clarke:** This is my last intervention. To go back to the intervention by my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin), which was pertinent to the situation we are all in, he asked whether the right hon. and learned Gentleman was saying on behalf of the Labour party that, if there were a cross-party agreement on a form of customs union, sufficient regulatory alignment and so on, his party would join in that

[Mr Kenneth Clarke]

positively, with a view to reaching a solution and moving on to the serious negotiations. The right hon. and learned Gentleman has turned that question into an attack on the Government, and I agree with him. I share his criticism that the Government should have made serious overtures to the Opposition long, long ago; but as we are now so short of time and we are all in danger of going towards a no-deal exit, which only a small minority in the House positively wants, is it not time for him to answer the question from my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset? Is the Labour party available for discussions with a positive view to reaching a conclusion on a customs union and sufficient regulatory alignment to keep open borders?

**Keir Starmer:** I have been available for discussions for the whole time I have been in this post. I have spoken to Members on all Benches about amendments, some of which have had cross-party support. We are going to have to have a discussion—I think starting after Tuesday—about where we go next. We will all have to enter that in the right spirit, because I genuinely think that leaving with no deal would be catastrophic. I also genuinely think that we cannot do it on 29 March this year; it is simply not viable for so many practical reasons. We are going to have to look at what available options are realistically still on the table and what now are the merits of each of them. There are different options; we are just discussing one of them. There are other options that I know members in my own party feel very strongly about, such as a public vote. But we are going to have to sit down and consider credibly what are the options and how Parliament takes control of what happens next. We will enter that in the right spirit, but we will all have to acknowledge, I am afraid, that some of the options that may have been there a year or two ago are not there in the same shape and form as they would have been at the time of the manifestos.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Keir Starmer:** No, I really am going to make some progress now because I have been giving in—hopefully, I have been giving way, though I may have been giving in as well!

I have made the point about this being the same proposition on the table, but let me just go to the heart of the problem of why we are so stuck on this question of the backstop on which I have been challenged. At the heart of the problem is the future relationship document. The truth is that there has been barely any progress on the future relationship. It is a flimsy 26-page document. In truth, it is an options paper—a 26-page options paper—which could and should have been written two years ago. Paragraph 28—I know that everyone has marked it up, but it is worth having another look at—covers the implications for checks and controls. This is the future relationship. It says:

“The Parties envisage that the extent of the United Kingdom’s commitments on customs and regulatory cooperation, including with regard to alignment of rules, would be taken into account in the application of related checks and controls, considering this as a factor in reducing risk.”

It then goes on to say that there is a “spectrum of different outcomes”. What it is saying is that we do not

know yet what the commitments on customs and co-operation will be. We do not know what the alignment will be. If it is close it might lead to one result; if it is not close it might lead to another result—a spectrum of different outcomes.

The document has 26 pages, at the heart of which is a “spectrum of different outcomes”. We keep calling it a deal, but this is not a deal; it is an options paper. It is an options paper that has been written by others. We have all mocked up an options paper, as have various academics. Let me contrast this with what the previous Brexit Secretary, the right hon. Member for Esher and Walton (Dominic Raab), said. We were challenging him over the summer about the future relationship and trying to get an assurance from him that we would have a precise and detailed document that we could vote on so we know where we are going. He said this:

“What is important is that it is clear and specific enough”—  
the future relationship document—

“that we are not talking about options for negotiations”—  
that is what it would not be—

“but we are clear on the choice of model”—

so it is a clear model that he said we would have—

“and therefore that it reads as a direction for the UK and the EU to get on with it—that we are really implementing heads of terms for an agreement.”

This is miles away from that. This is not a deal, and that is the cause of the problem.

The cause of the problem is this: whatever the Secretary of State says, nobody but nobody who is serious about this thinks for one moment that this document will turn into the future relationship and come into force on 1 January 2021. Nobody credible thinks that. It is a complete myth. It is precisely the same as the myth that this would all have been negotiated by now, which is why there is such anxiety about the backstop. The backstop should never have been the driving force—the focus. We should have been so far advanced in this part of the negotiation that the backstop would have been a bit of a non-issue.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Keir Starmer:** I just want to make this point. We need to understand why this document is so flimsy. It is not just an accident. It is not just that people were not working hard. It is not just that the civil servants, who have worked really hard in all this, were not doing their job. It is for two primary reasons.

The first was that the Prime Minister laid down her red lines in autumn 2016 without consulting the House and, I think, without consulting the Cabinet. She said that those red lines were: outside the customs union, outside the single market and no role for the European Court of Justice. She added the suggestion that

“if you believe you’re a citizen of the world, you’re a citizen of nowhere.”

That was an interpretation of the referendum—we can argue whether it was a good or bad one—by a small team of, I think, three of four people. That was not even the interpretation of the Cabinet, and certainly not of this House. We only have 26 pages on the future relationship, because that got us off to the worst possible start to the negotiations. Those were political

choices, not necessities. They were the Prime Minister's choices, which set her on a path, and this is where it ended.

Add to that the fact that we only got the Chequers proposal in June last year. Anybody who visited Brussels between the triggering of article 50 and June 2018 will have heard the same complaint that I heard: "We don't know what the UK is actually asking for, and therefore we can't really advance the negotiations." When we first got the Chequers proposal in June last year, those in Brussels acknowledged that at least there was now a plan on the table. Of course, Chequers did not unlock the problem, because it was a plan that led immediately to Cabinet resignations, that MPs were quick to say they opposed and would not agree to in any circumstances, and that the EU rejected. That is why there are only 26 pages, which expose the thinness of the proposals.

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Keir Starmer:** I will just crack on.

What we see from this document is that the envisaged future relationship will not deliver frictionless trade; it does not aspire to any more. There is no plan for a permanent customs union and no certainty for financial services. In fact, there is almost nothing for financial services. On workplace rights and environmental protections, there is nothing to ensure that standards do not fall behind over time. No wonder the general secretary of the TUC said:

"This is a bad deal for working people: bad for jobs and bad for rights."

It also places us outside a whole raft of common EU programmes and agencies. Again, much of that flows directly from the Prime Minister's insistence that there should be no role whatever for the European Court. She put that red line down, and once she had done so, any meaningful participation in those bodies became very difficult.

For five years, I was the representative of the UK in Eurojust, which, as the House will know, plays an important part in the investigation and prosecution of very serious offences across Europe, as do other agencies. In order to have the full participation that makes sense, we have to accept the oversight and enforcement mechanisms that go with it, but the red line made it impossible and led to such a thin document as this.

**Alberto Costa** (South Leicestershire) (Con): I have heard colleagues ask the right hon. and learned Gentleman repeatedly about the Labour party's proposals and whether it would work on a cross-party basis. He indicated at the Dispatch Box that he would enter into cross-party discussions. Is he speaking for the Labour party or as an individual, and what proposals does he have?

**Keir Starmer:** I have to say that I love this. We are voting on the Government's deal, but Members are attacking the Labour party's plan. Well, that makes a lot of sense. Whatever else we are going to do next Tuesday, we are not going to vote on our plan. Let us be serious.

**Alberto Costa:** Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

**Keir Starmer:** The hon. Gentleman asked me a question and I am answering him. Whether we like it or not, the Government's deal is what we are voting on. We are not

voting on what any one of us may think, say or do. Having not made any attempt to engage seriously with the Opposition on amendments and proposals, it is a bit rich for Government Members to now say that it is somehow the Opposition's fault that the Government are in a mess and cannot get their deal through. I gently say that there is huge interest in what the Opposition think. Why? Because, in an ordinary set of proceedings and absent the snap general election, there would be a majority on the Government Benches for the Government's own proposition. This challenge needs to be put in its proper context: it is because Conservative Members know full well that they are not all going into the same Lobby.

**Vicky Ford** *rose—*

**Julian Knight** *rose—*

**Keir Starmer:** If anyone wants to intervene on me and say that the Conservatives are all going into the same Lobby, they can, but I do not think that is the case. The point is that the Government are so divided that they cannot get their own deal through. That is the truth of the matter.

**Vicky Ford** *rose—*

**Keir Starmer:** I am going to make some progress.

**Vicky Ford** *rose—*

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I am well aware that the hon. Lady is a former chair of the Internal Market Committee of the European Parliament. In case there are people present who were not aware of that, among the litany of achievements that she can proclaim, I have done a public service in advertising that important fact. However, it does not give her an automatic right to intervene. The right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) will decide whether he wishes to give way to the hon. Lady, and at the moment he is not giving way.

**Keir Starmer:** Thank you, Mr Speaker.

**Vicky Ford** *rose—*

**Keir Starmer:** I am not going to give way.

It is no good us pretending about this. I have said in recent weeks and months that the future relationship document is 26 pages long and that it is thin and flimsy, and the answer that now comes back occasionally is, "It was always going to be that way. What did you expect? It's a future relationship." Well, I will tell Members what the Prime Minister expected. I see nods from Conservative Members, but the Prime Minister was very clear about what she expected, and she set it out in her Lancaster House speech on 17 January 2017:

"I want us to have reached an agreement about our future partnership by the time the two-year Article Fifty process has concluded."

I repeat:

"I want us to have reached an agreement."

She continued:

"From that point onwards, we believe a phased process of implementation, in which both Britain and the EU institutions and member states prepare for the new arrangements".



[Keir Starmer]

At the time, I was proposing that that was a transition period, and the Prime Minister and various Secretaries of State for Brexit kept insisting it was not a transition period, because that would imply that we were negotiating in it; instead it was an implementation period, because—[*Interruption.*] No, this is what they argued. They said that the agreement would have been reached and all we would need to do was implement it—to phase it in—during the two-year period. So the idea that this is as it was always going to be—that a blind Brexit was inevitable or an inherent part of the process—is completely contradicted by the Prime Minister’s own words when she said what was going to be achieved.

There are very serious consequences to having such a flimsy document on the future relationship. First, it invites this House to vote on a blind Brexit. I and other Labour Members have very strong views on what the future relationship should look like. Given a document that does not set out whether it might end up as a distant Canada-style model of some sort, or a closed Norway-style model, how can one expect any responsible Member of this House to say, “I don’t know where this is going to end, I don’t know what it’s going to look like, it could actually turn out to be an agreement I fundamentally disagree with, but I shall vote for it”? That just cannot be right. That is the problem—it is a blind Brexit. Secondly, as I have said, because the document is so thin, nobody serious, either here or in Brussels, is suggesting for one moment that the agreement is actually going to be ready by January 2021.

That means that we are going on to either an extended transition or the backstop. That is going to happen. If anybody is intending to vote next week on the pretence or understanding that we are not going to be here arguing about this in July 2020, I genuinely think they are labouring under a misconception—they are wrong. We will either be going on to the transition or going on to the backstop if the deal goes through in this form. We cannot escape that and simply pretend it is not going to happen.

I have said a few words about the backstop. As the Secretary of State rightly said, it provides for citizens’ rights and financial obligations. I do not shy away from the commitments made under the Good Friday agreement. I certainly have no truck with those who play down the importance of the Good Friday agreement—it is not the Secretary of State, the Government or the Prime Minister—or even say that their version of hard Brexit somehow overrides it. Those commitments are serious, and they have to be kept.

I also accept that, given the lack of progress in the 26-page document that we have, at this stage, sadly, some sort of backstop is inevitable. Having got to this stage of the article 50 exercise, it is now inevitable that we cannot finish the exercise within the transition period. There are risks under the backstop, and the Attorney General’s advice, which we fought to uncover last year, set them out pretty starkly. There is the fraught question of whether the backstop would, in truth, be indefinite or temporary. We can have views on that, but we cannot avoid the fact that it is a live dispute, and the Attorney General gave his view on that.

It is also indisputable that once we are in the backstop, if that is what happens in January 2021, it will introduce barriers to trade between England, Wales and Scotland

and the EU. That is spelled out in the document. We are putting up barriers to trade in January 2021 if we go into the backstop. I have already touched on the inadequacy of the proposed customs arrangements.

**Jonathan Edwards:** I am sure the right hon. and learned Gentleman will have seen the article written over the weekend by Peter Hain and Paul Murphy—both former distinguished Members of this House and Secretaries of State for Northern Ireland who played an important part in the peace process—in which they made the case that the backstop is an important element that we must honour. Has he had an opportunity to reflect on that?

**Keir Starmer:** I have read the article, and I reflect on it. I used my words carefully; I said that there are risks in the backstop, which the Attorney General’s advice set out, and they are real risks.

There is a risk that we should not be blind to. The Attorney General spelled out in his advice that the backstop, as a matter of international law, may well be indefinite—he said that it is arguable either way—and that we therefore cannot get out of it unilaterally. We know that, and we have had a discussion about it. However, he went on to say that we cannot get out of it even if the negotiations completely break down and an allegation of bad faith is found. That is not just—

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr Robin Walker)** *indicated dissent.*

**Keir Starmer:** He did say that. I flushed that advice out, and I have read it over and over again. It is absolutely clear. The Attorney General says that if an allegation of bad faith is found, the only remedy is to ask the parties to act in good faith. That is spelled out in the advice. I know that the Minister is an honourable man and will concede that. I am not suggesting for a moment that there is bad faith—of course I am not. I do not think that the negotiations have been or will be negotiated in bad faith, but a country ought to pause before it simply says that an international agreement with those sorts of arrangements is to be waved through because we have used so much time up that we cannot do anything else.

**Mr Robin Walker:** The point I was making—I apologise for making it from a sedentary position—is that the Attorney General said that, on the balance of probabilities, the backstop would not be entered into. He also pointed out that it could be challenged legally under European law were it ever to be entered into.

**Keir Starmer:** I understand the argument that article 50 can only be a vehicle for a temporary arrangement and not a permanent one. The Attorney General addressed that, and it is obvious to anybody who has read and understood article 50 rightly. However, the point the Attorney General was addressing was the circumstances in which we could bring the backstop to an end once we were in it, as a matter of international law. Whether article 50 permits it or not, or what the Court would do if it were challenged, is an open question.

The Attorney General said that the backstop may be indefinite—he did not say it was indefinite—but he called into question the argument that it will be temporary.

I have noticed that the Prime Minister is very careful in the way she puts it: she always says that the backstop is intended to be temporary. I do not think she has ever used any other phrase, presumably because she is bearing in mind what the Attorney General has advised. I am not saying that there does not need to be a backstop or arrangements to protect the Northern Ireland situation, but we cannot simply and casually say that these are matters to which we should not have too much regard. I honestly cannot think of another treaty that the UK has ever entered into that it could not exit in such circumstances. We might say that that is a good thing or a bad thing, but it is a very unusual thing to be doing.

I want to address the notion that rejecting the deal somehow leads to no deal. I have never accepted that, and it is deeply irresponsible of the Government to pretend that this is a binary choice. No Prime Minister has the right to plunge the country into the chaos of no deal simply because the deal has been rejected, or to run down the negotiations. I believe that that view is shared across the House. There is no majority for no deal. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), the right hon. Member for Loughborough (Nicky Morgan) and others for the amendment to the Finance Bill that the House passed yesterday. It will not formally prevent no deal, but it will give consequences to a non-endorsed deal.

The amendment is also symbolic, in that it shows that the House will not simply sit by and allow a no-deal exit. I do not think that the Prime Minister would attempt that, because I think she understands that a no-deal exit in March this year is not practically viable. I have been to Dover several times to look at the customs arrangements, and it would be impossible to get from the arrangements as they are today to those that would need to be in place on 29 March in the time available. Whatever anyone else says, it would be impossible to do that. There are plenty of other examples. However, if the Prime Minister attempts a no-deal Brexit, we will fight her tooth and nail every inch of the way.

Every Member of this House has a solemn duty to consider the deal before us—not the deal that the Prime Minister pretends to have negotiated or the deal that she promises to change between now and when we go through the Lobby, but the text before us. Labour is clear that the deal is not in the national interest. It does not come anywhere near to meeting our tests, it will make the country poorer and more divided and it will not protect jobs and the economy. I say that with sadness, because I have shadowed three different Brexit Secretaries, and the fact that we now have a deal that is so demonstrably not uniting the country and not able to command the support of this House is a tragic waste of the two years that have been available for negotiations and a miserable end to this part of the process. We will have to vote on the deal next Tuesday. After that, it will be time for this House to decide what happens next.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The House is now embarking on the resumption of the debate started on 4 December and interrupted. A lot of Members put in to speak on 9 and 10 December, and the order just agreed allows those who have already spoken the possibility of a second speech. I must tell hon. and right hon. Members that if they wish to speak on any of the next four days

of debate, they should put their names in to my office, and that they cannot rely on notification that was given a month ago. Apart from anything else, the days have changed and my team cannot be expected to anticipate the thought processes of hon. and right hon. Members, so if people would notify my office, that would be greatly appreciated.

4.13 pm

**Mr Andrew Mitchell** (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): I draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. We have just heard two heavyweight and extremely important speeches from the two Front Benches. I congratulate the new—he is not really new anymore—Brexit Secretary on his grip on the extraordinary complexity of detail that he so evidently demonstrated at the Dispatch Box. I have only rarely troubled the House with my views on Brexit—I think this is only the second time I have done so—and I have approached the whole process on the basis that as Government Back Benchers, it is our job to try to assist the Government in reaching a satisfactory deal. Our job is to support and assist.

We have some special issues in the west midlands. My hon. Friend the Member for Solihull (Julian Knight) has made it clear that the issue of just-in-time supply is important to us there, but this is not just about cars. It is also about food. Much of the food in this country is not stored in a warehouse, but is on a motorway, so just-in-time supply is a very important matter for us.

I also think the comments made by my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin) and the Father of the House, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), and indeed the response from the shadow Brexit Secretary, are a very important start to this resumed debate and need to inform our discussions.

It has always been quite clear that it is the Government's job to propose and Parliament's job to dispose. Let me be clear: I have great sympathy for the Prime Minister. I served with her in Cabinet and shadow Cabinet for seven and a half years, and I believe that she has a steadfast determination and integrity. No Prime Minister could have given so much time to the House at the Dispatch Box on this issue. However, I have to say that I have been astonished that she would bring back to the House of Commons a deal that she knows she has absolutely no chance whatsoever of getting through, and apparently with no plan B. I think this is a matter of very great concern.

The Government are accountable to Parliament. We have had the beginnings of a new constitutional strategy: that it should be the other way around, and somehow the House of Commons should be accountable to the Government. That is not the way we do things. While I was unable to support the amendment last night, because I thought it fettered the Government's ability for Executive action too much, I did support the amendment to the Business of the House motion this afternoon, because I think the House of Commons now has to be very clear that if the deal does not go through next week, this House of Commons has got to reach some conclusions and, if I may coin a phrase, take back control. It seems to be that it should do so on the basis of what my right

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hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset and my right hon. and learned Friend the Father of the House were saying.

As of today, I cannot understand what the Government's strategy is or has been. It has all the appearances of drawing on the strategy pursued by Lord Cardigan at the charge of the Light Brigade in Crimea. Indeed, it does not seem to be a strategy at all. As Sun Tzu, the famous Chinese general, said:

“Tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat.”

The danger with the tactics being pursued was set out very eloquently by the first Brexit Secretary, and they of course relate to the issue of the backstop and of sequencing.

In summary, with the greatest of regret, I am unable to support the Prime Minister in the Lobby next week. Briefly, that is for three reasons. The first is to do with the backstop. The backstop issues have been very well rehearsed. In the royal town of Sutton Coldfield, we had the pleasure of welcoming Arlene Foster to speak, and it was very clear to me that her reservations about the treatment of Northern Ireland on the backstop were extremely difficult.

I would make this point in addition to what has been said already about the position of Northern Ireland. Having now been in this House for nearly 30 years, on and off, I have sat through heartbreaking statements about the situation there, with the violence that so dreadfully afflicted Northern Ireland for so very long and, indeed, that went wider than Northern Ireland. The fact is that there was a hard-won, hard-fought treaty—lodged at the United Nations—which says there shall be no border in Northern Ireland. For me, that is the beginning and the end of the matter.

**Gavin Robinson** (Belfast East) (DUP): I do not want to question the sincerity of the comments that the right hon. Gentleman has just made. There are very few references to the border at all in the Belfast agreement, but where there are references, they do not in any way suggest that this decision cannot take place. There is no commitment to open the hard border. There is a commitment to co-operation among our nations—between Northern Ireland and the Republic. There is a commitment to relationships on a north-south basis.

One of the things that is in the Belfast agreement, which is completely absent from this discussion, is that it says in paragraph 12 of strand 2 that any future relationship—or impediment—or regulation or rule can be implemented only when it is agreed by the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Oireachtas in the south. That is completely absent from the considerations on or indeed the text of the withdrawal agreement.

**Mr Mitchell:** The hon. Gentleman makes a good point, but the point I am making is that the absolute importance of an open border in Northern Ireland—indeed, it is enshrined in an internationally lodged treaty—seems to me to be completely unexceptional.

The second reason I cannot support the deal is that, far from settling matters, it enshrines or embeds the conflicts and divisions that have so convulsed our country. It perpetuates, not heals, the deep divisions that have engulfed our country. It leaves us as a rule taker, which

will antagonise and inflame both sides. Those who voted remain will campaign to become rule makers once again, and those who voted to leave will feel that we have not done so and that the result of the referendum has not been fully respected.

The Government present the deal as the compromise that should bind us together; it is, in my view, the worst possible common denominator. It perpetuates the toxic, radioactive afterlife of the referendum. We need look no further than what is said about the deal by the leading proponents and opponents of Brexit on the Government Benches. Consider the eloquent arguments put by my hon. Friends the Members for East Surrey (Mr Gyimah) and for Orpington (Joseph Johnson) and my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), and the equally eloquent and passionate arguments put by my right hon. Friends the Members for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis) and for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith) and my hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg). Listening to their eloquent, well-argued points against the deal before us, one can see that it will perpetuate the deep divisions.

Thirdly, all of those points are before we start on the political declaration, about which we have heard some astute comments today. We will be out, we will have paid the £39 billion and we will be saddled with the backstop. We can already see how difficult it will be to negotiate and agree the trade and commercial deals with our 27 European neighbours in the European Union. We have heard what the French have said about fisheries. We have heard what the Spanish have said about Gibraltar. We have heard what Greece and Cyprus have said about any precedents set in respect of Turkey. Alas, I cannot support the deal.

So what is to be done? It seems to me that we almost certainly need more time, although the amendment that we passed today makes it clear that the House of Commons expects the Government to address these matters with great urgency. The former Brexit Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden, makes the good point that deals in the European Union are normally done up against the clock. I recognise the validity of that point. The much bigger role for Parliament to take, which was set out by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe and my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset, is clearly extremely important.

The Government, as the servant of Parliament—not the other way round—need to go back to Brussels, Paris and Berlin and spell out clearly to our friends in the European Union why the deal is unacceptable, in particular the backstop. They should explain that if the Commission persists in this vein, it will sour relations between the European Union and the UK for generations, to our huge mutual disadvantage.

The Government have rightly stepped up planning for no deal, but given the will of the House on this matter, even talk of cliff edges and no deals seems unduly alarmist. It will clearly be in everyone's interests for a series of deals and preparations to be put in place, however temporary. We must use any extra time to look again at the available options. The shadow Brexit Secretary talked about this. What are the pluses of Norway and Canada—both deals that the EU offered us earlier? Clearly, no money that is not legally, contractually due should be handed over at this point.



If the Prime Minister's deal is rejected, it will be for Parliament to reach a conclusion on how to proceed. I profoundly hope that we can, because if we are unable to do so and this House cannot reach a resolution on these matters, the possibility of a further referendum will undoubtedly arise—something I believe profoundly to be most undesirable. A large cohort of our constituents will feel that a second referendum tramples on their democratic rights and is an attempt by a complacent establishment to make off with the referendum result. As a matter of fact, I do not think the result would be likely to change in the event of a second referendum.

Parliament must now seek to reach an agreement on how best to proceed. Only if we find ourselves incapable of reaching any agreement should we consider the option of going back to our constituents to seek their further guidance.

4.24 pm

**Stephen Gethins** (North East Fife) (SNP): Mr Speaker, it feels like déjà vu all over again. We seem to be back to where we started just before Christmas. As the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) rightly pointed out, it seems that nothing has changed, but we hope that we will have a vote, and that it will be meaningful, so that we can get on with finding solutions to the problems with which Parliament is faced.

I think the point was made earlier that part of the problem for MPs, businesses and others is that it is becoming increasingly difficult to believe anything the Government tell us will definitely happen. We have to feel for those who have had to negotiate their way through this, and for the officials who have had to negotiate on behalf of the UK Parliament. I sincerely hope that Monsieur Barnier is enjoying his birthday today; he deserves to, after two and a half years of “nebulous” arguments, as some might put it. Indeed, the Prime Minister got off very, very lightly when Jean-Claude Juncker referred to her proposals in that way. I think he was just trying to be helpful to the Government.

Those of us on the Scottish National party Benches cannot vote for a deal that will make us poorer, less secure and more isolated, and which will deliver worse public services and a worse future for young people, depriving them of the rights and opportunities that we have enjoyed and taken advantage of. It is timeous that during the biggest crisis in modern times, with a weak and unstable Government in place who are clearly the most incompetent in living memory, “The Scream” is to come soon to the United Kingdom.

We have a Government who are spending money on food and medicine shortages in peacetime, because they have lost control of the situation in this place and beyond. With every day that passes, they show us just what a disaster this is. This disaster is entirely of the Government's making. This Brexit mess was left to them by the grossly irresponsible Brexiteers, who have had a political lifetime to prepare for this moment, but when the moment came, we found out just how ill-prepared they were. In many ways, those who proposed this in the first place do an utter disservice to cowboys and snake oil salesmen.

This situation will make us poorer. What kind of Government proactively pursue a policy that they know—because their economic analysis tells us—will make us poorer? A hard Brexit will cost £1,600 for every person in Scotland. We know that because the Scottish Government had the decency to produce independent analysis, something the UK Government have pointedly refused to do—and we know why: because they are deeply embarrassed by the situation, as they should be.

**Jamie Stone** (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): There is a tendency among those who favour Brexit to think that maybe it would be good for us to tighten our belts, and that a little reduction in income is something we can get over. However, I represent the furthest away part of mainland Britain. I have businesses that will go bust if we have a hard, no-deal Brexit. Their owners will lose their livelihood, as will all the people who work in those businesses. To take forward the hon. Gentleman's point, surely the ultimate role of Government is to protect those people and protect those businesses? Without enterprise—the little acorns from which mighty oaks grow—this country is going nowhere.

**Stephen Gethins**: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that point. He represents a rural area with many similarities to my constituency. He will be aware that the Bank of England warned that crashing out would be worse than the 2008 crisis. We know how devastating years of austerity have been for our public services and household incomes. The University of St Andrews found that small businesses will be particularly hard hit, so he is right to make that point. Even the Chancellor recognises that remaining in the European Union is better. We are all paying the penalty for the Tories' folly and, frankly, extremism in this regard. The EU single market is the world's largest economic bloc, with half a billion consumers. It is eight times bigger than the United Kingdom, and 40% of Scottish exports go there. It has become very expensive indeed to leave the EU, and the question has to be asked: is it now unaffordable to remain in the United Kingdom?

Other industries will be badly hit as well. The UK, and Scotland in particular, does well out of education and research. Since 2014—we have had no answers about what will come next—Scottish universities and other research institutions have drawn down about £500 million of EU funding, and the UK has done particularly well competitively. I represent some universities; research conducted by those such as St Andrews, Dundee and Abertay through EU funding—I see this daily, as do colleagues elsewhere in the House—will benefit each and every one of us for years to come, and that is before we even start on the financial benefits of membership.

What have the UK Government said in response to the biggest employer in my constituency? Absolutely nothing. That is an abrogation of their responsibility to people who own small businesses, and who work in research, which makes our lives better and improves our healthcare. The same goes for other industries. The Secretary of State mentioned the food and drink sector and talked about having a no-deal Brexit if the agreement was rejected. Extraordinarily, some of his colleagues have actively said that they would like a no-deal Brexit, but the National Farmers Union of Scotland has said:

“It would be nothing short of catastrophic and could have a devastating impact”.

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On access to markets and much-needed labour, it said:

“It is becoming clear to NFU Scotland that there is misleading and damaging rhetoric coming from the UK Government...on where the gaps in skills and labour are.”

I hope that the Secretary of State will not mind me saying—I am sure that others will not—that the NFU is not renowned for coming out with strong words. It does so sparingly, not often, so I certainly hope that he will heed those words.

On fishing, which the Secretary of State mentioned, we have consistently argued for being taken out of the common fisheries policy. For years, Conservatives have consistently voted against that proposal in this place: they voted against the Fisheries Jurisdiction Bill, and against our proposed amendments to previous treaties. Now that we are being taken out of the EU, however, with the impact that will have on the markets to which we need access, all of a sudden they are all in favour of a hard Brexit.

**Alan Brown:** If the backstop is enacted, tariffs will be applied to Scottish fishing exports, but Northern Ireland will be protected by tariff-free access to both the EU and the UK. The Scottish Secretary said that he would resign if special provisions were given to Northern Ireland. Does my hon. Friend share my concern that the Scottish Secretary is not only still in the job, but urging his colleagues to back a deal that disadvantages Scotland?

**Stephen Gethins:** My hon. Friend is right. It is truly remarkable that the Secretary of State for Scotland is still in a job. He is pursuing a policy that he knows will not only make us poorer, but put Scotland at a competitive disadvantage. I say to our friends from Northern Ireland that we want them to thrive. This has nothing to do with the state of Northern Ireland; it is simply about having a level playing field across these islands. Having a level playing field means that under the agreement, we have access to the markets that Northern Ireland has access to, and it means having EU vessels—

**Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con) rose—**

**Stephen Gethins:** If the hon. Gentleman can answer the point about why the Secretary of State for Scotland is still in post, or can say whether we will cede waters to EU vessels and place barriers on trade for customers, I would love to hear from him.

**Stephen Kerr:** The hon. Gentleman has mentioned a number of sectors; it is only right to put on the record that NFU Scotland, the Scotch Whisky Association and every other trade body in Scotland is imploring this House to support the Prime Minister’s agreement with the European Union. That is what our constituents and the businesses that employ them expect of all Scottish MPs.

**Stephen Gethins:** It is good to hear the hon. Gentleman’s point, which he makes well and honestly, but it is extraordinary, and a shame, that many of his colleagues—some of whom are in the Chamber—were not listening to him. If he cannot even win over his colleagues, what

hope does he have of winning over everybody else? There is almost nobody on his entire half of the Government Benches—extraordinary stuff—but I have the greatest respect for the courage and indefatigability he demonstrates.

This Government’s disrespect agenda has turned the constitutional settlement of the United Kingdom upside down. The UK Government have imposed legislation on the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly against overwhelming opposition from across the parties—from not just the Labour party but the Scottish National party, the Liberal Democrats and Plaid Cymru. The Scottish Parliament rejected the deal by 92 votes to 29, leaving the Conservative party in utter isolation in Scotland, as it has been for decades.

As the Government turn the constitutional settlement upside down, without reference to this place and ignoring the Scotland Act 1998, let me paraphrase the great Winnie Ewing—Madame Ecosse—who said that it was claimed once upon a time that Britannia ruled the waves; now, Britannia simply waives the rules. We heard howls of protest in this place today when Parliament took back control, but Parliament did the Government a favour. The Government have wasted all this time, but now they will be forced to come back within three days, not because of something they did, but because Parliament reasserted itself, and you, Mr Speaker, did the right thing today in allowing the vote. That is incredibly important as we reach this crunch time. One cannot do this kind of thing in the European Union.

I have found utterly baffling and really quite depressing the lack of knowledge about the European institutions in this place. The EU is made up of independent and sovereign states, which reach agreement and compromise in what is truly a partnership of equals. There is democratic oversight from the European Parliament—Ministers here have attempted to stifle democratic oversight—and there is a Court, not to impose anything on anybody but to resolve disagreements, which will arise in any democracy with 28 independent and sovereign member states.

I am not entirely sure what future arbitration mechanism the Government propose. I see from their agreement that they propose a role for the European Court of Justice. I welcome that, but it is a bit too little, too late, and it has been met by a wall of opposition from their own Members, who do not seem to understand what the Government are arguing for.

As I set out what the European Union is all about, it strikes me that despite all those who try to compare it with the United Kingdom and ask whether, if Scotland becomes independent, we want to be in the EU, no one can tell me in what way they are similar. Can anybody compare the EU with the UK? Silence. It is not possible to compare them. To do so would be to disregard every treaty, and the fact that the EU is a club for independent and sovereign states. I am astonished, since Government Members persistently make that argument, that nobody can tell me what the difference is. That argument is almost as dead and defunct as the Prime Minister’s deal.

Let me move on to a human element. The way EU nationals have been treated is a disgrace. No Member should be complicit in what is being done in our name. That is nowhere clearer than in the appalling treatment of our friends and neighbours who happen to hold

passports from a different European country. They contribute so much to our homes and our NHS, and they contribute financially so much more than they take away.

On a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry)—as well as, to be fair, the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman) during Prime Minister's questions today—does the Minister agree that it is deeply offensive to be asking those who already pay their taxes and so much in contributions to pay £65 each to remain in their homes? Would anybody on the Government Benches like to defend that? Anybody? I didn't think so. Would anyone want to defend the disgrace of charging people £65 to remain in their homes?

**Stewart Malcolm McDonald** *rose*—

**Stephen Gethins:** Since the Government cannot stand up to defend themselves, I will give way to my hon. Friend instead.

**Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** Does it not offend natural justice that people are being made to pay that fee to maintain rights that they already have and enjoy, yet they were excluded from the vote itself and have played no part in the democratic mechanisms that have brought us to this point? The Government have done everything to isolate them and are doing everything to isolate them further. Would it not show an element of good will, at least, if they cancelled the £65 fee?

**Stephen Gethins:** My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. It is the very least the Government could do.

**Drew Hendry** (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): My hon. Friend is making a fantastic speech. Is the situation not even worse, because these people—our friends and neighbours, our colleagues, people we depend on in our communities and throughout Scotland, have been asked—even when they have been here for decades, to apply to pay to stay in their own homes?

**Stephen Gethins:** As usual, my hon. Friend makes a powerful point about EU citizens on behalf of his constituents. Truly there is shame on this Government for the way they treat our neighbours and fellow citizens. They are whipping up a frenzy over immigration and those seen as outsiders. The Government have disgraced themselves, and, following the vote of no confidence, are no longer fit for office.

**Douglas Ross** (Moray) (Con) *rose*—

**Stephen Gethins:** If the hon. Member can defend the Government's position, which they themselves seem incapable of defending, I will give way to him, although he could not do so when I challenged him earlier.

**Douglas Ross:** Can the hon. Gentleman defend the SNP's policy? In July 2014, in the run-up to the Scottish independence referendum, Nicola Sturgeon spoke about her "common sense position" on this issue. She said:

"There are 160,000 EU nationals...living in Scotland... If Scotland was outside Europe, they would lose the right to stay here."

Does he defend that?

**Stephen Gethins:** It is extraordinary that the hon. Member cannot engage with any of the arguments or defend his own Government. Indeed, he cannot even vote for his own Government. The way the First Minister came out the day after the referendum to give that reassurance to EU nationals and the way the Scottish Government have said they will waive the fees of public sector workers which as yet the UK Government have not had the decency to do—I hope they will change their mind—should put each and every Government Member to shame. In the independence referendum, as in Scottish Parliament and local authority elections, those EU citizens—our friends and neighbours—have the franchise, they have the vote, and they are treated with decency, which is a lot more than can be said here.

**Dr Philippa Whitford** (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): Everyone will know by now that my husband is German and that we have many friends who are EU citizens. With many EU citizens who have been here for decades being refused permanent right to remain and they or their children being refused citizenship, does my hon. Friend agree that it is not just about the money? There should not be an application. Even a registration would suggest something different. An application implies that someone can be refused.

**Stephen Gethins:** My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. She frequently makes very good points on that very matter. This goes to the heart of what kind of society we want to build and how we treat our friends and neighbours. Do we want that isolationism, or do we have the decency to treat our friends and neighbours appropriately?

**Ian Blackford** (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): My hon. Friend is making a very powerful speech touching on the human elements and our responsibility to our friends and neighbours, but there is also the fundamental point about our rights as EU citizens. Could anyone defend the current position? He worked in Europe for many years. We today have the opportunity to work in 28 member states. How is it right that if the Government get their way UK citizens will have the right to work in only one state and will be excluded from the opportunity to work in Europe which he, I and many others had? It is a disgrace that that right is being taken away from our young people.

**Stephen Gethins:** That is an excellent point. I spent years benefiting from freedom of movement on the Erasmus programme. I know that many other Members who are present did as well, and that it has benefited our friends, our relatives and many of our constituents. Who are we to deprive the next generations of the benefits that we have had—the rights and opportunities that we have had? It is utterly shameful to be depriving our young people of freedom of movement, from which many of us across the House have benefited, and which benefits everyone without fear or favour. That is yet another failure.

Then there is security, which is a basic priority of the UK Government and of any Government anywhere in the world. This is a Government who are, proactively and consciously, making us less safe, isolating us from key partners elsewhere in Europe and drawing away from key planks such as the European arrest warrant. According to the Royal United Services Institute,



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“the full benefits of membership—combining both shared decision-making and operational effectiveness—cannot be replicated”

by the deal that we are seeing today.

Nowhere has the disregard for security—and for the peace process—been seen more clearly than in Northern Ireland. There has been an utter disregard for it throughout the debate, although that is not the Government’s fault, and it is not the fault of one or two Ministers who argued for remain. The disregard shown during the EU referendum and subsequently was appalling as well, especially given that the European Union has been a key partner for peace in Northern Ireland for decades.

Let me now, briefly and finally, say a little something about the Labour party. We have the weakest and the least stable Government in living memory. They cannot even defend their own record. They cannot even defend the basics. They are actively making us poorer and less secure—proactively—and at great cost as well. All that the Government have going for them—and I say this with great respect to the shadow Secretary of State, the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras, who was very good today and always is, as are many other Labour Members—is an exceptionally weak Opposition Front Bench.

I want to work with the Opposition Front Bench, and we work together very well. The right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras has been a champion for his cause. However, the Leader of the Opposition appears to have washed his hands of any kind of leadership when it comes to this issue—the biggest issue to have faced his party. There is no such thing as a “jobs first” Brexit, but there is such a thing as a jobs-destroying Brexit.

We want to work with Labour, and the House should not just take my word for it. Last night, as I was preparing for today’s debate, I was contacted by a member of the Labour party who lives in Crail, in my constituency. She sent me a letter which she has sent today to the Labour party’s international policy committee. I know that all Labour Members will have read it, but I will read some of it out for the benefit of the House. She wrote that

“if there is a general election, or a second referendum, the Labour Party should make it clear that being in the EU is in the UK’s best interests, and that it is Parliament’s duty to ensure that we stay.”

That did not come from the Scottish National party, or from my friends among the local Liberal Democrats, or even from the Conservatives or the Green party, but from my own local Labour party. I always like to say that there is a great deal of sense in North East Fife, but apparently there is even a great deal of sense in the North East Fife Labour party, and I hope that its members are listening.

**Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** What my hon. Friend may not know is that a Labour spokesperson said after Prime Minister’s Question Time that in theory Labour could change its mind and be against Brexit in any future snap election. Does he agree that a Schrödinger’s Brexit is not exactly a step forward for the official Opposition?

**Stephen Gethins:** As usual, my hon. Friend has made an excellent point.

I appeal to the Labour party. We have a weak Government, and an absolute crisis is facing us. I have worked with many Labour Members, and I know that many of them are pained by the position that has been taken by the Leader of the Opposition in particular. They behave honestly and decently, and they make a fine contribution, as has been evident today. I appeal to them to join with the SNP in the short time that we have left, because there are alternatives, and other Members and Ministers have made that point. As the shadow Secretary of State and others made clear, we must revoke article 50 or seek an extension. That is the only sensible course of action left to us, because the current situation will not play out sensibly. Although helpful, no amount of motions requiring a response within three days can help us beyond that point. It will be embarrassing for the Prime Minister, but it is a small price to pay.

Over two years ago, the Scottish Government set out a compromise that they devised with members of other parties, with experts—we still like to listen to experts—and others, but that compromise was rejected by the UK Government without them considering it or coming back on anything. This Government have comprehensively failed on the biggest issue to face a post-war Government, so this Parliament must take back control of the situation. It also means that we are now in a place, after almost three years, whereby when we get some kind of final solution such is the huge impact that we must put it back to the people in another referendum to let them sign it off. I know that that certainly has support across the SNP Benches and, increasingly, among those on the Government Benches as well. Given the time that the Government have wasted since 2016, that is our only reasonable option. No deal must be ruled out. Billions of pounds have been totally unnecessarily wasted. We have not struggled for metaphors for the Government’s failures over the recent past, but a ferry company without any boats is up there with the best of them.

Brexit has no redeeming features—none. We are almost three years on from the referendum, and I believe now even more than I did then—I was strong for remain—that Brexit is the wrong thing to do and that nothing good whatsoever will come out of it. I want everyone across these islands to thrive, but what underlines the current set-up is that the UK is broken and that we probably need to move on to a new relationship. Every one of Scotland’s neighbours—similar-sized countries—is more successful, fairer and has a more equal and respectful relationship with the UK Government than Scotland does. Our close neighbours in Scandinavia have a healthy and respectful economic and political relationship, even though not all those independent states are members of the EU. That is a healthier and better state to be in. I note that none of the 50 states that have gained independence from the UK since the second world war has made as much of a mess as the UK Government have made of this situation, because they had a much more straightforward way through.

Right now, however, we must focus on sorting out the almighty mess that the Tories have left us in. The Government have had their chance, but they have blown it over the past two and a half years. All that they have achieved is to drive up support for the EU across the other member states. Support for the EU in Ireland is at 92%, meaning that those of our near neighbours who

believe in leaving the EU are giving the flat-earthers a wee run for their money, and they are even giving those who believe that the Prime Minister still runs a strong and stable Government a bit of a run for their money. We have been sold this nonsense for far too long. We are stuck on a sinking ship, and this Parliament must take back control. We need a common-sense solution, and this deal is not it.

4.53 pm

**Andrea Jenkyns** (Morley and Outwood) (Con): In May last year, when I was a Parliamentary Private Secretary, I believe that I was the first person on the payroll to resign to fight for Brexit. I had deep concerns about how Brexit was being handled, and I felt compelled to resign for the Brexit that I believed in and the Brexit that my constituents and our country voted for. I was the first to step down, but I was not the last. We have seen talented, committed and hard-working colleagues on both sides of the Brexit debate resign because of numerous concerns.

Our reasons for standing down may vary, but one thing that we all have in common is our belief that this deal is a bad deal for our country. Be they remain or leave, I respect all those colleagues who bravely stood by their convictions and made the principled decision to fight for what they believe in, but the fight is not yet over. The Prime Minister speaks of a deal that will unite our country, a goal that no doubt we all desire, but the division we have seen is of the Prime Minister's own making. Her desire to get a deal at any cost, prolonging "Project Fear", and her decision to postpone last month's withdrawal agreement vote were mistakes—and that decision has only led to more division at a time when our country should be uniting behind the democratic decision to leave the EU.

On 23 June 2016 the question was clear: should the UK remain a member of the EU or leave the EU? The British people spoke and decided overwhelmingly to leave.

**Mr Chris Leslie** (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): Not overwhelmingly.

**Andrea Jenkyns:** Well, I think 1 million more people is quite a big clue, actually.

It was never supposed to be this way. At the referendum there was no third option: the choice was either leave or remain. The referendum did not mention a half in, half out or worst of both worlds choice for our country's future. The referendum question said nothing about giving the EU £39 billion of taxpayers' money and getting nothing in return, the referendum question said nothing about a continued role for the European Court of Justice after 2019, and the referendum question said nothing about an Irish backstop and restricting our ability to sign new trade deals. This deal is a sell-out of those who voted to leave. It is therefore impossible for the House to unite around this deal, and it is impossible for our country to unite around a bad deal.

At the referendum two years ago the British people spoke and our objective was clear: as elected Members of Parliament we were tasked with delivering Brexit. Some Members thought the British people would deliver a different result and would vote remain in the referendum,

but they did not, and this is the problem: some Members do not accept the result of the referendum and are using every opportunity to thwart the will of the British people.

It is a sad period in our great Parliament's history when MPs try to overturn the democratic mandate; that is completely unacceptable. After all, it was Parliament that gave the British people the opportunity to have the referendum in the first place. Our great British parliamentary model has been a beacon that has been used as a template in parliamentary democracies across the globe for centuries. Let us not insult our greatest institution, or forget that we were elected by the British electorate. We are all democrats, so let us respect the result: our British people have spoken and it is time for us now to deliver. Our people decided to take back control and said we should leave. [*Interruption.*] They are still British citizens.

This was a vote dictated not by fear, but by hope: hope of a different tomorrow and a new path; hope of a new system not restricted by the EU's institutions; and hope that once again our people will feel that they have a true stake in our country's future. The chance of a global Britain was promised, but that promise has now been broken.

We must leave, and we need a clean Brexit and to trade under WTO rules if necessary. The US and China sell billions of pounds' worth of exports each year to the EU using WTO rules; the UK can do the same if necessary. As the EU's largest trading partner and with a deficit of £95 billion in trade in goods, we should have been negotiating from a position of strength, but the Prime Minister's determination to get a deal at any cost gave the EU the upper hand. The Prime Minister showed her hand too soon, and now the EU has called her bluff.

I say that it is time we put the ball firmly in our court and take the upper hand in these negotiations. The EU fears our leaving on WTO terms as it will give Britain the competitive advantage if we do, so let us fully embrace a clean Brexit; I have no doubt that the EU will come running back to us at the eleventh hour. But besides being a good negotiating tool, leaving on WTO terms is not something we should fear.

**Paul Masterton** (East Renfrewshire) (Con): My hon. Friend talks about the potential advantages of our leaving on WTO rules. Can she explain why, if WTO rules are just fine for trading with our largest trading partner, it is so necessary that we are able to do trade deals on our own terms with other, much smaller economies?

**Andrea Jenkyns:** I believe in a global Britain, as the Prime Minister said in her statement several times, and it is important that, in trading with both smaller nations and larger nations, Britain is free to chart its own path in the world and to forge new trade deals with whoever.

**Ross Thomson** (Aberdeen South) (Con): My hon. Friend will not be aware of it, but, in evidence to the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs today, Ryan Scatterty of Thistle Seafoods in the north-east of Scotland, representing seafood processors, said that the growing market for his industry is in places like Australia. The industry currently trades on WTO rules, as he confirmed to the Committee. If the industry can do that with Australia, surely it can do it with the EU.

**Andrea Jenkyns:** I was in Kenya with some of our colleagues back in July. Kenya sells us lots of flowers, which have a short shelf-life, and it currently trades with us on WTO rules. We have no problems there, so I agree with my hon. Friend.

**Stephen Kerr:** Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Andrea Jenkyns:** I will give way to my hon. Friend, and then I will continue.

**Stephen Kerr:** Does my hon. Friend agree that we would desire a free trade agreement between the United Kingdom and the European Union?

**Andrea Jenkyns:** As I said earlier, we have seen how the EU negotiates—look at how it negotiated with Greece—and it usually comes back at the eleventh hour. It would be great to have a deal with the EU, but I do not agree with having a bad deal. The Prime Minister's mantra is that no deal is better than a bad deal, and in that case I would rather leave on WTO rules.

**David Linden** (Glasgow East) (SNP): Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Andrea Jenkyns:** No. I need to make some progress.

It is time that we put the ball firmly in our court and take the upper hand in these negotiations. The EU fears our leaving on WTO terms, as it would give Britain a competitive advantage, so let us fully embrace a clean Brexit. Leaving on WTO terms is not something we should fear.

There has been some concern about engineering firms being disproportionately affected by a clean WTO Brexit. However, the heads of firms such as Dyson, JCB and Northern Ireland's Wrightbus support Brexit. Car companies can withstand a 10% tariff on sales into the EU and a 4.5% tariff on components from the EU because they have benefited from a 15% depreciation in sterling. Border checks on components from the EU will be unnecessary, counterproductive for EU exporters and illegal under WTO rules, which prohibit unnecessary checks.

A better deal was available and is still available. The Brexit deal was never only a choice between the Prime Minister's deal and reverting to WTO rules, but if that is the choice, let us go on WTO rules.

This place is often divided by its very nature, but one thing that unites us is our belief that the British people are remarkable and can succeed, no matter the obstacle. Our great history shows that we can overcome any hurdle and that we always triumph. This deal is a submission, and the British people should never accept a bad deal. This deal is remain masquerading as leave, and it is time that entrenched leave Members started believing in Britain and respected the result of the referendum.

Instead of fear, we need to see forward planning and a vision for the future—a future away from the EU—that the whole country can get behind. I am hugely optimistic about our country's future. There may be difficult times ahead, so we need a leader who can take this great country out into the world and start trading freely around the globe, and this deal simply does not allow us to do that.

In her Lancaster House speech, the Prime Minister said:

"A Global Britain must be free to strike trade agreements with countries from outside the European Union too... the great prize for this country—the opportunity ahead—is to use this moment to build a truly Global Britain. A country that reaches out to old friends and new allies alike. A great, global, trading nation. And one of the firmest advocates for free trade anywhere in the world."

That was a vision for Brexit that many of us had, but the Prime Minister's deal will not allow it to happen. I therefore urge colleagues on both sides of the House to reject her deal. Let us stand up for democracy, let us restore faith among our electorate and let us now deliver on our promises to our great British public.

5.4 pm

**Mr Chris Leslie** (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): It is nearly two months since the 585 pages of the withdrawal agreement were published, and it is already gathering a little bit of dust. As we have already heard, despite deferring the vote and pretending otherwise over Christmas, and ringing up Mr Barnier or Mr Juncker on Christmas eve or new year's eve saying "Please can we have a negotiation?", the Prime Minister has found that, in that famous phrase, nothing has changed. So here we are yet again facing a Government who are determined to prevaricate and kick the can further down the road.

Earlier today, having seen the Government defer this issue previously, Members realised that once the Prime Minister's plan was defeated there would potentially be 21 days, and then perhaps another seven days, before the Commons would be allowed to determine what happens next. We had the ridiculous spectacle of the Government objecting to that and saying, "No, Members must not be allowed to vote on moving things forward." That prevarication is extremely dangerous. It is dangerous to put political calculations above the country's best interests when we could crash out with no deal on 29 March.

I am glad, Mr Speaker, that you withstood the attempts by a loud and vociferous minority in this place to thwart Members and prevent them from having a say. You have in the past made decisions and rulings with which I have disagreed, but on this occasion allowing parliamentarians to express their views was the right thing to do. Indeed, that proved to be the case, because a majority of MPs said, "No, we don't wish to wait 21 or 28 days, till the middle of February; we want to get on with things." The time has now come to decide. The House has instructed Ministers, if the Prime Minister's deal is rejected on Tuesday, to come forward with a motion three sitting days later, which would be Monday 21 January. We could then make some decisions.

By the way, I do not address my remarks on prevarication only to Ministers. I gently say to those on the Labour Front Bench that they, too, should stop prevaricating on the question of Brexit. The time has come for the Labour party to make some decisions and stop this notion of constructive ambiguity. I know that this complex sequenceology has been constructed to try to avoid having to confront these issues, but the politics should come second to the national interest. We cannot afford to gamble at this stage, given how close we are to 29 March.



The withdrawal agreement is wrong for the country, as is the political declaration that accompanies it. The withdrawal agreement ignores 80% of our economy, the service sector. It might not necessarily provide good pictures for the television cameras, unlike queuing ferries at Dover and so forth, but the service sector is very much where the UK excels, whether in legal, professional, media, creative or financial services. Not only do many of our constituents work in those services, but they provide the engine for the revenues needed for our public services—for our NHS, schools, local authorities and social care. If we ignore the risk of diminished prospects for those sectors in our economy, we will be facilitating a further decade of austerity to come. That is why I say to all Members, across all parties, that we cannot just kick the can down the road and pretend that this will not matter.

The problem with the withdrawal agreement is that it is full of warm promises about what might be agreed, but it does not actually agree many, many things. It contains no agreement on data or energy policy. It says that we will establish a process on transport policy, and that we will talk about the Erasmus programme to allow students to study throughout Europe. It does not resolve the security situation or the question of Euratom. It fudges the question of the Northern Ireland border still further. The withdrawal agreement does not actually settle many of these things.

What is worse is that the political declaration is non-binding on the parties involved, which means that it amounts to little more than warm words. The Government got themselves into this ridiculous situation by embarking on the article 50 process without a commitment that, by the end of it, we would have not just the divorce arrangement settled, but, in particular, a settled plan for an EU-UK trade deal. That should have been part of the negotiation framework.

For us now to be asked to leave on 29 March without having settled our future relationship with Europe is highly irresponsible. Ministers may say, “Well, we intend to do it this way”. European officials may also say that they intend to do it that way, but, of course, they are here today and gone tomorrow, and commitments that are made by those particular individuals will not necessarily bind us on what happens to the UK. Therefore, we will not have the EU-UK arrangement settled down by the time that we are asked to leave, and anything could happen in that process.

There are many difficulties with that, because of course if we do not have the EU-UK trade deal buttoned down, our prospects of doing deals with the rest of the world will have to wait. Other countries, such as Japan, Singapore, Canada, America and others, will say, “We may be interested in doing a trade deal with you, but we would like to see what your relationship is with the EU first. Will you be allowed to reduce tariffs or not?” That arrangement could take two, three, four or five years—an ever unknown amount of time. The Canada trade deal with the EU took seven years.

The idea that the poor old Secretary of State for International Trade is raring to go with all these new deals across the world is, of course, fantasy. That is the delusion of Brexit that so many people are operating under, but the real world is beginning to bite. Businesses know it, and increasingly our constituents see it, and they want the right to determine their own future.

The withdrawal agreement and this settlement would end the free movement of people across Europe. I regard that as a great tragedy. It is a shame that we have not stood up and spoken out for the benefits of free movement. We should remember that free movement is reciprocal, so just as we restrict European movement into the UK, we will potentially be sacrificing UK citizens’ right of movement to the rest of Europe. Let us think of the future generations, their work opportunities, their study opportunities, the freedom we enjoy, the 2 million British people who already reside across the rest of Europe, and the uncertainties that this will create—and for what? What is this great harm? It is a ridiculous proposition, and that alone would be a reason to reject the withdrawal agreement.

There is also the notion that the agreement will allow us to control taxpayers’ money, but we know that we will lose a great deal of money because of the effect on the economy. Members do not need to take my word for that; the Treasury, the Government and the Prime Minister herself have articulated how we will be worse off by going down this pathway. We will be controlling a diminished amount of money. We will be paying out £39 billion, and possibly even more during the transition arrangement, in exchange for what? There is no commitment on a trade with the EU deal going forward, which I regard as a fundamental failure.

The Prime Minister has made a number of strategic errors all the way along this process, such as setting down red lines and interpreting the outcome of the referendum in her own way—for instance, on whether it was to do with the single market or the customs union, when, of course, none of that was on the ballot paper. She has also failed to take the temperature of Parliament. She did not exactly read the runes of the House of Commons from the beginning, and now she faces this situation. Under this arrangement the UK could be left in limbo in this situation for the next four years, and we would not even have a seat around the table to shape the rules to which we would be subject—it is a nonsense. Britain has had a fantastic ability to shape the rule-making arrangements of an entire continent—the whole European Union—for many years, and many of the rules and regulations that we have chosen to adopt have been generated by the United Kingdom. Some of the best ideas that we have had have shaped EU policies, and it is a great shame that we will be moving away from that.

Whether it is because of the failures of the withdrawal agreement or the wishlist presented in the form of the political declaration, which is an almost meaningless document, this House has to reject the Prime Minister’s proposal when it comes to the vote next Tuesday. The House must quickly realise that we have to extend article 50 at the very least, if not suspend or revoke the article 50 process, while we put this question back to the British public so that they can decide, in the full knowledge of the facts and the economic and social impact.

A people’s vote is a solution whose time has come, and increasing numbers of Members on both sides of this House are realising that it is the way ahead. I strongly hope that the Labour Front Benchers will also realise that the people’s vote has the support and is the preference of the vast majority not just of Labour party members, but of Labour supporters and voters. Now is the time to decide. We cannot afford to prevaricate any longer.

5.16 pm

**Mr Jonathan Djanogly** (Huntingdon) (Con): If the referendum were rerun today, everything that I have seen over the last two years—not least as a member of the Brexit Select Committee—would still lead me to vote to stay within the European Union. Having said that, I do respect the result of the referendum as a valid expression of the will of the people, but to me this means leaving the EU in a way that secures the best economic deal available with the EU and that maximises the potential for retaining the close cultural, educational, justice and security relationships that we have developed with our closest partners and allies. The referendum was “in or out”, but it did not, as some wrongly insist, dictate the terms of our leaving, nor the terms of our future relationship with the EU once out. Both of those questions were left for Parliament to resolve, and that is what MPs must now do. It is for this primary reason that I would oppose a second referendum, which would be indeterminate, complicated to implement and very divisive.

**Angus Brendan MacNeil:** The hon. Gentleman will probably be aware that the Prime Minister spoke to 200 MPs in one of the rooms in Portcullis House last night. Again, she ruled out a second referendum, but she said that if the deal does not get through, there are two options left: a no-deal Brexit or no Brexit at all with the revocation of article 50. Businesses up and down the country are going to have to start thinking about how they react once the deal is voted down. Will the hon. Gentleman venture his view on what he would do in that scenario?

**Mr Djanogly:** I was at that meeting, which I thought was a good expression of joint interests from all parties to the Prime Minister. I hope that we saw within that meeting the start of what could become a consensus, moving forward after what might be a defeat next week. Having said that, I do not discount a second referendum, as the Prime Minister did not. I am simply saying that I think it would be a very poor second best and a sign that this place had failed, but I do not dismiss the possibility.

As for the Prime Minister’s deal, on balance I find it to be a fair one and practical in the overall circumstances of the hand that we had to play; it has my support. To criticise the deal as not being as good as what we have with the EU now is a facile argument, if only because the EU was never, ever going to allow us to leave on the same or better terms than apply to the remaining 27 countries, no matter how many German cars we bought. The deal was always going to have to represent a compromise of views within the Conservative party, within Parliament and certainly with the EU. The deal reached does not represent my optimum position, but no one was ever going to get everything they wanted.

That is not to say that I do not share some of the criticisms of the deal, including many that can be found in the Brexit Committee’s report on the deal. For instance, despite assurances from two Secretaries of State, the financial settlement has not been included in the withdrawal agreement as being wholly or even partially conditional on securing a binding future relationship. To my mind, this has been a failure of negotiation that will undoubtedly reduce our leverage in future relationship negotiations due to start in March 2019 if we have a deal. Furthermore,

the lack of detail in the future relationship political declaration means that there will still be another cliff edge as we reach July 2020, when we will need to decide either to head towards the backstop or to extend the implementation period, and there will still be a level of uncertainty for business as to the final form of the deal, although much less so than if we crash out with no deal.

So, on balance, we should take the deal on offer. The mess and upset that would be caused by a hard Brexit is unacceptable. Yes, the legalities can be brought to the fore on things like the backstop, but the legal cart should not be leading the commercial horse.

**Norman Lamb** (North Norfolk) (LD): I suspect that the hon. Gentleman might agree with me that the deal is very different from what people were promised during the referendum by those leading the Brexit campaign. If he does agree, is there not a case for thinking that it is undemocratic not to allow the people to have a say now, given that what is on offer is so different from what they were promised?

**Mr Djanogly:** I would not argue with the right hon. Gentleman about promises being made during the referendum campaign that could now be disputed, but the same could be said for a lot of general elections that we have had in the past. To say that elections or referendums are discounted because of what people maintained during the course of them would not, I am afraid, be a line that I would take.

Furthermore, if the deal is rejected by this House, from my point of view I will do everything I can to ensure that we do not leave the EU without a deal, and, to my mind, the next best thing after the Prime Minister’s option would be the Norway-plus alternative. If the Government’s deal fails to pass this House, and assuming that the Opposition’s no-confidence motion fails, I hope that we shall then start to find a new tone of cross-party working. We shall need a degree more honesty in how we describe Brexit issues, where in reality no one is going to win—not us and not the EU. We have the Labour Front Bench changing its position; we have the Brexiteers shouting, “Sell-out”, at every initiative while offering nothing as an alternative; and we have a Government who have frequently made soothing hard Brexit noises to Brexiteers while lining up a deal that clearly has a trajectory of close regulatory alignment to the single market and some form of customs arrangement. I do hope that the Government get their deal, but if not, it will surely be because they have unsuccessfully attempted to be all things to all men.

**Gareth Thomas:** Does the hon. Gentleman accept that if the deal does not pass this House next Tuesday, agreement to extend article 50 will be an urgent priority for the Government to bring forward a measure on?

**Mr Djanogly:** The hon. Gentleman makes a very important point. If the deal is rejected and we start looking at other possibilities—on a more consensual cross-party basis, I hope—then clearly whatever route we take leads to the deadline, and an answer to that may well have to be to extend the article 50 period. I am very pleased, looking back over a year ago now, that some of us in this place decided to ensure that the Government were not able to restrict the timing of the article 50 period, and so that will be a possibility.

Rather than add to the fudge, let me explain why and how, if this deal fails, Members of all parties should coalesce around a Norway-plus option, and why the “plus” element—being in a customs union with the EU—is a good thing. First, most business wants a customs union because it allows free movement of almost half our exports between Union members without tariffs and checks and paperwork. Opponents say that this would stop the UK forging its own trade agreements, but, to my mind, the benefits of the EU customs union are far greater. We must keep in mind that the EU has some 250 FTAs with some 70 countries, and the UK plan is to “roll over” those deals, meaning that, at best, we would have the same—not better—terms as the EU with one third of the world’s countries. There would be no advantage of being outside the EU. That is, of course, assuming that we are able to make those deals happen, which we know is proving somewhat elusive, as the hon. Member for Nottingham East (Mr Leslie) explained.

Secondly, the chances of negotiating better FTAs as a country of 50 million, rather than a bloc of 500 million, is realistically and simply not how it normally works. Thirdly, there will be significant costs of going it alone on FTAs, from being forced to take US genetically modified crops to issuing visas to countries, as currently requested by Australia and India. Fourthly, FTAs take a long time to negotiate—an average of seven years.

Fifthly, the claim that Commonwealth countries will prioritise us over the EU is unrealistic, not least considering that the Czech Republic currently has four times the trade with New Zealand than we do and that the Swiss do much more trade with India than we do. Sixthly, “most favoured nation” clauses in our rolled-over EU agreements and the integrated nature of world trade will significantly reduce our ability to get commercial advantage. Finally, high levels of foreign input into our manufactured goods will create huge problems under the so-called rules of origin.

In conclusion, my view is that we shall be better off with a customs union arrangement with the EU, and the deal on offer presents the best opportunity of securing future prosperity for our companies and employment for our people. We should support it.

5.26 pm

**Sir Vince Cable** (Twickenham) (LD): One problem of having extended debate and resumption of debate is that we are getting a lot of repetition and recycling of arguments that we have heard many times before. For that reason, I want to focus on one specific issue, which is the idea of World Trade Organisation rules and exactly what they mean. The term “WTO rules” is used casually in every pub, and in every radio interview I encounter, but I suspect that many of the people who use it are not at all clear what it means.

Before getting into the detail of that, I will make one general point about no deal, which was brought out rather brilliantly by the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), who got to the heart of this very well. He exposed the fact that no deal is actually a choice. It is not just something that happens; it is the conscious choice of a Government who could choose to revoke article 50, as the Father of the House keeps reminding us. That may be a difficult

decision and a very unpopular one, but article 50 could be revoked, and by choosing not to revoke it, the Government will be choosing to have no deal, with all its catastrophic—or so they tell us—consequences.

Let me narrow down to the specific issue of what the WTO rules would be if we found ourselves in a no-deal world. The basis on which I speak is that many years ago, long before I came into the House, I was part of a small community of international trade specialists and got involved in negotiating the so-called Uruguay round and then the Doha round as part of the World Trade Organisation—or, as it was then called, the general agreement on tariffs and trade. I saw at first hand the way in which the WTO system operates. I realise that there is no longer just a small community of anoraks, which is what we were. A large number of people now consider themselves experts on trade policy, but the glibness with which the term “WTO rules” is applied leads me to believe that there are probably not too many anoraks, because there are some very real difficulties in applying WTO rules.

The World Trade Organisation is to trade what the United Nations is to peace. It has some admirable principles, but I think most Members, and certainly those on the Government Benches, would consider it seriously negligent of us to make our national defence dependent solely on the rules of the United Nations. Rules have to be enforced, and they have to be effective.

We need to look back on what the World Trade Organisation is and what it is trying to achieve. In the post-war world, it has established one central principle, and actually it is not free trade; it is something called the most favoured nation—MFN—rule. It is about non-discrimination. It has one big waiver, which is to allow common markets and customs unions such as the European Union to function on the basis of total free trade within themselves, but its whole objective is to stop the proliferation of bilateral agreements.

Such agreements were common in the inter-war period, and they are becoming fashionable again. Many people who are in favour of Brexit say that they are the whole purpose of trade policy. Those people want deals with numerous countries, but the whole purpose of the WTO was to stop this happening. It was supposed to be a multilateral organisation. In that capacity, the WTO achieved a great deal. It cut tariffs to single digits on most manufactures except agriculture, and it got rid of quantitative restrictions, except for the quotas that still exist for agriculture and textiles. It also began to establish a set of rules around intellectual property and various other intangible non-tariff barriers regarding, for example, government procurement.

The problem is that the WTO reached the zenith of its authority about 10 years ago, when the Doha negotiations collapsed and multilateral trade negotiations ceased to make any progress. This was largely due to the obstruction of India, Brazil and, to some extent, the United States. The European Union was actually the main liberalising force, but anyway, the negotiations collapsed and the WTO’s authority is now much less strong. Where does that leave us in terms of what the WTO rules now mean? If they mean anything, it is the application of the rule of law. In the WTO, the rule of law operates through dispute panels, which in theory have the same force as the European Court of Justice in settling disputes. It baffles me that Conservative Members



[*Sir Vince Cable*]

are so affronted by the intrusiveness of the European Court of Justice, because it was designed to achieve precisely what the dispute panels of the WTO were designed to do.

However, like the United Nations, the WTO is not a desperately effective body, and many of its rulings are not carried through. Because it is a weak organisation, it is possible for big countries to bully weak ones. A celebrated case some years ago involved a trade dispute between the United States and Costa Rica—over men's underpants, as it happens—and Costa Rica won the dispute. The United States felt deeply humiliated and refused to comply. A face-saving compromise was eventually reached, but that dispute sowed the ill feeling that in due course led to President Trump, who has made it absolutely clear that he does not believe in the World Trade Organisation. He does not want it to work, and he is doing everything he possibly can to stop it working, including not sending judges to sit on the dispute panels. It is now a very weak organisation. If we were to crash out of the EU under WTO rules and found ourselves in a dispute with the United States—or, indeed, with the European Union, which we had left—we would not be able to rely on the WTO dispute panels to settle the dispute in an orderly manner.

That is one of the WTO's central weaknesses. Another is that, throughout its history, it has been overwhelmingly concerned with getting rid of tariffs. The main problem in international trade these days is the divergence of standards, which is of course why we originally entered the single market under Lord Cockfield and Mrs Thatcher. That was perfectly logical. If we are trying to liberalise trade, we attack the non-tariff practices that obstruct trade, hence the harmonisation of rules on mutual recognition. However, the WTO does not do that. It has very weak rules covering government procurement and all the barriers that are dealt with in the European Union through the rules on state aid, competition and the like. That, in turn, means that there is very little in the WTO that covers the services sector, which, as we have been reminded, accounts for 80% of our economy. We have a fair degree of liberalisation in the services trade in the European Union, which benefits our high-tech industries, financial services and so on. No such arrangement exists in the WTO. Those sectors are completely unprotected.

Finally, and not least, the fact is that some tariffs remain, and they are on agriculture. We have the problem that if we leave the European Union with no deal, on WTO terms, the European Union's tariffs on dairy products, lamb and various other items, which are quite high, immediately kick in. The problem with that, as we discovered when we had the foot and mouth epidemic, is that if we cannot export, prices crash. The only logical response from the farming industry, in order to maintain the value of the stock, is to slaughter large herds. This will happen. We know there is a paper at the moment in the agriculture Department—the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs—setting out a plan for slaughtering a third of all British sheep in order to maintain the integrity of the market. That is an inevitable consequence of a high tariff obstructing British exports.

That is not all; I had only 30 seconds in the House yesterday, but I mentioned the particular problem associated with exports through the port of Portsmouth. It is actually the lifeline to the Channel Islands; that is the main route. The Channel Islands are not otherwise affected by Brexit of course, but they will be in this case. If trade is obstructed at the port because of the need to comply with veterinary requirements, phytosanitary requirements and things of that kind, lorries will be obstructed and fresh produce will not be able to get through. Quite apart from the disruption to traffic, the whole system of agricultural trade and the supply of food to the Channel Islands will simply dry up. We have an enormous practical problem resulting from this.

**Mr Leslie:** The right hon. Gentleman is giving an excellent speech, which is very helpful indeed. Did he see that the *Financial Times* reported yesterday that the Department for Transport commissioned research that says that just a 70-second delay in authorising a vehicle at the border could mean a six-day queue to get on a ferry?

**Sir Vince Cable:** Yes. Indeed, if I have made a contribution to this argument, it is in pointing out that this is not just a problem in Dover; this problem exists in all the ports around the country. There is going to be serious disruption of supply chains—of the supply of fresh food and many other items. Those people who trivialise the issue by simply saying, “WTO rules—nothing to worry about”, are completely disregarding these consequences.

The conclusion I come to—I think many Conservative Members share it, publicly or privately—is that no deal is just not a viable, acceptable option under any circumstances. We will therefore, within the next few weeks, be brought to the point at which the Government will have to revoke article 50. That would be a major step; it would be overturning the result of the referendum. I feel uncomfortable about Parliament, through Government, doing that. That is why I and other people who are not enthusiasts for referendums believe that the only way of dealing with this properly and of reasserting democratic legitimacy is to go back to the public and seek their approval for doing just that.

5.38 pm

**Theresa Villiers** (Chipping Barnet) (Con): I rise briefly to explain why I feel I have to vote against the draft withdrawal agreement that we are debating over the next few days.

Before doing that, however, I want to welcome warmly the statement made very clearly by the Prime Minister after the Salzburg summit that, whatever the outcome of the negotiations, the rights of EU citizens living in the United Kingdom would be protected. I think that was a hugely important promise to give. I urge the Government to make sure that their settled status scheme operates smoothly so that we ensure that those rights are fully and properly protected, because it is vital that we do so. EU citizens are our friends, our colleagues and our neighbours. We want them to stay, and we want to ensure that their rights are appropriately protected.

Turning to the draft withdrawal agreement, I regret that I have to diverge from the Government on this crucial question but I cannot support an agreement that I do not think is in the national interest and that I do

not believe respects the result of the referendum in 2016. Of course, I fully recognise the need for compromise as we settle a new relationship with our European neighbours. I strongly believe that we need to listen to the views of people on all sides, whichever way they voted in the referendum, but right across the spectrum of views on Brexit there are many who believe that this draft agreement is not the right one for our country.

A legal obligation to pay £38 billion to the EU, without any certainty on our future trading relationship, would significantly undermine our negotiating position. We would be giving up a key advantage in the negotiations for little in return.

The so-called backstop would do even greater harm. It is not acceptable for the United Kingdom to become a regulatory satellite of the EU, locked permanently into its regulatory and customs orbit, without a vote, a voice or even an exit door. Northern Ireland would have an even greater proportion of its laws determined by institutions in which it has no say than the rest of the United Kingdom under the terms of the deal. Even listing the titles of those regulations takes up more than 60 pages in the draft agreement. As the Attorney General's legal advice confirmed, Northern Ireland would be required to treat Great Britain as a third country in relation to goods crossing the Irish sea.

According to Martin Howe, QC, the backstop arguably contradicts the articles of the Acts of Union of 1800, one of the fundamental founding statutes of this Parliament. The articles state that

"in all treaties...with any foreign power, his Majesty's subjects of Ireland shall have the same privileges and be on the same footing as his Majesty's subjects of Great Britain."

The articles also stipulate that all prohibitions on the export of products from Great Britain to Ireland, or vice versa, should cease from 1 January 1801.

Even if the backstop were removed, I am afraid there would still be unacceptable flaws in the draft agreement. In particular, the significant continuing role for the European Court of Justice would prevent us from restoring democratic control over the making of our laws. Of similar concern is the statement in the political declaration that the backstop and the withdrawal treaty will be the starting point for the negotiations on the future relationship.

I want to emphasise that none of the amendments that have been tabled to the motion can fix the defects that I have referred to in the withdrawal agreement. If we ratify the treaty, it will be legally binding and it will apply regardless of encouraging statements and amendments about parliamentary locks or other warm words.

There is a better option: we should table a draft in the EU negotiations that sets out a wide-ranging free trade agreement based on the Canada plus model. That is in line with proposals that Donald Tusk put forward in March. It should include a protocol in which all parties commit that no new physical infrastructure will be installed on the Northern Ireland border. Instead, we should use existing flexibilities in the EU's customs code to ensure that customs formalities and checks take place away from the border, as was set out in the paper produced by my right hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson) in September last year.

More people voted leave in June 2016 than have ever voted for anything else in the long history of British democracy. That was a legitimate expression of the

natural desire to be an independent self-governing democracy—the basis on which most countries around the world operate their systems of government. EU membership means vesting supreme law-making power in people we do not elect and cannot remove—people who in this negotiation process have shown clearly that they do not have our best interests at heart and that they are prepared to inflict punishment on us for the democratic choices we have made.

Brexit is an issue that has divided my constituency and the whole country. I will continue to work to bridge the divisions that the referendum has painfully exposed, but I do not believe that the draft withdrawal agreement is the right way forward either for my constituents or for the nation as a whole, and I urge the House to vote against it next week.

5.44 pm

**Rushanara Ali** (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab): Britain in the European Union has been at the heart of building peace, security and prosperity. We have played a critical role in promoting the ideals of democracy, human rights, equality and freedom. We have worked with our European partners to fight extremism and terrorism, to protect the environment, to improve labour standards for our citizens and to contribute to tackling global poverty, conflict and inequality.

Since the referendum, the Government have failed to build coalitions and consensus. They have failed to prioritise economic reality over fanciful ideology. They have failed to put aside party interest in favour of the national interest. That failure is reflected in the dreadful deal secured, after two years, by the Prime Minister. It leaves us as rule takers at the mercy of the EU, when we were once equal partners setting the agenda and making the rules. It leaves us fundamentally worse off, costing billions of pounds that could have been spent on tackling the appalling social problems caused by the programme of austerity implemented by the Government: crime, child poverty, inadequate social care, rising homelessness and the housing crisis. There have been cuts to education, early years funding and much else.

The deal leaves businesses facing years of uncertainty and without clarity on our future trading relationship with the European Union. It gives little clarity on what protections there will be for workers' rights and the environment after the implementation period. It leaves us in a much weaker position to negotiate trade deals with non-EU countries, whenever it is that we might be free to do so. We have heard from many knowledgeable Members about how long that might be. It is not likely to be done in two years; it is more likely to be in five, six or seven years. The EU has been successful in negotiating over 50 trade agreements with third countries. Britain is stronger negotiating as part of an EU bloc with big emerging economic powers. It leaves us worse off, and the golden promises made by the leave campaign have so far failed to materialise. They were totally unrealistic. They were incredibly misleading and untruthful. They were unfair on the British people, because they were so untrue and misleading.

Since 2016, the uncertainty due to the result of the referendum has already cost the UK more than 2% of GDP. Households are £900 a year worse off and investment has gone down dramatically. The Prime Minister has said that the impact of leaving the EU does not show

[Rushanara Ali]

that we will be poorer, but that is exactly what the Government's own analysis of leaving the EU shows. Under the Government's deal, the economy will be 3.9% smaller. That is the equivalent of over £100 billion a year. The average person will be over £1,000 worse off and real wages will be 2.7% lower. Trade barriers would be 10% of the value of the services trade. The Government are also asking us to spend £39 billion to make people poorer.

How can I vote for a deal that makes us even more worse off, when thousands of people in my constituency rely on jobs in financial services, the tech industry and other companies that trade with the European Union? They desperately need access to the single market and the customs union. Even before we leave the EU, half of all children in my constituency live in poverty thanks to the appalling policies of this heartless Government. The Government's austerity programme has led to schools facing millions of pounds of cuts, homelessness doubling, and crime, including violent crime and knife crime, soaring because 200 police officers have been laid off—nationally, the figure is 21,000. I cannot understand how the Government can claim that this is the best they can do, when Britain stands to lose so much. The provisions and the cost of Brexit will result in less money for investment in our public services because of the tens of billions of pounds we will have to spend under the Prime Minister's deal or no deal, which is the choice she is threatening us with.

In the future trading relationship—the political declaration, which many colleagues have already mentioned—the Government no longer promise frictionless trade, only the possibility of co-operation. A future customs arrangement could consist of technology solutions that do not even yet exist and are likely to cost tens of billions of pounds. Financial services—which contribute 6.5% of total economic output, more than £27 billion of tax annually, and employ more than 2 million people around our country—get just three paragraphs.

I refer to financial services because my constituency sits between the City of London and Canary Wharf, which power our economy. Too often this Government fail to prioritise or think about the long-term impact of our leaving the single market and customs union on those sectors that provide so much tax revenue and so many jobs in our country. As many hon. Members have mentioned, the services sector accounts for 80% of the economy, yet the future trading relationship lacks clarity on the kind of access we will have to the single market. The relationship for UK firms in the sector will be based on equivalence, which is much worse and more limited than what we have now. That means the loss of passporting rights and 16 million people facing uncertainty about their insurance policies. There also remains no clarity about how about £28 trillion-worth of derivatives—the infrastructure that allows banks and their clients to manage risk, cash flow and capital positions—could be affected.

When the Prime Minister decided, hastily and irresponsibly, to start the clock by triggering article 50—which some of us voted against—she had no strategy. She did not have a plan and put our country in a terrible position and at the mercy of EU negotiators, who had

the upper hand. In 2017, the UK's former ambassador to the EU, Sir Ivan Rogers, told the Treasury Select Committee:

“If you wanted to avoid being screwed in the negotiations...say: ‘I will invoke Article 50, but only under circumstances where I know exactly how it's going to operate’.”

That is not what happened. The Prime Minister did not heed that advice and the country is paying the price for her mistake.

The Prime Minister has failed to listen to concerns relayed to her by Members from across the House, including at a meeting she held yesterday, rather belatedly—nearly two years after triggering article 50—with Members of different parties. She missed the opportunity to bring the House together from the beginning, as others have pointed out. She has been beholden to managing divisions in her party, which has been ripping itself apart, making a mockery of our country in the rest of the world. Let us not forget that the rest of the world, which historically has seen us as an important ally, is looking at us in dismay. When Conservative Members talk about global Britain, they should remember how their behaviour in tearing themselves apart, and how their divisions tearing the country apart, look across the world. They are far from presenting an image of the inclusive, mature, global Britain required in the face of the huge challenge we have to address.

By giving us a false choice between her deal and no deal, the Prime Minister is holding a metaphorical gun to our heads. That is utterly irresponsible and she and her Ministers need to stop doing that. We will not accept that false choice. The no-deal scenario is utterly catastrophic. The Bank of England's worst-case scenario points out that no deal could shrink our economy by 8%, and unemployment could increase dramatically, with inflation spiralling out of control. Many constituencies will suffer job losses in a no-deal situation, but mine will be among the worst off—according to the UK Trade Policy Observatory at the University of Sussex, thousands of residents in Bethnal Green and Bow will lose their jobs.

Yesterday's amendment to the Finance Bill demonstrates that there is no majority for crashing out of the EU with no deal. I believe there is a majority for seeking to secure permanent customs union and single market access, and the Government should do so. As they are running down the clock, article 50 must be revoked. But of course the best deal on offer is membership of the EU. The Government promised the exact same benefits, but they now offer something that will damage our economy.

I cannot support this deal, because I believe it will make our country and my constituents worse off. The Government's own analysis points to that. We should allow the public a final say, with a choice between the Government's deal and remaining in the European Union. I and many of my constituents joined more than 700,000 people to march in the streets of London for a people's vote. I believe that is the only way to settle this matter, and I hope the Government will consider that option when this deal is voted down, as I believe it will be; otherwise, they will destroy livelihoods, cause job losses, damage our economy and diminish our place in the world. Nobody wants to see that happen to our country.



5.56 pm

**Alberto Costa** (South Leicestershire) (Con): My constituency voted to leave the European Union, and I promised my constituents before, during and after the referendum that I would respect the result. I also told them that I believe in a smooth and orderly Brexit. Although the Prime Minister's deal is imperfect, I believe it will provide that smooth and orderly Brexit.

The Prime Minister has worked very hard on the deal, and my constituents have given me the message loud and clear, whatever their view on the European Union, that she has been sincere about respecting the referendum result. She has been extremely hard-working and is absolutely determined to see this through. I think all of us in the House, and most of our constituents, recognise that the Prime Minister is trying to do what is in the best interests of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

I would like to touch on a couple of aspects of the deal that I think will help Members come to the same conclusion I came to and support this compromise. I have received many emails from constituents telling me to vote against the deal or for the deal. Even those who asked me to vote against it did so for different reasons. Some did so because they want no deal, and others because they want a second referendum or another outcome—perhaps no Brexit at all. Those who email to ask me to support the deal do so in a calm, rational and logical manner, whether they voted leave or remain. They explain that this deal, imperfect though it is, is a compromise that will allow the country to have a smooth and orderly exit.

Mr Speaker, you will know that for the last two and a half years I have been championing the rights of EU nationals living in the UK and British citizens living in the EU27. I think I am one of the MPs most personally affected by the decision to leave the EU and its impact on citizens' rights, because my mother, father and sister are EU nationals. I think everyone in the House believes that we should protect the rights of EU nationals living in Britain and British citizens living in the EU, and the only way of doing that in a smooth and orderly manner is with the Prime Minister's proposed deal. It is the only deal that offers an absolute guarantee to my parents, to the more than 3 million EU nationals in Britain and to the more than 1 million British nationals in the EU.

**Carol Monaghan** (Glasgow North West) (SNP): Does the hon. Gentleman support the £65 fee that these EU nationals have to pay?

**Alberto Costa**: I would say two things about that. In 2014 the SNP—[*Interruption.*] I promise to answer directly. In 2014 the SNP argued that Scotland should leave the EU and then reapply for admission as a third party. That was, in effect, what was on the ballot paper for Scottish independence, so it is a bit rich today for the SNP to talk about citizens' rights. It put them in danger back in 2014.

I said that I would answer the hon. Lady's question, and my answer is this: as a member of the Government—as a Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Secretary of State for Scotland—I support the Government, but I am uneasy about the fees for settled status. My hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman) asked the Prime Minister about the fees earlier today,

and I can say this to the hon. Lady: it is a matter that I am pursuing and will continue to pursue to ensure absolute fairness for innocent EU nationals in this country, who did not have the right to vote in the referendum, who in many instances have lived in this country for decades, and who might be asked to pay a sum of money—albeit a modest sum of money—to remain in the country. I personally think we have to look at that very carefully. I promised her an answer, and I hope she is satisfied with that one.

The deal on citizens' rights gives certainty not just to citizens but to businesses that rely on EU nationals for their workforce. If a further reason is required, that is a second and connected reason to support the deal. It would allow businesses to continue to employ EU nationals, not just those resident in this country today but those who come to the UK during the implementation period. The implementation period would give certainty to EU nationals who in the future might wish to live and work here—and exercise their withdrawal agreement rights, if that agreement is passed—and to businesses in South Leicestershire that have been lobbying me and asking me what the situation will be for the people they employ.

The implementation period would also give certainty to British businesses that do business in the EU27 and need UK nationals not only to work in member states but to have the ability to move between member states. The deal that the Prime Minister has negotiated allows for that, and I say this to Opposition Members, particularly Labour Members and the shadow Brexit spokesman: if they are sincere, as I hope they are, I urge them to see that as an overriding reason to support the Prime Minister's deal, given that they have not come up with any plan of their own that would give EU and UK nationals the rights that her deal would give them.

I come now to the second issue, which is the so-called backstop. Let me declare an interest and refer Members to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. I am dually qualified as a Scottish and an English solicitor, and I still practise as an English solicitor. We have heard a lot of talk from people who have, let us say, new-found Unionism in their blood, and I welcome that greatly. I felt that I was a lonely voice in the 2015 Parliament when I intervened to oppose nationalists' comments about the United Kingdom. [*Interruption.*] If the hon. Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) has an intervention to make, she should feel free to make it.

**Carol Monaghan**: I think that all we would argue about is where the lines are drawn. The hon. Gentleman obviously feels that he is British, and we feel that we are Scottish. Both of us are happy to show pride in our nations, as we see them.

**Alberto Costa**: I am proud to say that I am Scottish, British and with Italian heritage, and there is absolutely nothing wrong with that. We are the wonderful, fantastic United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. I urge the hon. Lady to start reflecting on her own party's policies, which are divisive. I am not a nationalist; I am a British patriot. There is a difference between the narrow-mindedness of nationalism and being a good patriot.

I was talking about the issue of the so-called backstop. Let me make a simple analogy. There is one area about which, as a dually qualified solicitor, I am able to speak

[*Alberto Costa*]

with some knowledge, and that is legal services. There is a lot of talk about creating a border down the Irish sea, but there is already a border down the Irish sea when it comes to legal services regulation.

In fact, the United Kingdom is blessed with three legal systems: distinct, proud, global and fair systems. We have the English and Welsh system, the Scottish system and the Northern Irish system. As fellow lawyers will know, each of those systems regards the others as foreign legal systems. England and Wales regards Northern Ireland's system as a foreign legal system, and Scotland regards England and Wales's system as a foreign legal system. A qualified Scottish solicitor does not have automatic regulatory rights to practise in Northern Ireland, because there is already a border down the Irish sea in respect of legal services regulation. Each jurisdiction has its own regulatory body when it comes to the profession of lawyers.

**Gavin Robinson:** As a member of the Northern Irish Bar, and as someone who had the opportunity to study English or Scottish law, I know that there are two substantive forms of law in this land. We have devolution, and there are respected regulatory bodies in every field and every facet in this country. In this place, however, we have one sovereign Parliament. The withdrawal agreement would allow rules and regulations to be set for Northern Ireland in another sovereign Parliament.

**Alberto Costa:** I understand the hon. Gentleman's point, but my point is simply this. He does not have an automatic right to practise as a barrister in England and Wales unless the regulatory body in England and Wales permits a Northern Irish barrister to do so, because there is a border down the Irish sea. Under European Union law as it stands, the Law Society of Northern Ireland is, at least for solicitors, the regulatory body that is recognised as a competent authority. I speak as a Unionist—I have the scars on my back from fighting for the integrity of the United Kingdom when I stood against the SNP candidate in Angus—but there are already instances of different regulatory practices between the different constituent parts of the United Kingdom.

**Gavin Robinson** *rose*—

**Alberto Costa:** I am afraid that I am going to wind up my speech now. Others want to speak.

There is nothing unique in the principle of having slightly different regulatory regimes when it comes to services or goods. I do not want to see the backstop, and I believe that the Prime Minister is right: it is an insurance policy, and I hope that she will bring something back from the EU in the next few days. However, I do not think that that alone should negate a Member's duty to vote for this deal in the interests of the United Kingdom.

In conclusion, if the deal does not go through next week, the people out there are watching us. We are the sovereign Parliament—sovereignty is in our hands—and we must make a decision that calms the febrile atmosphere that still exists out there, and one that allows us to respect the referendum result in a smooth and orderly manner. I believe that the Prime Minister's deal, compromise though it is, allows us to do that.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. There is no formal time limit on Back-Bench speeches at present, but it would be helpful for colleagues to know that speeches of approximately 10 minutes each, and preferably no more, will happily enable everyone who wishes to contribute to do so.

6.10 pm

**Sir David Crausby** (Bolton North East) (Lab): I was actively involved in the "Get Britain Out" campaign in the referendum in 1975. I was on the wrong side of that referendum when I voted to leave, and I was on the wrong side of the next one, 41 years later, when I voted to remain. In the meantime, the British people changed their minds in one direction, and I changed my mind in the other. At the same time, mainstream politics, and much of the media, changed its mind as well as the common market evolved into the European Union. In the 1970s, many Conservatives who supported the common market, which many in Labour saw as a big businessman's club, started to get nervous when the European Union started properly to deliver workers' rights. At the same time, the Labour movement and the trade unions came round to the view that there were advantages in cross-European standards on equal pay, decent working conditions and, most importantly, good standards of health and safety.

The referendums of 1975 and 2016 have much in common. Ted Heath, the then Prime Minister, had taken us into the common market in 1972 without a people's vote, so Harold Wilson promised a referendum after he delivered renegotiated terms. The British people went for it, and he won the 1974 election and the remain result in the consequential referendum. Fast forward to 2015, David Cameron, who was becoming terrified of the threat posed by Nigel Farage and UKIP, must have looked back in history and thought it would be a good idea to imitate Harold Wilson by promising a referendum in the forthcoming election. To be fair, David Cameron was successful in that his policy secured a Conservative majority for the first time since 1992. The first part of Mr Cameron's cunning plan worked, but the difference was that it all went wrong for Mr Cameron because he was no Harold Wilson and was completely unable to persuade the British people to do what was in Britain's best interest.

When critics say that there should be no second referendum, the fact is that we have already had two. In advance of the second vote in 2016, those who wanted to leave the EU claimed that the public did not understand the consequences of the common market when we first voted in 1975 so, as was their right, they argued for another referendum. Now, the same group who want to leave argue that another referendum—a third one—would be an insult to those who voted three years ago, because it would be tantamount to saying that those who voted to leave did not know what they were doing. The truth is that nobody knew what they were doing in 2016—if indeed they did in 1975. Only a few anoraks, mainly in this place, actually thought they knew what they were doing, and I have to say that some of them—unfortunately, scarily—still think they know what they are doing.

If there has been a mistake in this sad saga it is that we should never have had either referendum in the first place, and that is the fault of nobody but us politicians. We are responsible for this self-inflicted chaos, not the electorate, and we have a duty to resolve it.

If I have learned anything from all of this it is that yes/no referendums are not the right way, not even the honest way, to make complex policy in the interests of our country. They have been deviously misused by politicians to win general elections: the promise of a 1975 referendum won the election for Labour, just as the proposed 2016 referendum won the election for the Tories. What we should honourably do in the future is make it clear in our manifestos what we stand for and then put that to the public in a general election. I reluctantly have to say that Ted Heath was right in 1970 when he put in the Conservative manifesto that he would negotiate to take us into the common market and did so. That is what we should resolve to do in the future.

Where do we go from here? In crisis, we should stay calm and do the sensible thing, not the emotional thing: when in a hole, stop digging. As we stand, we have clear choices: a no-deal Brexit, the Prime Minister's no-point Brexit, or no Brexit at all. The choices might well look unpleasant and humiliating, but this is where we are as a country.

For my part, I am not a fan of our present-day EU and its institutions, and there is much that we should change: the common agricultural policy is a disgrace; our fishing communities are treated unfairly; the free movement of labour was introduced too quickly without thought or consideration for low-paid workers; and as for the unelected bureaucrats and their unaccountable budgets, they drive me crazy. But to leave in panic with the Prime Minister's proposed deal while remaining under the yoke of the unelected control of foreign powers is madness; it would be a betrayal, and it in no way honours the will of the British people, even in what was a flawed referendum vote in the first place. We would do better to stay in the EU and give the rest of them hell, particularly the unelected bureaucrats.

To stay where we are is my conclusion to this humiliatingly unsolvable problem, because the fact is that what was promised by the leave campaign in 2016 is not and never was deliverable. We just have to accept in life that there are some things that we cannot do. For my part I always wanted to score the winning goal in a World cup final in the last minute for England at Wembley after extra time, but I have reluctantly come round to the view that it is not going to happen. Likewise to be the first nation to leave the EU in opposition to 27 other countries and get a good deal for Britain at the same time was always, to say the very least, naive.

Some say that the Prime Minister has done her very best and she deserves a measure of sympathy; sorry, but I have none, because my concern lies with the fate of the British people, who have been led by this Government—her Government—into extremely dangerous waters.

The fact is that the Prime Minister has been centrally involved in this circus, all the way through, from the point when David Cameron and his Ministers opportunistically started the process. The Prime Minister should go back to Brussels and make it clear that we will not be bullied. We should leave, if we must, in our own time and on our own terms. And if we need to take up the option to delay or revoke article 50, of course we should do that. We should do whatever is in the interests of the British people, and if that creates uncertainty for our markets and an embarrassment for the Government, so be it.

My dad did not fight his way through the second world war to be humiliated, and I will not be voting for this cap-in-hand deal or any other remotely like it.

6.20 pm

**Ross Thomson** (Aberdeen South) (Con): My views on Brexit are well known. As a prominent campaigner for Scottish Vote Leave, my views were well known by my constituents before I was elected to this House. I respect the fact that colleagues and other MPs have very different views, often genuinely and passionately held, but I hope that, regardless of those deeply held views, we can all agree that we all want what is best for this country.

Did Members know that the number of people who voted leave in Scotland is similar to the populations of Glasgow and Edinburgh—Scotland's two largest cities—combined? Over 1 million Scots voted to leave the EU, yet they are wholly under-represented both in this place and in the Scottish Parliament. There is growing frustration and anger among Scottish leave voters about their being airbrushed out of Scotland's story by the narrative of some that Scotland voted to remain, and that that is Scotland's voice. Well, I will not be airbrushed out of here. *The National* can attack me and bully me as much as it wants, and people can vandalise my office or protest outside it as much as they want, but I will never give up speaking up for the 1 million Scots who voted to leave the European Union.

I am not just a Brexiteer. I am a committed, dedicated and most passionate Unionist first. Our United Kingdom is something that we have built together, and the ties that bind us go beyond the nations to individuals. For over 300 years we have traded together, fought for freedom and peace together, and built our lives together. That is why in the 2014 Scottish independence referendum I campaigned with my head, heart, body and soul to keep this United Kingdom together.

It is because I am a Scottish Unionist that I cannot in good conscience support this withdrawal agreement. I share the concerns of other colleagues and Democratic Unionist party Members that the backstop arrangement would mean hiving off Northern Ireland from the rest of the UK, with Northern Ireland being kept in a separate regulatory regime. Northern Ireland would be left in the single market for goods and agrifoods, while Great Britain leaves, an arrangement that would give Brussels more say over the rules in Northern Ireland than our own United Kingdom Parliament.

The backstop would require that Northern Ireland follows around 300 EU regulations, and if the UK were to diverge from one of them, it would mean a border down the Irish sea. If the EU were to change any regulation and the rest of the UK did not follow, despite having no say over those changes, it would impose a border down the Irish sea. Northern Ireland would be left in full harmonisation with the EU.

I have heard the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and other Ministers say that, to avoid a border down the Irish sea, Great Britain would align with Northern Ireland, but what does that mean in practice? It means that the UK would be tied to EU rules that it would be voiceless to change or oppose. That would not be taking back control. It is the opposite of what people voted for and worse than the current arrangement.



[Ross Thomson]

The prosperity of our Union is dependent on our own internal market and the thousands of jobs that depend on it, so any barriers that are put in the way of that and that affect our ability to trade within the United Kingdom are hugely damaging. I therefore struggle to comprehend how anyone who believes in the integrity of the UK can support a deal that would keep Northern Ireland in the single market. How could anyone want to see new burdens and regulations put in place on trade going east to west across the Irish sea? That would mean that goods manufactured in my constituency of Aberdeen South that move to Belfast would be subject to new customs declarations and the issuing of certificates—new barriers to trade within our own country.

I recognise that the Government have attempted to address these real concerns, and that they have brought forward new measures, but it is with regret that I feel that those measures do not go far enough. What I read today seemed more like a public relations exercise than a real remedy to the problems. The backstop arrangement will be part of an internationally binding treaty, which means that by its very nature it will supersede any domestic legal provisions. Furthermore, the arrangement fails to hold true to what was agreed in the joint report of December 2017. So, to coin a phrase, nothing has changed. The withdrawal agreement does protect the Union—the European Union. Sadly, it does not protect our own.

There are wider concerns about the withdrawal agreement. The backstop means that we could be trapped in the EU indefinitely, with the EU27 having a veto. We would be unable to strike our own trade deal. The advice from the House of Commons EU legislation team is that the backstop customs arrangement would be

“a practical barrier to the UK entering separate trade agreements on goods with third countries”.

As a Scot, I know that one of our greatest exports is Scottish whisky. Its global reputation for quality is absolutely unmatched. The industry has been optimistic about the opportunities presented by Brexit to sell its product into the exciting new and growing markets in the world. The withdrawal agreement recognises and protects more than 3,000 geographical indications. The agreement is not a trade deal—in fact, we cannot even talk trade—but under it, the UK will protect EU GIs, such as Parma ham and feta cheese. That has the potential to prevent us from reaching free trade agreements with the US or India, which are the big markets for Scottish whisky. In trade deals, we need to protect our own GIs, not the EU's. Furthermore, US ambassador Woody Johnson has clearly stated that if the withdrawal agreement is passed, it does not look like it would be possible to agree a bilateral UK-US trade deal.

Finally, we will have to pay £39 billion to the EU. That is £1,400 per family in the UK. Ordinary taxpayers should rightly feel that they are not getting very much for that amount of money. I recognise that in a negotiation one side does not get everything that it wants and the other side nothing. However, nowhere in the agreement can I see a significant concession that the UK has achieved. Unbelievably, the EU appears to have got everything that it wants. It is therefore little wonder that

the EU Commission is claiming that the power lies with it—that its mission is to prove that leaving the EU does not work.

In conclusion, yes, Brexit is an unprecedented challenge for our country, and it requires a national effort to meet that challenge, but Brexit is not an existential threat to our Union. That is why I am horrified that before us is a deal that leaves Northern Ireland behind and treats it like a foreign territory. I will not stand by and allow our United Kingdom to be broken up by the back door. No Unionist can ever accept that. The Conservative and Unionist party cannot accept that. The UK Parliament cannot accept that, which is why MPs must vote down this deal.

6.29 pm

**Mr Pat McFadden** (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Aberdeen South (Ross Thomson) and my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton North East (Sir David Crausby).

After a month's delay, we have to begin by asking: what exactly has been gained by putting this vote off from its scheduled date in December? What has the Prime Minister achieved by her tour of European capitals and her pleas to fellow EU leaders? There may well be some kind of letter, or statement, or clarification issued between now and the vote next Tuesday. No doubt the Government will try to make the most of that if it comes, but after a month's delay, it does not feel as though anything of substance has changed in the proposals before us.

All of us are conscious of our responsibilities. We are conscious of the stakes before us, and also conscious that this issue, almost like no other, cuts across party political lines. After two years of debate on Brexit, we find our country deeply divided, sentiments unleashed that we thought we would not see again in Britain, our politics paralysed by irreconcilable red lines, issues that would normally be top of the political agenda neglected and downgraded because of the huge political energy sucked up—and all the while, the rest of the world look at the UK and wonder what has happened to us.

The Brexit vote in many parts of the country, including in the Black Country, which I have the honour of representing, was driven by a deep sense of loss—a loss of an industrial past that had brought good jobs and prosperity, a loss of a sense of pride and purpose for some of our towns and cities contrasted with a present where, far too often, the jobs are low-paid and insecure and where people and areas feel ignored and abandoned. Any attempt to understand how we got here has to appreciate that sense of loss. The question is how we respond to that sense of loss with leadership that offers some actual answers rather than simply giving people someone or something to blame.

Once the Brexit vote happened, the country had a choice: a complete break with the European Union with the consequence of a hard border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland and huge economic and industrial disruption, or a rule-taking Brexit where we left legally speaking but still obeyed most of the same rules. It was a choice between a Brexit that raised the question of what is the price, and a Brexit that raised the question of what is the point. What was never on the cards was to pretend that we could keep all the current advantages of EU membership and have all the new freedoms promised by the Brexiteers. The failure to

be candid about that is the root cause of the disillusionment with the draft agreement put before us. Even more damning, the failure to be candid about this had nothing to do with putting the national interest first. As always with this issue, year after year, it had far more to do with fear of being candid because of the internal politics of the Conservative party.

The flaws in this agreement are about far more than the Northern Ireland backstop. Let us be clear: the backstop is an insurance policy in case a trade agreement that does the same thing as the backstop is not reached, and that same thing is such a degree of alignment with EU rules that there is no need for a hard border between Northern Ireland and the Republic. That requirement has not been imposed on us; it is reiterated and supported by the Government and signed up to explicitly in the agreement of December 2017. No one has done this to us. It is a commitment that we have made.

Brexit also promised to give the UK control over borders, laws and money, yet the agreement before us does the opposite. In fact, it crystallises the disempowerment of the United Kingdom. We will still be paying in for years to come, but we will no longer have any say over the laws we obey. That does not enhance sovereignty or control. It simply leaves us paying tens of billions of pounds for a worse deal than we have at present. And remember: this is only the withdrawal agreement. Negotiations on the future have not really begun, but we know a couple of things about them. We know that service industries, which form 80% of our economy, are to be thrown under a bus, and we know that the degree of access that we have to EU markets in the future will be closely related to the degree of alignment with the rules that we are prepared to make, even though we will no longer have a say over them.

On the economics, the Government have not even tried to deny that the proposal will make the country poorer compared to our current arrangements. Every study of every scenario, including the Government's own, has admitted that. Never before—certainly not in peacetime—have a Government brought forth a proposition that they admit will make the country poorer and then said that we must proceed at all costs. Perhaps that is why this deal seems to satisfy neither leavers nor remainers.

This deal has done one great service to us. It has shown us how much worse the proposed arrangement is compared with the deal that we have now—whereby we are rule makers, not rule takers, usually to the significant advantage of our world-leading industries; there is no backstop or hard border between Northern Ireland and the Republic; and there is no interference in the multinational supply chains on which our industries depend.

The Government's argument does not really dispute that. They know that is true, and they have stopped really arguing for the withdrawal agreement on its merits. Instead, they are really desperate for the transition period, the singular advantage of which is that it is not really Brexit; it is staying in the European Union, except for the singular disadvantage of it, which is that we are absenting ourselves from the decision-making forums where the rules that we will obey are decided. The only argument that Ministers have left is that this agreement is better than the total chaos of no deal, but that is a humiliating choice for the country.

**Alex Sobel** (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): My right hon. Friend is making an eloquent speech, and he has made the excellent point that the deal we have now is the best deal available. But if we are to take leadership on this, and if we are to remain in the European family, should we not look at reforming the European Union? The message from the British people is clearly that the European Union is not perfect as it is now, otherwise we would not have had the result that we did, and we should be striding forward to try to reform the European Union if we are to remain.

**Mr McFadden:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and it is significant that a number of other countries would agree with us on that, even in the two years since the vote took place.

As I said, this is a humiliating choice for our country. We are the fifth biggest economy in the world, a major defence and security power, and one of the few countries in the world with global cultural reach, but we are being told by our Government that we have to accept a deal that they admit and know makes us weaker and poorer, because the only alternative to it is economic carnage. That is no choice for the country to have to make. We are also told that we have to vote for the deal because people are fed up talking about Brexit. The argument goes, "Just get on with it. Get it over with", but that is both irresponsible and an illusion. It is irresponsible, because boredom is no basis on which to take a decision as serious as this about the future of the country. We should not be told that we have to resign ourselves to the disempowerment of the United Kingdom under the illusion that if we do so we can then simply change the subject.

**Mr Kevan Jones** (North Durham) (Lab): My right hon. Friend made reference to the history of the internal politics of the Tory party leading this agenda. Is he also clear that we are not sure what type of Brexit we would actually end up with? The potential is that we will now have several years of just more of the Tory infighting that we have had over the past decades.

**Mr McFadden:** It is more than a potential—it is a racing certainty. It is an illusion to think that this argument is finished on 30 March if we agree this withdrawal agreement—that is simply not the case. That is precisely because, as my hon. Friend indicated, the political declaration leaves the fundamental questions unanswered. The only thing it makes clear is that our market access will depend on the extent to which we agree to common rules. The issues of economics and the border that create the dilemma between a "what's the point Brexit?" and a "what's the price Brexit?" go on and on into the future. They are unresolved, and that will continue. That is not the fault of the civil service or because of some establishment plot—it is the fault of Brexit itself and the failure to level with the country about the choices it would involve. What we have learned, in the end, is that we could not have our cake and eat it—not because someone was mean to us or conspired to steal our prize, but because this was always a false promise.

I am clear that the sense of loss that drove the Brexit vote is real. The need for a new plan to offer a better chance in life to working-class communities is urgent, but endorsing a plan that makes our country poorer and weaker makes it more difficult, not less, to answer

[Mr McFadden]

the genuine grievances felt in parts of our country. The first step to forming a new plan that offers real answers is to cast off the absurd victim complex that tries to portray our country as some kind of colony of the European Union. That is not true, it never was true, and we have wielded far more influence, with far more success, than that nationalist myth would ever allow for.

It is within our power to address many of the causes of Brexit without endorsing the self-harm contained in the proposals before us—or, indeed, participating in the dishonesty that tells working-class communities that their problems would all be resolved if only we could reduce immigration. Far too much of the debate about immigration has treated it as a danger to be feared rather than a fact of the modern world. Of course we should have a system with rules, but there is no rewind button to a country and a world that is not coming back. Every developed economy, including ours, will be more diverse in the future than in the past.

If the Government win the vote next week, we proceed on that basis, but if not, what then? In recent days, Parliament has exerted its will to take more control over this process. I simply say to Ministers that it is unacceptable to say that if we do not endorse this proposal, the only proposal is to drive the country towards no deal. Parliament must be allowed to express its view on the alternatives that are there, including extending article 50, the legal judgment that has shown that we can revoke article 50 if we wish, and the option of going back to the people themselves. These options must be allowed to be put before Parliament, they must be allowed to be voted on, and the Government must stop trying to drive Parliament into a choice between the proposals before us and the disaster that leaving without a deal would represent.

6.43 pm

**Julian Knight** (Solihull) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden), who is as erudite as ever.

Like many colleagues—perhaps I am being a little glib here to a certain extent—I did not actually come into politics to bang on about Europe. I am a social liberal and economically of the right—dry as a bone, in many respects. I wanted my political life to be, effectively, advancing that twin track of social liberalism and economic free marketarianism. However, we are where we are.

Before I was first elected in 2015, I knocked on about 30,000 doors during the two and a half years of the campaign, and I have to say that in most instances I found that Europe was probably about No. 10 on the list of issues raised on the doorstep. Much higher on the list was immigration and its conflation with Europe, which the right hon. Member for Wolverhampton South East spoke about. During the referendum campaign I visited Solihull College, and I was struck by the fact that many of the young students talked about wages and the lack of housing, and they equated that with EU migration in effect. That is one of the key reasons why so many people—a uniquely high number—in the council estates in the north of Solihull came out to vote.

Serving as an elected representative comes with acute responsibilities. I fundamentally believe that we have a duty to honour the clear commitments made by this House before the vote and after it and to deliver Britain's

departure from the European Union. I am especially wary of any effort to put the question to a second referendum. Not only would there be serious practical difficulties in any such effort—not least deciding on the question and simply completing the legislative work needed even to hold one—but it would pose a real problem for our democracy. There is no avoiding the fact that it would stand in a dishonourable tradition of Brussels taking questions back to the voters until it gets the answers it wants, nor that the Government and both the major parties have been quite clear that they would deliver on the result of the 2016 referendum. It may be tempting at this moment in the spotlight to clasp tight the political comfort blanket of a second referendum, but it is a fool's path for this democracy and this country. It sends us further down the rabbit hole.

We should remember that the EU has evolved since we voted leave. The hon. Member for Leeds North West (Alex Sobel) mentioned the need for change from within, and I argued about that at the time of the referendum. In Britain's absence, the push towards a full federalist agenda has accelerated and is very notable. That may well be a good thing for the EU in the long run, but it highlights that we want increasingly different things. We have held it together over many years, but those fissures are now widening. Even if we were to somehow get back into the EU by a second referendum or at a later stage, the proposition would be very different from today. Backtracking on the referendum would not sell the British people on the euro or the rest of the federal project, and the tensions that led to the referendum would not only continue but deepen further in the years ahead.

As for the withdrawal agreement, I share the view of the Attorney General that while it might not be perfect, it is temporary. I am deeply concerned by the backstop, both because of its implications for our practical sovereignty and because of its special treatment of Northern Ireland. However, on reflection, I believe that it is sufficiently uncomfortable for the EU that the EU will not wish to trap us in it indefinitely, and article 50 cannot be taken as a basis for a lasting future relationship.

I also need to think about what is best for my constituency. Solihull is a proud exporting town with a real global footprint, home to not only great British brands such as Jaguar Land Rover but numerous manufacturers and service providers that rely on frictionless access to European markets. As the MP for a town that enjoys a visible goods trade surplus with the EU, it is my responsibility to support a Brexit that meets the needs of Solihull's employers and exporters. This deal, while not perfect, does at least smooth our departure and avoid severe economic disruption in March.

Some Members are convinced by the warnings of so-called "Project Fear", and it is true that some of the wilder predictions about the consequences of a leave vote have proven far too pessimistic over the last couple of years. However, it would be rash to simply disregard the expertise of the likes of the Bank of England. Those models have a logical basis, and as someone who has been involved in economics and economic theory in the past, I think it is foolhardy to go on this adventure on a wing and a prayer without understanding or at least taking account of the experts whom we fund to supply us with this information. Even if those models are not a certain outcome, they are a real risk to jobs and businesses



across the country owing to the inevitable economic dislocation that may last only a few weeks or months but could last years.

I aspire to a future relationship based on a free trade deal with the EU and an ambitious drive to grow our links with the rising economies of Africa, Asia and Latin America, but if we have to take a little longer to get there in order to protect the livelihoods of my constituents, I am prepared to do that. Of course, Labour Members insist that such compromise is unnecessary, and that if only they were in power, they would deliver a deal that avoided all the difficult trade-offs that feature in real negotiations. Their so-called six tests are a mere wishlist. It is extremely reckless for self-styled moderates to risk Britain crashing out of the EU by voting against a deal on the orders of leaders who see only an opportunity for political gain in the chaos that that would unleash.

The right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) made a notable and wide-ranging speech earlier. It was incredibly thoughtful, and a prime example of the lawyer's art. It was also a history lesson, and he danced on the head of a pin. Unfortunately, he did not take an intervention from me, despite my requests. Had he done so, I would have told him that the 9,000 car workers in my constituency—as well as those in the west midlands manufacturing supply chain, which has delivered the second biggest growth of anywhere in the UK over the past five years—and even the unions in those companies all want a withdrawal agreement. They want an orderly exit from the EU, and that should be front and centre in our minds. It should also be on the minds of Labour Members, and I know that it is for many of them.

I want to address my final comments to my own colleagues. Let us deliver Brexit. Let us leave the EU. Let us not, like Samson, bring the temple crashing down around us. Purity is never a fully achieved state beyond the womb, so let us compromise and work together right now to deliver on the referendum promise. Let us protect jobs and let us move forward, because if we do not, we are in serious danger of creating fissures in this country so deep that we will never be able to close them.

6.52 pm

**Chris Elmore** (Ogmore) (Lab): I am in no doubt that this is the most serious matter I am ever likely to vote on while serving in this House. It is crystal clear from the speeches that we have heard from hon. and right hon. Members right across the House, before and after the Christmas break, that the Prime Minister's Brexit deal does not command a majority in the House. Furthermore, I do not believe that it commands a majority of support in the country. Today I want to lay out exactly why I cannot in all good conscience vote for this deal. The bottom line is this: I will not vote for my constituents to become poorer. I became an MP—as I am sure the majority of Members did—to improve the lives of all those living and working in my constituency. To vote for a proposal that would fundamentally undermine that notion would be a dereliction of my duty to my constituents as their Member of Parliament.

I fully appreciate that the Prime Minister has an incredibly difficult task to fulfil. There is no easy way to reconcile the 52% with the 48% while also reaching an

agreement that the EU27 and this House can agree on. Sadly, however, the Prime Minister has left us facing the worst of both worlds. We would be outside the European Union and economically weakened, but having to accept EU rules on which we would have little or no say. This deal does not please the 52% or the 48%. In truth, it seems to please no one at all.

There is little point in revisiting the events of the past three years, but I feel it is important to outline how I came to this position. I was not a Member of this House when the decision was taken to hold the referendum in 2016. Indeed, I was first elected only 49 days before the referendum took place. It goes without saying that I think David Cameron's decision to gamble the future of our country and the stability of our Union to settle an age-old row within the Conservative party was an act that was as shameful as it was reckless. Following the referendum, I respected the result of the vote by going through the Division Lobby to trigger article 50. For me, that was a turning point. At that point, the Government could have sought real cross-party consensus among Members from all parts of the United Kingdom on negotiating a way forward. Instead, they have sought to subvert this House and the views of the devolved Administrations in Wales and Scotland at every turn.

Then of course we had the 2017 general election, when the Prime Minister, now infamously, said to us, "nothing has changed". That may have been as true of the cruel austerity this Government have inflicted and continue to inflict on our communities as it has been of this Brexit deal. However, something did change at this point, which was that the British public simply said no: "No, we're not going to give you a majority so you can bulldoze your hard Brexit through. You need to work together in the name of the national interest to find ways forward that will enable our country to prosper."

The Prime Minister could have worked with my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) to ensure the deal answered Labour's six fundamental tests. These tests were indeed a high bar to set, but that is for a simple reason: Labour Members are not interested in securing a deal at any cost. Instead, we are committed to ensuring that our constituents in every corner of the United Kingdom, including my constituents, will be better off in the future than they are today.

More than 18 months on, in one regard at least clearly nothing has changed. The Prime Minister remains hellbent on selling this botched deal, which neither honours the referendum result nor answers the concerns of the 48% of people who voted to remain. Leading British entrepreneur and star of "Dragons' Den" Deborah Meaden recently said, and this struck a chord with me:

"How did we end up here? I warn against this when doing deals all the time. Ending up accepting a position you would never have accepted at the start simply because you are intent on completing the deal".

This comparison is a powerful one.

I would never be one to second-guess the electorate, but Members across the House have to ask themselves: if this deal and all its implications had been presented as the official leave campaign back in 2016, can they be confident we would still have had the same result? I do not think we would have, but that is what we are being asked to vote on. We are being asked to vote for something that supposedly honours the referendum result.

[Chris Elmore]

When we delve deeper and take a look at the impact this would have on people across my constituency, it becomes clear that this is not a situation I can accept on their behalf. Let us take manufacturing, which plays a key role in my constituency and across Wales, with 143,000 people employed by the manufacturing industry in Wales alone. Whether it is insulation, toilet paper or parachutes, they are all made in my Ogmores constituency. The automotive sector is another large employer in my constituency. Those involved have repeatedly shared that their operations have already suffered as a result of uncertainty about future trading arrangements. I have also spoken to many farmers in my constituency, and they are worried about the future of their exports, with 90% of Welsh lamb currently being exported to countries in the EU. I fail to see how this withdrawal agreement provides any certainty for people living in Maesteg, Llanharan, Pencoed or for anyone else in my constituency that the industries that provide their income will have the certainty they need.

The political declaration is nothing short of a wishlist, which binds us into years of further wrangling, using resources that we could divert to investing in the Welsh economy. Investing in projects such as the Swansea Bay tidal lagoon, the long-awaited rail electrification beyond Cardiff and, indeed, all the thousands of projects across Wales that are supported by EU funding would be a far better use of our time and money and would be of far greater benefit to the people of Wales than the further uncertainty we have now been promised by this Government.

Indeed, we still have not had answers from Ministers about what will happen after 2022 to the £600 million of EU funding that supports businesses and projects across Wales to thrive. I invite Ministers to explain to the House today what will happen to this funding. If they fail to do so, they simply cannot argue that my constituents and Wales as a whole will be better off after Brexit. But, of course, we have not actually had any Ministers stating that the UK will be better off under this deal. The Government of the day are trying to sleepwalk us into a situation where we will be worse off and, to use the famous phrase, we will not be taking back control.

I know that 52% voted leave and 48% voted remain in 2016, but I can tell all Members another certainty about the so-called will of the people: not one of the 52% or the 48% voted for this. In my constituency—whether in relation to the nearby automotive industry, the steel industry, the public sector, the agricultural industry, shop workers, our pensioners or, might I add, our young people, who have had no say in all of this—I have yet to be presented with an argument from any single Government Minister that gives me confidence that this deal will make them better off or improve their lives.

Any Member, including your good self, Mr Speaker, will know that I am one of the Members who is a fan of procedure in this House and, indeed, of our unwritten constitution. I proudly sit, perhaps nerdily, on the Procedure Committee. If the Prime Minister is unable to get this deal through Parliament on Tuesday, it is constitutionally right that there should be a general election to let the country decide how Parliament and the country itself moves forward. If a Government—any Government through history—cannot command a majority in this House on their flagship piece of legislation, they must fall.

However, if we are unable to achieve that because of another of David Cameron's ridiculous legacies, it is only right that with Parliament in deadlock, we put the question back to the people and let them decide. Parliament is sovereign, but we answer to the people. If we are unable to break the logjam, there remains no option but to let the public across all the nations that make up our great United Kingdom have a say.

Throughout this process, the Government have treated this House with contempt, they have treated the devolved Administrations with contempt and, above all, they have treated the communities we all represent across the United Kingdom with contempt. The Prime Minister's delay before Christmas, which stopped Members like me speaking on the day the withdrawal debate was withdrawn, treated me with contempt. Opposition Members are sick of the nonsense from the Government.

I worry about what is happening in this country, because of the division, insecurity and uncertainty that members of the Government and the Prime Minister are placing on the British people. We have seen that just this week. The change in political discourse that we have seen over recent years is, of course, not unique to the United Kingdom. From the election of President Trump to the rise of the far right across Europe and the continuing threats to peace around the world, we are living through extraordinary times. Such times call for extraordinary solutions and a fundamental rethink of how we do things.

I am not for one minute saying that there is a silver bullet answer to the problems we face as a society, but I am 100% confident in saying that this deal does not even provide the first stepping stone towards bringing our country together. I know that members of the Government continue to parrot the line that we still wish to be an outward-looking nation, but as with the line about the "country that works for everyone", I have a grave fear that the reality behind the rhetoric will be as apparent as the Government's majority in this House.

If this deal or a similar fudge is allowed to pass through this Parliament, I believe that years from now we will look back and ask ourselves a very simple question: was it worth it? I understand that many Members across the House will have grappled—and still will be grappling—with this question. To those who are still wavering, I say only this: until we can be sure that any deal will make our constituents better off and ensure that the next generation is more prosperous than the one that preceded it, we have a democratic duty to oppose it.

During his first speech to the House, Vernon Hartshorn, Ogmores' first Labour MP who was elected just over 100 years ago, was told by another Member to "go back to Glamorgan" and talk to the miners he was standing up for in his speech. I am sure that Mr Hartshorn took this somewhat flippant advice on the chin. Indeed, he did just that and throughout his time in office continued to fight for the communities I now proudly represent and for the industries that support them. In voting against this deal more than 100 years on, I simply seek to do the same.

7.2 pm

**Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con):** It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Ogmores (Chris Elmore). We have one thing in common, in that I was also due to

speak on the day the Government pulled the debate. I welcome the opportunity that all Members now have to put their views on the withdrawal agreement on the record in the House of Commons. I strongly disagreed with the Government's decision not to proceed with the debate in early December. It seems that the only progress that has been made since is the progress towards the Brexit date. In respect of the deal, sadly nothing has changed.

I approach this debate as someone who voted remain, but I admit that I was a reluctant remainer. I was unsure what the future would hold if we left the European Union, but as someone from a farming background I saw many problems within the farming industry that were caused by the European Union. I did vote remain in 2016, but I am a democrat and I respect the decision taken by the country.

The Moray constituency, which I represent, was split right down the middle. After more than 48,000 votes were cast, just 122 separated leave and remain. I am acutely aware that no matter how I vote in this place, I will be unable to please all my constituents. Indeed, a combination of my strongest supporters and my fiercest critics will, for a combination of reasons, either wholeheartedly agree or disagree with how I ultimately vote. That is a situation that I and many others right hon. and hon. Members are in.

I also want to say at this point that I commend the Prime Minister for everything she has tried to do to achieve the deal. With the work she has put in, no one can question her determination and drive to ensure that there was a deal on the table. At every point in the process challenges were put in place. There are many aspects of the deal that I support, but there are others that I do not. In this debate, I will focus on the two key areas where I still have the most significant concerns.

The first surrounds the future of our fishing industry. While the number of fishing boats and active crews in Moray is just a fraction of what it once was, there are many people and many communities who still feel extremely strongly about this industry and are passionate in their feelings. I promised, at the election that brought me here and since then, that I could not support a deal that did not deliver for our fishing industry. I maintain that point of view.

I would say, however, that I fully understand why many of my Scottish Conservative colleagues feel they can support the deal with regard to fishing. The ambiguity in the wording suggests that we can become an independent coastal state with control over our waters and over who fishes what, where and when. Unfortunately, that same ambiguity in the wording allows many in the EU to feel they have the opportunity to maintain or even increase their access to UK waters going forward. I welcome the political declaration and what it has to say about the future of fishing, and indeed the Prime Minister's own very strong stance on the issue, but I have to reconcile that with my own belief that if we as MPs vote with the Government next week, we will be rubber-stamping the deal with no guarantee that the promises in the political declaration will ever be achieved or delivered.

At this point, I would like to make mention of the Scottish National party, as we so often do. There are four of its Members here today. I have made my views clear—*[Interruption.]* I am just saying that I thought four was a good number for the SNP to have in the Chamber.

I have made very clear my views on the future of the fishing industry and why I cannot support the deal because of them. It is rank hypocrisy, however, to hear from the SNP that they would stand up for the fishing industry. These are the same SNP Members who say they want Scotland to go back into the common fisheries policy as an independent country. They cannot claim to hate the CFP and then say they will go back in and reform it.

**Stephen Gethins** *rose*—

**Douglas Ross:** I will definitely give way to the hon. Gentleman in a second, but I will do what he did—he gave way to me earlier on the proviso that I would answer his questions, so perhaps he will answer my question if I give way to him. How would the SNP reform the common fisheries policy, and how successful have any other reforms of the CFP been to date?

**Stephen Gethins:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way. I will slightly differ from him in that I will answer his question, while he did not answer mine. I urge him to read the Fisheries Jurisdiction Bill, which would have taken us out of the CFP while retaining our place in the EU and which his party rejected. Now can he tell me: how does our fishing community get the fabulous produce that is produced in his constituency and mine to the markets they need to get to if we are outside the customs union?

**Douglas Ross:** Mr Speaker, I have to be very careful with my language. I do not want to accuse the hon. Gentleman of misleading Parliament, but he did say, when he accepted my invitation to intervene on me, that he would answer my question and he has singly failed to do that. How would the SNP reform the common fisheries policy if we were an independent nation away from the United Kingdom trying to get back into the European Union? Yet again, SNP Members cannot answer that question, so they should not go back to fishing communities in Moray and across Scotland and say they would stand up for our fishing industry. It is very clear that they would not. There was a very clear decision in many coastal communities: they voted to leave the European Union because of the common fisheries policy. It is very clear that the only party that would take them back into it is the SNP.

**Ross Thomson:** Does my hon. Friend agree that even Scottish Government analysis shows that one of the biggest winners from Brexit will be the Scottish fishing industry? It is the stated policy of the Scottish Government to stop Brexit, which would throw that sea of opportunity away.

**Douglas Ross:** I agree with my hon. Friend. That evidence was given to the Scottish Affairs Committee in the House of Commons only today. The Scottish Government produced their own report showing the thousands of jobs that will come to the Scottish fishing industry and the huge boon that that will be to our economy.

The second issue that causes me concern, as a proud Scot in the United Kingdom, is the future of our Union. Many right hon. and hon. Members have passionately outlined their concerns about the backstop, and I echo those fears. We hear that the backstop will be bad for both the UK and the European Union so



[Douglas Ross]

neither side will want to enter into it. As an alternative, some have suggested extending the implementation period. Indeed, the Prime Minister mentioned that at Prime Minister's questions today, and the Secretary of State also said in his opening remarks that the Government now support the proposal for MPs to vote on either extending the implementation period or entering the backstop. For me, however, neither of those options is suitable, because extending the implementation period would cause as many problems as the backstop itself. We would remain tied to the European Union and, for example, the common fisheries policy for longer, abiding by their rules while having absolutely no influence over the policies.

On the backstop, I have found ambiguity where I wanted certainty. Article 132 of the withdrawal agreement allows for a one-off extension of the transition period "for up to one or two years."

That is very particular wording. Why not a one-off extension for up to a maximum of 24 months? I have sought Government legal advice and the opinion of several Cabinet members, and they are also unable to agree. Some believe "up to" means that it could be a few months, while others believe it means up to one full year or up to two full years because any extension by the EU would have to run for a full year's budget. We do not have clarity on that important issue, which the Government are now offering as a solution to concerns over the backstop.

I also note what has been said today about a possible veto for Stormont, but that does not address all the issues with the backstop. Today of all days—the second anniversary of the Assembly collapsing in Northern Ireland—the proposal seems to have been rejected by the DUP, the Ulster Unionist party and Sinn Féin, so it seems to be struggling to garner support anywhere.

**David Simpson** (Upper Bann) (DUP): I assume that the hon. Gentleman understands how seriously my party takes the backstop with regard to Northern Ireland—I am glad he has mentioned it. He said that he was a reluctant remain voter. Has he now had a road to Damascus experience with regard to Brexit?

**Douglas Ross:** If the hon. Gentleman listens for another 90 seconds, he will be able to decide whether I have trod that road.

After weeks of wrestling with my concerns about the agreement and seeking assurances over the issues I have highlighted, I have not been able to resolve them. I would like to support the Prime Minister and my Government, but I must also stand up for those who elect me. This is not a decision I have reached quickly or easily, and I am sure that, ultimately, history will judge each and every MP on how we vote and decide whether we got it right or wrong. In doing so, however, history will have the benefit of hindsight—something none of us is blessed with.

My decision comes down to this: my overarching belief that I am elected to this place to be Moray's voice in Westminster, and not Westminster's voice in Moray. I have to put my constituents and my constituency ahead of my party and my Government. It is for that reason, Mr Speaker, that when this debate concludes and you

call the Division on the withdrawal agreement, it will be with a heavy heart but a clear conscience that I will not be able to support the Government and I will vote against this agreement.

7.13 pm

**Jo Swinson** (East Dunbartonshire) (LD): Two and a half years ago the Prime Minister stood on the steps of Downing Street and promised to tackle society's burning injustices. I for one was glad to hear that speech, and I hoped that it would mark a real change in direction from this Government.

We could debate endlessly the reasons why people voted to leave the European Union, and of course they were varied. For many, however, there was a feeling that the system is broken, that working hard is no guarantee of getting on, and a fear that their children will end up worse off than they are, earning less, finding it harder to secure a decent home. People, rightly and understandably, feel angry about that. However, instead of the radical changes needed to our economy and society, the energy and attention of our Government have been sucked into the black hole of Brexit. Nothing has changed for those the Prime Minister vowed to help. Those injustices still fuel discontent. We have an underfunded universal credit system bringing misery to thousands. We are in the midst of a housing crisis in which many children are living in heartbreaking conditions and vulnerable people are sleeping on our streets—and dying on them, too. None of that will be resolved by leaving the EU. None of that will be resolved by the Prime Minister's Brexit deal.

The leave campaign said we would take back control, but to many of my constituents—to the mother of two who contacted me because she was worried about her family's security after the Prime Minister called her husband a "queue jumper"; to the scientist concerned about jobs in Glasgow once the life sciences industry loses vital European funding; and to the businesses that do not even know on what terms they will be able to sell to our biggest trading partner in three months' time—it feels like we are doing the very opposite.

Five years ago, I fought passionately to keep Scotland in the United Kingdom. Together, we are stronger. Our economy is more successful and our influence is greater. We can pool risks. Our businesses benefit from selling to a larger market, without barriers. We share values. We share our history. We share a desire for our loved ones in different parts of the country to be able to live, work and travel where they want with ease. I am certain that Scotland's best future is in the United Kingdom, and for the same reasons I believe the United Kingdom's interests are best served within the European Union.

In 2017, the people of East Dunbartonshire elected me to fight for Scotland's position in the UK and for the United Kingdom's position in the EU. That is the manifesto I stood on. The Liberal Democrats have led the fight for a people's vote so we keep the benefits of our EU membership and remain a leading and influential member of the world's most successful economic and political bloc. I am delighted that so many MPs from all parties are coming together and working beyond party lines for the public to have the final say on a deal, with the option of keeping our EU membership.

**Deidre Brock** (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): At the end of the day, if push came to shove—if we came to a crunch—and there was a choice only between Scotland remaining in the UK and Scotland remaining in Europe, which would the hon. Lady choose?

**Jo Swinson:** We are trying to unpick a Union we have been in for 40 years. Look at the chaos that is causing. The last thing we need is the chaos of trying to unpick a Union of 300 years. If this experience tells us anything, it is how disastrous that would be.

We need a people's vote. Two and a half years on, we know that leaving the European Union will not make us richer. It will not bring in £350 million a week for the NHS, despite what that bus said, and it will not be the "easiest trade deal in human history,"

despite what the International Trade Secretary said. Those were fantasies of the leave campaign. Brexit has become a national embarrassment. It will make us poorer, it will hurt our NHS and it will weaken our Union.

Perhaps strangely, I have recently found myself agreeing with both the former Brexit Secretary, the right hon. Member for Esher and Walton (Dominic Raab), and the Prime Minister. The right hon. Gentleman is right that the Prime Minister's deal is worse than staying in the EU—we would be bound by the rules but lose our say over them—but the Prime Minister is right that this is the best Brexit on offer.

I despair at the arrogance of those, whether they sit on the Conservative Benches or the Labour Front Bench, who claim that they could negotiate a better deal. They live in the land of make-believe. Here in the real world, there are no magic beans to put food on the table and there are no pots of gold at the end of the rainbow. Even my five-year-old could tell them that unicorns are not real. And, frankly, I am horrified by those who are so cavalier that they countenance no deal as a serious option. How lovely it must be to live in an ivory tower, claiming French residency or setting up investment funds in Dublin as the poorest people in society pay the price for an ideological Brexit.

Quite simply, there is no deal that will ever be as good as being members of the European Union; there is no Brexit that works for the whole United Kingdom; there is no Brexit that keeps our economy strong and jobs safe; there is no Brexit that gives us first-class public services. We need a way out of this mess. We should give people the chance to choose, in full knowledge of the Brexit deal on offer, what future they want for their children. I urge the House to vote down this deal and call for a people's vote.

7.20 pm

**Paul Masterton** (East Renfrewshire) (Con): It is a pleasure to be called, Mr Speaker. As a Member who was denied the opportunity to speak first time around, I am pleased finally to get the opportunity to speak up and set out my views on this important issue.

On the withdrawal agreement itself, I wish to focus on my main area of concern, which, unsurprisingly, is the backstop. There is no question but that the backstop has the potential to build a regulatory border in the Irish sea beyond that which already exists, although I accept that it would be in areas where divergence is

fairly unlikely, such as industrial goods standards. While I am satisfied that the backstop will not create any new material differences between Great Britain and Northern Ireland on day one, it clearly provides a mechanism for those differences to appear and deepen over time. With no guarantee as to how long the backstop will operate, we will be in a constant political battle between loosening ties with the EU—and with it Northern Ireland—and keeping our country aligned and so failing to take back control in a variety of areas. Given that none of us can see into the future, I am concerned that the backstop will not future proof the integrity of the Union in the long term, if we find ourselves using it for more than a couple of years.

All these issues have been long rehearsed, so I will not dwell on them further, but the fact is that without a backstop there is no deal, and if there is no deal, there is no transition period. That is why I strongly welcome the paper the Government released today, which is probably the most explicitly Unionist statement by a UK Government in at least a couple of decades. I was grateful primarily because of the request I have made of numerous Secretaries of State that the Government continue to work at ensuring a role for the Northern Irish Assembly—and Executive, if it is sitting—as was included in paragraph 50 of the December joint report, in order to ensure regulatory divergence has an element of consent. There are areas, of course, where Northern Ireland would wish to follow new EU rules—for example, to protect the single energy market—but there will be an issue if that is imposed over the heads of the politicians and institutions of Northern Ireland, particularly where it creates new barriers or materially increases an existing barrier with Great Britain. I wonder, however, if the commitment to domestic legislation could be strengthened and whether there is some mechanism by which it could be incorporated into the withdrawal agreement to give the greater certainty that the DUP and the Ulster Unionist party are looking for.

Moving on to the political declaration, Opposition Members are right: it is thin and does not provide a clear pathway to what our future relationship will look like. Instead, it provides a spectrum of opportunities for where we could end up. It seems to point in a direction slightly looser than the Chequers deal, which was a proposal I was quite comfortable with when it was settled on. Ultimately, it kicks the can down the road on all the major issues until the middle of 2020.

We have to be prepared for months of further argument on all these points domestically before we even get to the EU negotiating table, and those negotiations will be tough. I hope the Government have learned some lessons from this first phase of negotiations in terms of how they organise themselves and how they construct a negotiating position and work better with the various groupings in this Parliament so that when they properly start negotiating the second phase, they do so with a strong domestic mandate. That is the only way we will get a meaningful and lasting agreement with the EU that works.

I believe that the Prime Minister has reached the best deal that could have been achieved within the parameters set out in the negotiations. It is a compromise. It is not the deal that I wanted, but its acceptance would bring some certainty and allow us to move forward. It achieves many of the things that the EU said were not on

[Paul Masterton]

the table. It is a bespoke arrangement that maintains industrial tariffs at zero and keeps us closely aligned but without the jurisdiction of the ECJ. Cherries have been picked and cake has certainly been eaten.

I come back to the fundamental point that it is risk to vote down the deal in the hope that something better will materialise. My inbox is full of emails from constituents asking me to vote down the deal but in order to get a range of different outcomes, and they cannot all get what they want. For me, this is not about rolling the dice. It is not about whether I or my constituents who use 38 Degrees can afford for the gamble not to come off and to end up somewhere worse. I have to make this call in the interests of the 90,000 people of East Renfrewshire, where there are wildly different views and personal circumstances. Many of my constituents simply cannot afford for this not to work out. If I were to vote against the deal, and if no other magical solution arrived and we crashed out in March, I would feel wholly responsible for the economic impact on families and communities in my constituency that would result. I fully appreciate the range of views across the House, but I do not personally feel that I could be complicit in that outcome, and I will therefore support the deal on Tuesday.

A vote against the deal is not a vote to stop Brexit—if it were, dozens of my colleagues would not be preparing to bring it down—but, facing all the facts, I think that it seems likely to be rejected. Let me repeat a statement that I have always made, and which, indeed, I made at my selection meeting in 2017: I will not support a no-deal Brexit. In East Renfrewshire, 75% voted to remain in the European Union. Mine is the highest remain-voting seat held by a Conservative. My election was not the result of a promise in our manifesto to deliver Brexit but the result of a promise to protect the Union, and the greatest threat of the Union is a chaotic no-deal Brexit.

If the deal is voted down, I will work with colleagues on both sides of the House to put in place an achievable plan B. I will continue to argue for my preferred alternative of remaining in the European economic area as a member of the European Free Trade Association, with a bespoke customs protocol to protect the position in Northern Ireland. I will argue for a rejection of the political institutions of the EU but a retention of the principles at the heart of why we joined: a Common Market 2.0. We will need the withdrawal agreement for that, but I make a commitment to my constituents to re-evaluate my position with a genuinely open mind.

I urge the Prime Minister, if the deal is defeated, to announce immediately that there will be indicative votes on a series of options, on a free vote, so that we can properly test the mood of the House. In the weeks ahead, I will vote in the manner that secures a sensible and orderly exit from the European Union, and sets us on a pathway to a future relationship that works for East Renfrewshire and every part of our United Kingdom. I will vote—not just on Tuesday, but in every vote thereafter—in the manner that I consider to be in the best interests of this great nation. Ultimately, that is the only way I shall be able to go home from this place and look my constituents, and my children, in the eye, knowing that I did what I felt was right for them and their futures.

There are many Conservative Members who, like me, voted to remain but accept, admittedly reluctantly and with some misgivings, that we are leaving the European Union. We have compromised at every stage of the process to try to find a way to make this work, and the deal before us is as far as I am prepared to go. If some of my colleagues want to blow this up in pursuit of an ideologically purist fantasy, fine—go ahead—but I am done. My patience and good will will be gone, along with the patience and good will of many other Conservative Members.

Would it not be something if, when the history books are written, it emerged that it was owing to the arrogance and belligerence of the hard-line Brexiteers in refusing to compromise that, rather than ending up with this imperfect Brexit, they ended up with no Brexit at all?

7.27 pm

**Nick Smith** (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for East Renfrewshire (Paul Masterton), and it is an honour to speak in probably the most important debate that has taken place during my time in the House.

Given that there is less than three months before we leave the European Union, we urgently need a good Brexit deal. What we have seen, however, is the Health Secretary almost boasting about buying thousands of extra fridges in which to store vital medicines in case we crash out of the European Union in March. How on earth has it come to this? We have ended up here because of the Government's catastrophic failure to negotiate a good deal in good time. This is a Government who had no real idea what they wanted, a Government who have spent more than two years negotiating with their own Back Benchers, and a Government who have tried to sideline Parliament at every turn.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) has set out the key failings of this deal at length, so I will restate our Labour view very briefly. The deal does not meet our tests, and it certainly does not work for our country. I have always set one key test for any Brexit deal: does it give people in Blaenau Gwent security about their future after the UK has left the EU? This deal fails to do that, mainly because it is bad for trade and jobs. Crucially, it does not guarantee tariff or barrier-free access to European markets for our businesses.

Our economy has millions of moving parts. Many manufacturing industries rely on just-in-time supply chains, with daily deliveries of key components. A no-deal Brexit would cause chaos, particularly for our automotive, farming and food processing sectors. Around 3 million jobs across the UK depend on trade with the EU—100,000 in Wales. Any disruption to supplies or extra hurdles when exporting goods would have an impact on people's livelihoods at the other end. The best way to protect livelihoods is through a permanent customs union and strong regulatory alignment with the EU. That is why a permanent customs union is backed not only by Labour, but by the TUC and the CBI. However, the Government have completely ruled out that sensible step that would protect jobs and the economy. Without it, our businesses do not have the guarantees they need, workers and consumers do not have the assurances they deserve, and my constituents do not have the certainty about their jobs that they should have.



When I speak to my leave-voting constituents, many want the same things. Some still want to leave but recognise that it is complicated, some have expressed sympathy for the Prime Minister, and some have even expressed sympathy for me, but we all see a Government at sixes and sevens, with no obvious way through this impasse. As my right hon. Friend the shadow Chancellor set out, Labour wants a Brexit that puts jobs first. If the Prime Minister still cannot provide that, we need a general election. If that is not possible, we must consider extending article 50, so that we do not crash out, or a further vote. One thing is for certain, though: I cannot vote for this Prime Minister's mangled deal.

7.31 pm

**Stephen Kerr** (Stirling) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Nick Smith) and to take part in this debate, which is historic by any definition. I rise to speak in support of the withdrawal agreement and the political declaration, because my fundamental political belief is in pragmatism. I am no ideologue or absolutist, and the success of the Conservative and Unionist party has been its willingness to adapt to present realities, and to work practically to deliver what is in the national interest.

It is in the national interest for us to leave the European Union in an orderly way, by agreement, and to continue to have close and co-operative relationships with our European neighbours. It is in the national interest for us to achieve a free trade arrangement whereby we can continue to trade freely across borders without the encumbrance of barriers, tariffs and burdensome charges. It is in the best interests of our economy, businesses and jobs for this Parliament to get a grip on the practicalities of our predicament. It is in the interests of our democracy and public confidence in Parliament for this House to deliver on the instruction of the British people that we should leave the European Union. The people's vote of June 2016 answered the question asked of the people by this House. This House must now honour that answer.

We must be careful to ensure that our opposition to the deal is not simply about waiting for a perfect one. What we have on the table before us is not a perfect deal. It is not an entirely comfortable deal, but it is acceptable. Compared with the risk of leaving the European Union in a disorderly way, without an agreement, this agreement is a good agreement. It secures the rights of citizens and provides for a transition period and an orderly departure from the European Union. I would much prefer no backstop, but I accept that the commitments that we have given to the people of Northern Ireland, which we must honour, make a backstop of some form or another an inevitable element of any agreement of any description.

**David Simpson:** I respect the hon. Gentleman, as he knows. He talks about the backstop and Northern Ireland; he said he will support this agreement, but does he understand the difficulty that we have with the backstop, and the serious repercussions it will have for the future of Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom?

**Stephen Kerr:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. The respect that he describes is reciprocated—to him, and indeed to all his colleagues, whom I recognise as Unionists. I do understand the complexities, and a lot of the emotion as well, around the issue of Northern Ireland's place in the United

Kingdom, but I have thought long and hard about Northern Ireland, as well as Scotland, and I believe that the backstop does not have to, and must not, represent a threat to the integrity of the United Kingdom, and that those of us who want to honour the decision of the people on 26 June must work together to make Brexit happen. Otherwise, we will have a crisis of political confidence in this country. There are so many people—sadly, on both sides of this House—who do not want to honour the result the people gave us in June 2016. The alternatives on offer are this agreement, no Brexit, or a hard, no-deal Brexit. I will come back to those points, but I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's intervention. Negotiations are about achieving the acceptable, but very rarely about achieving the perfect. The withdrawal agreement is a predictable compromise that is bearable for both sides—and, crucially, it delivers on the referendum result.

Since shortly after being elected to this House, I have served on the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee. Its latest report revisited evidence we had received 12 months earlier from businesses in strategically critical sectors of the UK economy—automotive, aerospace, pharmaceutical, and food and drink. We collected evidence on their response to the withdrawal agreement, and as we make clear in the report's conclusion, while they would have preferred to have stuck with the status quo, they now need clarity and certainty, and for that reason, their consistent message to the Committee, and to the House through the report, is that we should support the withdrawal agreement. They were also very respectful of our democracy and accepted the result of the June 2016 referendum—something that so many in this House seem unprepared to do. These business leaders were prepared to accept that result, and they were actively seeking to apply a pragmatic approach to an undoubtedly complex set of problems. It is now for us parliamentarians to be pragmatic and deliver the certainty that businesses need, and we do that by supporting the withdrawal agreement.

I am a Unionist; it is core to who I am. I have an unshakeable belief in our country and its peoples, in Scotland and in the United Kingdom, the most successful political union in the history of the world. My warning to colleagues is simply this: nationalism is waiting in the wings. The withdrawal agreement is, in my judgment, no threat to the Union, but no deal is. The threat in Scotland is from the Scottish Nationalists; they want the disruption that no deal would bring, because their nationalism is more important to them than any other issue. They and their leader make no secret of the fact that their single unifying purpose is to break up the United Kingdom, and that transcends every other single issue, economic or social. They want chaos; they want the disruption, because they believe it will give them the platform to launch their bid, much talked about within their ranks, for a second independence referendum, so that they can break up the United Kingdom.

I say to those who advocate no deal, particularly Conservative Members, that to me, as a Scottish Unionist, they exhibit some of the same symptoms as the SNP. Like the SNP, they appear to be prepared to sacrifice jobs and prosperity to realise their version of our future.

**Alan Brown:** The hon. Gentleman talks about nationalism. Who gave EU citizens the vote in the 2014 referendum? Who gave EU citizens the voting franchise, and who did not?

**Stephen Kerr:** I am not sure what the hon. Gentleman's intervention amounts to, but I am grateful for his having had the opportunity to make it.

I appeal to colleagues, particularly Conservative colleagues, not to sacrifice the good for the sake of an unrealisable perfect. A second referendum, a no-deal Brexit or a general election all point to more uncertainty, and I cannot support any of those outcomes. We must remember that we voted as one United Kingdom to leave the EU.

My constituents in Stirling are weary of Brexit and of the shenanigans that go on in this House. They want us to move on. They want us to turn the page. Every single one of them wants us to deal with the pressing issues that affect their life and the life chances of their family. Irrespective of who they are or their story, we need to deliver stability and certainty. We need to turn the page. Voting for this agreement is the best way to do that, and I commend it to the House.

7.41 pm

**Gavin Robinson** (Belfast East) (DUP): It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr)—he is truly an honourable gentleman. He was about to conclude his speech by saying that we voted as one Union and that we should leave as one Union. Well, I am a Member of Parliament for a part of this Union that is going to be left behind, and I will develop that point further. He fairly conceptualises what the aspiration was but, sadly, the faults and flaws of this withdrawal agreement rest in the concluding sentence that he never quite reached.

I, like the hon. Gentleman, am not an ideologue on this issue. Three of my hon. and right hon. Friends are sitting around me, all intently listening, and they know what I have said to them privately. For my whole life, Northern Ireland and this United Kingdom have been a part of the European Union. I have known nothing else, and it has not been a motivating or driving factor for me politically. It did not lead me to come to Parliament to campaign to leave.

I campaigned, very enjoyably, with the right hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Theresa Villiers) in my constituency of Belfast East during the 2016 referendum. I proudly voted leave because I was frustrated by the fear, the threats and the intimidation from those who said, "If you don't do what you're told, Northern Ireland will descend back into chaos. If you don't do what is expected of you, the peace process is in jeopardy." I found that line offensive.

I campaigned for a leave vote believing there was aspiration in what was being outlined, and believing that the people of this country engaged with that aspiration. Today, motivated not by leaving the European Union but by Unionism, I find it offensive that we have a Government, a Parliament and neighbours in the European Union who want to undermine our precious Union. It is deeply disappointing and it is not where we should be. It goes against every grain of my political ideology and it goes against the grain of the Prime Minister's expressed political ideology.

The Belfast agreement has been mentioned quite a few times in this debate by Government and Opposition Members of Parliament. The hon. Member for Stirling, the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell)

and the right hon. Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden) all talked about the Belfast agreement. The Father of the House, the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), indicated that the Belfast agreement—that hard-fought document for peace—contains a commitment to an open border in Ireland. It simply does not. I will give way to any Member of Parliament who wants to explain to me where that provision is in the Belfast agreement. It is not there. It is based on mutual respect, interconnected co-operation and better relationships between the people of Northern Ireland and the people of the Republic of Ireland.

What has gone wrong in this withdrawal process? What fundamental problems has the Prime Minister made? The first was to believe the political aspirations of others over what her own head should have told her. The Belfast agreement does not preclude a border on the island of Ireland. There is a border on the island of Ireland. We have differentials in duty rates. We have physical infrastructure. It was a mistake to believe that the aspiration to have no hard border on the island of Ireland meant that there should be no infrastructure whatsoever, because there is infrastructure today. There is this fanciful notion of cameras being attacked or any infrastructure being subject to vandalism or worse, but it is there today. There are cameras right across the main roads and arterial routes that take people from Northern Ireland to the south. We have different currencies and we implement different rules and laws. We have smuggling as a consequence of the fact that we have tariff differentials. As a former Minister in the Northern Ireland Office, the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, the hon. Member for Norwich North (Chloe Smith) knows that full well, as does the former Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the right hon. Member for Chipping Barnet.

Secondly, as a country we were wrong to accept the premise that we had to solve the border question without knowing what the trading relationship was going to be. Who decided that that was a good negotiating strategy? How do we provide the answer when we do not know what the question is? Yet these are the circumstances in which we find ourselves. We accepted that premise from the European Union.

**Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson** (Lagan Valley) (DUP): I have every sympathy with the position expressed by the hon. Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) and understand entirely his motivation, yet for me the major issue is that according to the Attorney General's interpretation of the backstop, in circumstances in which the backstop becomes operational, Northern Ireland must treat Great Britain as a third country for trade purposes. That offends my Unionism. It offends my sense of being part of the United Kingdom. Surely that is the issue that we need to address and resolve.

**Gavin Robinson:** My right hon. Friend and party Chief Whip is of course absolutely right.

The third and final thing that we were foolish to accept was the notion that there had to be a solution to the border problem because in the event of no deal there would be a hard border. What did we see just before Christmas? The publication of the preparation plans from the European Union and the Dublin Government. What was strangely absent from those

documents? Any provision for border infrastructure. It is a shibboleth. We have spent two years tearing ourselves apart trying to solve an issue that does not amount to a hill of beans.

I have to represent constituents in east Belfast who have a range of opinions, but there is one recurring theme: reject this deal. People say, “Reject the withdrawal agreement because it does not honour the aspirations of Brexit”; “Reject this deal because I want to stay in the European Union”; and “Reject this deal because I want a second referendum.” What is the thing that unifies them all? It is the rejection of this deal.

The White Paper published today does nothing to satisfy the constitutional concerns that we have. This is not just about economics. The withdrawal agreement outlines a scenario where we would not only have to face, but have coerced upon us, further implementation of forthcoming EU regulations, not to mention the 300 that are already there, which were referred to in the Attorney General’s advice and which span 69 pages. These 300 pieces of legislation will apply to Northern Ireland compulsorily. They could apply to the rest of the United Kingdom voluntarily. It is offensive to me as a Unionist that we need an Act of Parliament in this place to recognise our part of this country. That cannot be right. That should not be right.

When the Prime Minister spoke in the Waterfront Hall in Belfast on 20 July 2018, she said that the reality is that any agreement we reach with the European Union will have to provide for the frictionless movement of goods across the Northern Ireland border. We accept that. She went on to say that equally clear is that, as the United Kingdom Government, we could never accept that the way to prevent a hard border with Ireland is to create a new border with the United Kingdom. Sadly, that is what we have.

When the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland spent time before Christmas going around trying to sell this withdrawal agreement, she was filmed on BBC Newsline with a group of ladies from the Resurgam Trust in Lagan Valley who said, “Secretary of State, we don’t like this deal because it treats Northern Ireland differently.” With all the majesty of her office, the Secretary of State said, “It does not treat Northern Ireland differently.” And do you know what? The ladies were not in a position to challenge her authority on the matter. Yet there is no annex for Aylesbury; there is no protocol for any other part of the United Kingdom in this withdrawal agreement. There are no separate provisions, no backstop, no loss of democratic accountability or democratic involvement in the production or the assessment of future regulations on our trading relationships, and the White Paper today does not change that. We can see it in the withdrawal agreement—we can see it in the text—that the UK Government are committing to enforcing, over the heads of the Assembly and its Members if they were to disagree, implementation of rules over which we have no democratic control or say. That is not taking back control. Mr Speaker, you have heard and presided over sessions and speeches in this Chamber, and heard speeches outwith this Chamber, that have continually said that this is about taking back control of our laws, our borders and our money. On that test, this withdrawal agreement fails.

I do not want to extinguish hope, and I will conclude with this: the next number of months will undoubtedly be febrile in this place, as they have been, and within

the country. I do not doubt the sincerity of the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and his colleagues and his team in delivering on the referendum commitment. All we ask is that Northern Ireland is not treated differently from any other part of this United Kingdom; that we honour our shared commitments, our shared history, our shared values and our shared aspirations; that we do it collectively; and that we work, post Tuesday, on how best we deliver a workable solution.

7.53 pm

**Colin Clark (Gordon) (Con):** I was fortunate to speak in the December debate, so I will do my best to be brief. It is a tremendous honour to follow the hon. Member for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson). He has made a very powerful case and he demonstrates his tremendously strong rhetorical skills.

I listened to the shadow Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union very closely. In his words, he said that this is not a vote about Labour’s proposals; I agree. We are voting on the withdrawal agreement and the political declaration. I agree with the withdrawal agreement and I will be supporting it. I listened to Labour’s desire for a customs union and for a close relationship with the EU to protect our vital Union of the United Kingdom and to protect business and jobs. The shadow Secretary of State agreed with the Government Front-Bench team that there must be a withdrawal agreement to protect citizens’ rights. I echo the words of the Minister for the Cabinet Office that this should not be about semantics. This is not about Labour’s plan, but that is because there have been so many versions of Labour’s plan. The Government have had to come up with a finely negotiated plan, which we are now trying to get through this House.

The shadow Secretary of State said that he had agonised over voting for article 50. That set off a time-limited process, which we had to negotiate with the EU, and here we are; we have nearly arrived at the end of it. During that time, I have never heard a concise, cohesive plan from the Opposition. I can only conclude that despite the deal’s perceived faults, to avoid no deal, and to protect jobs and citizens’ rights, as the shadow Secretary of State agreed a deal should do—and recognising that there must be a withdrawal agreement and, I am afraid, a backstop—Members on both sides of the House, following on from article 50, should support the deal. It is the next step so that we can negotiate our future with the EU and the rest of the world. This is in stark contrast with those who simply do not agree with Brexit, although I respect that that is what they campaigned on.

The SNP rejected Brexit pretty well in the same way that it rejected the result of the independence referendum. SNP Members quote figures of doom and gloom, which is disappointing because we are here to be optimistic. My hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) said that those who oppose this deal could be the handmaidens of a hard deal—of no deal. This disappoints me, because back in 2014, as a consequence of possible separation, the SNP was happy to negotiate with the EU as a third party. That is in tremendous contrast with the suggestion of Armageddon, when we would have to negotiate with the EU as a third party.

Industries in my Gordon constituency have embraced Brexit. In good faith, they expect elected politicians here actually to get on with it, so I implore the SNP and



[Colin Clark]

others who reject Brexit to think again, to deliver on what we pledged and to respect the Brexit referendum with a deal that works for business and jobs. These industries want us to make progress and move on to the next step, because the political declaration leaves a great deal of scope. There are not many Members present on either side of the Conservative side of this debate, but the political declaration would allow scope for a deal that would very much accommodate what both sides of the debate on the Conservative Benches and the Opposition are arguing for.

The Government are making no-deal preparations. The Treasury Committee heard from the Bank of England that the financial system is robust in all situations. That is a very good thing and that is what the stress-testing was; it was not suggesting that the economy would drop by 10%. We cannot go back. The country has moved on, but it seems that this place is frozen in time while the rest of the country is moving on, including my constituency. I heard on the radio this morning the chairman of the port of Calais, who said that the trucks will keep moving under all circumstances. The rest of the world and the rest of Europe is moving on, while this place is frozen—stuck back in the EU referendum.

We know that the currency markets and the stock market have built-in risk, and that companies have pent up investment in their balance sheets; as we heard on the Treasury Committee, their balance sheets are in rude health. My good and hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) said that he is a pragmatist. Well, I am an optimist and I believe that there can be a positive result from Brexit, so next week let us give the economy and the mood of a nation a lift. Let us support the Prime Minister's deal and get on with Brexit.

**Mr Speaker:** I am extremely grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his magnificent succinctness, upon which he should be congratulated.

7.58 pm

**Mrs Sharon Hodgson** (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): As we have a little more time than I thought we would, before I get into the substance of my speech tonight I just want to start by thanking you, Mr Speaker, for your support with regard to the harassment and targeting of MPs on and around the estate. The abuse that the right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry) and others on both sides of this House and this issue are being subjected to is truly despicable and genuinely worrying for the stability of our democracy. My worry is that the genie may be out of the bottle and the country may not heal for decades, no matter what happens here. That is why, as others have said, this is probably the most important decision and vote that I will have made in my almost 14 years as an MP, and perhaps may ever make.

I say this as I have had brought to my attention details of a threat that I have just received, calling me “a traitor who should be hung for treason”.

This threat was not even made anonymously. It was made very publicly and traceably, and the man—I believe it is a man because I have seen a photograph of him—who made this threat must know that it is public and easily traceable, which makes this change in our national and political discourse all the more worrying. My crime that

precipitated this threat was to be one of the 213 MPs of all parties to have signed the letter against crashing out without a deal—which we now know, after the vote last night and today, is the will of the majority of Members in this House. I say all this to reinforce the point about the pressure of the political climate that we are all operating in and dealing with. I know that none of us is taking any of this lightly at the moment.

Two years ago, over 62% of people in Sunderland voted to leave the European Union. That is an average across the three Sunderland constituencies. My canvassing told me at the time that the vote in my constituency may have been more in the region of 65% to 67%. The fact that—as I am sure you know, Mr Speaker—Nissan, the most productive car plant in the whole of Europe, is in my constituency explains why that first result on results night had the impact that it did on all of us, not just the three Sunderland MPs. I campaigned and voted to remain in the European Union, and did so because I believed that it was the best decision for the security, social cohesion and economy of the north-east and the country as a whole. Despite this, I recognised that a majority of my constituents had voted to leave, and I set out to respect the result of the referendum.

In that vein, I have largely refrained from commenting publicly on Brexit or speaking about it here—check *Hansard!*—choosing instead to listen to my constituents to understand the result, the vote. So I ran two surveys on Brexit. I took great care to read all of the significant amount of correspondence I received on the topic. I held three large public meetings. I engaged regularly with major employers in my constituency, such as Nissan, Rolls-Royce, BAE Systems and others, to hear their concerns about the process as it has unfolded over the past two years. Many of these companies, in particular, have been unnecessarily placed in a position by this Government where they are already spending vast sums of money on preparations for a no-deal scenario—something that none of us here will ever allow to happen.

Voting, and how one votes, is an extremely personal decision, and it would be wrong of us to claim to know exactly what led people to vote in the way that they did. We do know, however, what issues come up on the doorstep, in emails and letters, and through polls and surveys. We also know what was promised to people. As part of the survey that I ran last year—I ran one straight after the referendum and then one again last year—I asked people who had voted to leave in 2016 to rate a number of factors involved in their decision from “very important” to “unimportant”. The three issues with the highest number of people ranking them “very important” were, first, the principle that decisions about the UK should be taken in the UK; secondly, concerns that remaining would mean little or no choice about how the EU expanded its membership or powers; and thirdly, the incentive of trade opportunities outside the EU. It will be noticed that in this sample, immigration did not make the top three of the “very important” issues. It was an issue that people could choose but was actually near the bottom of the list in the final analysis. Make of that what you will.

During the referendum, people were also promised that voting to leave would mean more money for the NHS, more controls on immigration, and significant trade opportunities around the world—and ultimately that it would mean “taking back control”.

**Mark Tami** (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend accept that they were also led to believe by the leave campaign that this would be a very simple process?

**Mrs Hodgson:** Absolutely. That would be one of the biggest ironies of any of our political careers, as we are all finding out that it is anything but simple. It has got to be the most complicated thing I have ever had to try to get my head around.

Can anyone in this place honestly say that the deal on offer delivers any of the things I have listed? Far from delivering back control, this deal means giving up our voice within the EU and becoming rule takers until at least 2020, at which point the problematic backstop could come into place. The Government's own analysis shows that the economic benefit of further trade deals around the world is minimal, will not come for a while and will be outweighed by GDP falling by around 3.9% under their deal.

With regard to immigration, the Government's recent White Paper failed to provide overall clarity on the issue and included plans to disgracefully label workers on less than £30,000 a year as "low-skilled". That policy will only contribute to existing staffing shortages in the NHS in particular, as it rules out nurses, care assistants and paramedics coming from abroad. As shadow Minister for Public Health, I am well placed to know that the much promised extra money for the NHS—remember the £350 million on the side of that big red bus?—could not be further from the truth.

It is no wonder that all this lack of clarity has left people on both sides of the debate hugely disappointed. Indeed, in recent weeks I have received hundreds of emails, letters and postcards regarding this deal, as I am sure every single Member of the House has. There are people who say that the Prime Minister's deal fails to respect the result of the referendum and would like me to vote against it. There are people who would like me to vote against this deal and then push for a people's vote. There are people who would like to bypass another vote altogether and for us to remain a member of the European Union. There are people who would like a Norway or Canada-style deal, and there are people who believe that we would now be better off leaving the EU without any deal at all.

However, it is astonishingly clear from the percentages of 87% to 13% that very few people would like me to vote for this deal. It is no wonder that almost 60% of those who took part in my survey now think that the electorate, as well as Parliament, should have to approve any deal agreed with the EU before it is ratified.

Almost nothing of what was promised and expected has been delivered. People who voted to leave the EU are not happy with this deal. People who voted to remain in the EU are not happy with this deal, and 87% of my constituents who contacted me about this deal are against it. As such, I will be voting against it when the question is put on Tuesday.

**Mr Speaker:** What an extraordinarily succinct contribution that was. Of course I am paying attention; I never cease to do so.

8.7 pm

**Carol Monaghan** (Glasgow North West) (SNP): The public, frankly, are fed up with this, but they are also worried. I have been overwhelmed with correspondence

from my constituents, 69% of whom voted to remain, and many of whom have since changed from leave to remain supporters. They have raised concerns about the treatment of EU nationals and the impact that it will have on the NHS, and they are angry at the tone of the negotiations. Today's carry-on after Prime Minister's questions does nothing to restore anyone's faith in the Government or the Tory party.

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): My hon. Friend says that many of her constituents are moving from leave to remain. Is it not the case that many of them are also moving from no to yes on the question of Scottish independence as they watch this play out?

**Carol Monaghan:** That is exactly what many of the emails say—they voted no in 2014 because of their concern about European Union membership, and now their worst concerns are coming to pass.

I was in Romania last year as part of a parliamentary delegation. Everywhere we went, there was a celebration of Europe and its membership of the European Union. People showed great pride in the country having been a member since 2007. It was notable that one issue raised fairly regularly with the delegation was the brain drain that Romania was experiencing. It was seeing its most talented and very best young people moving to other parts of Europe. We gain benefit from that, and we should continue to.

Let us compare that with the UK. We joined a trade organisation very reluctantly in the early 1970s because we were being economically disadvantaged by not being a member of it. Almost immediately afterwards, there was a referendum to see whether that had been the right decision. Had we really done what we should have done? Throughout that time, we heard about European bureaucracy and about how things were being done to us. There was lots of comedy about it. I remember episodes of "Yes, Minister" in which people talked about sausages and bendy bananas. It is rather ironic that we are talking about the bureaucracy of the European Union and European Parliament when, just along the corridor, we have a whole pile of unelected bureaucrats sitting in this building.

The nature of the arguments in the referendum campaign also caused me deep concern. There were stories about millions going to the EU that could be spent on the NHS instead. There was scaremongering about swarms of migrants. A lot of this was stoked up by the right-wing media, and it was received by a public who were looking for leadership. EU nationals were blamed for the strain on schools, the health service and social housing, but let us be clear that the majority of EU nationals in the UK are of working age and are contributing. Three to 18 is the age of education, but the majority of EU nationals here are not in that age group. The biggest strain on our health service comes from those who are over 70, and that does not generally include EU nationals.

When I first came to London to sit in this place, I had a flat in a building where more than half the flats were empty, because they had been bought up and banked by foreign money launderers who used them as a place to keep their investments. Those flats were empty when homeless people were sleeping out on the streets. That was not the fault of EU nationals. If we want to deal with the housing crisis, we need to build houses for

[Carol Monaghan]

social use—for people who need houses. We need to stop building houses that are going to sit empty in the centre of London.

**Alan Brown:** On that theme, is my hon. Friend aware that the UK is currently the most unequal country in the EU? The people who financed Vote Leave are the very ones who are going to do their best to make the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. That will be the Brexit dividend.

**Carol Monaghan:** We know that a no-deal Brexit is going to be economically disastrous. We also know that when an economy is wrecked in such a way, people with money, power and connections are in a position to exploit the situation for their own ends. No doubt we will see that happening if we are stupid enough to leave without a deal.

Following the vote to leave, where was the political leadership? Who was countering the right-wing media? Who was reaching out to the EU nationals here? The answer is that Scotland was. On the very first day after the vote, the First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, stood up and said, “You are welcome. We want you. We value you. Please remain. You are our friends, our family and our colleagues.” That is powerful. I and many of my colleagues wrote to every EU national in our constituencies. The majority of them cannot even vote for us in this place, so there was no personal gain for us in doing that. We did it because it was the right thing to do. But what did we see from the Prime Minister? We saw her talking about “queue jumping” by EU nationals, implying that they were cheating their way into jobs, and we now see them being asked to pay a £65 fee to apply for settled status. How can they feel valued with that sort of action?

The biggest issue for me is the position of EU nationals and the loss of freedom of movement—[*Interruption.*] The deal does not protect freedom of movement—not for EU nationals here or for our people moving elsewhere. It does not support that. My husband is an EU national. He spent 17 years in the Royal Navy as a commissioned officer, with two and a half years of that time spent under the ocean, yet he has British nationalists telling him to go home if he does not like things here, and he is not unique in that. The worst thing is the patronising manner in which people have been dealt with. He has been told, “You should be okay.” What? Because he is white and speaks English? We are not interested in being part of a xenophobic society that pulls the drawbridge up behind us.

Our universities have expressed concerns about Brexit. They are concerned about the loss of EU funding, both in Horizon 2020 and in successor programmes. They are concerned about the threat posed to the rich collaborations that are supported and underpinned by freedom of movement. Universities UK has said that over half of all UK-based European Research Council funding is received by non-UK nationals living in the UK. That accentuates the risk that we could lose out on talented and highly mobile researchers.

With the immigration White Paper, the Government said, “Well, if you’re skilled, you’ll be okay.” I have asked a series of written questions about what is meant by high, medium and low-skilled jobs. I have been told

that high-skilled is degree level, medium is A-level or HND level, and low-skilled is GCSE level. However, that is at odds with the salary thresholds that will apply. For early-stage researchers and post-docs or for early-career nurses, teachers and even medics, the definition of skills does not match the salary threshold.

**Stephen Kerr:** The reality is that what the hon. Lady is describing is actually up for consultation. I am sure that she and other Members, including Conservative Members, will make representations to ensure that Scotland’s interests are looked after in our new immigration laws. She is making a valid point, but she is talking about what will happen, when this is in fact a consultation document.

**Carol Monaghan:** If the hon. Gentleman looks at the contributions from SNP Members over the past couple of years, he will see that when we have talked about salary thresholds, the message we have sent has been strong, clear and consistent. Salary thresholds do not work, and they specifically do not work in Scotland, where people earn less than in parts of the south-east of England. It would be good if the hon. Gentleman joined us in calling for the scrapping of these salary thresholds.

**Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP):** My hon. Friend makes an excellent point about the salary thresholds. My experience of dealing with many constituents, who are treated very shabbily by the Home Office, is that they work all the hours God sends and still cannot reach the thresholds to get their families to come over from other countries. I have a constituent who missed out by a matter of pounds and was not able to bring over their family.

**Carol Monaghan:** My hon. Friend confirms the point that I was making.

I want to move on to Euratom. Since the vote in 2016, I have regularly raised issues about Euratom. When I have asked about the arrangements for importing radioactive sources for medical scans and cancer treatments, I have been accused of scaremongering. Let us be clear: Euratom regulates nuclear facilities and materials. Outside Euratom it is still possible to carry out such regulation, but Euratom also guarantees a supply of medical radioisotopes. There are only a few reactors worldwide that actually produce them. They have short half-lives and have to get from production to use point very quickly, and Euratom guarantees that. What arrangements is the UK putting in place to make sure that we can get them here very quickly? If we do not have them, the 500,000 diagnostic scans and 10,000 cancer treatments that take place every year will not be able to happen. That is fundamental, and we have not had answers. Articles 79 to 85 of the draft agreement talk about Euratom, but there is nothing in it about future supplies and no answers about future arrangements.

I will not be voting for this deal because of the impact on our universities and our research collaborations, because we have not had any answers about the medical radioisotopes that are currently supplied by Euratom and because of the economic dangers to Scotland in being removed from the single market and the customs union but, ultimately and fundamentally, because of the removal of freedom of movement, which we on the SNP Benches hold so dear.



8.19 pm

**Owen Smith** (Pontypridd) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan). I do not agree with much of what she says on the Union—I value the Union of the United Kingdom—but I do agree with her about this deal. I think this deal will make our people poorer, guarantee that we have less money to spend on the NHS than what was promised, and cede sovereignty from this country to the European Union—a deeply ironic state of affairs and not what was promised. I also believe that the deal is increasingly making our country a laughing stock across the world—something we cannot afford to be in these dangerous times.

I do not want to talk too much about economics today. Such discussion has characterised this debate and has perhaps been one of its great flaws. Indeed, one of the great flaws of the attempt to win the referendum for remain was to concentrate so much on the economics. I want to talk a bit more from first principles about the role of Britain within the world and what the deal will mean for us. As well as affecting the economic future of generations in this country, the deal will determine the role of our country in the world. It will affect whether we fulfil our historic mission to be a leading country in the world or resile from it.

I fear that this Government, whose 30-year civil war is the cause of the mess we find ourselves in, and who cling so desperately to power, will not have the capacity or wherewithal to rise to the challenge we face. Instead, they prefer self-deception and jingoism. They would rather peddle delusions about Britain after Brexit than face up to the real problems that gave rise to it, still less find solutions that might resolve them. The country cannot afford, and this House cannot afford, to indulge the fantasists in any corner of this House for a minute longer.

We are just 79 days away from Brexit and it is time—it was time long ago, truth be told—to tell the truth to the country about Brexit, because there is no global Britain after Brexit. It is a con, Mr Speaker, on your family and on mine. Brexit is a retreat from the globe, starting with disengagement from our part of it. It is a recipe for isolation and an abdication of our responsibility within our continent of Europe. At the very moment when Britain is most needed, when our influence and power might provide ballast and security for a Europe that is squeezed on the one hand by a demagogue in the White House and on the other by a despot in the Kremlin, and at a point when an expansionist China is looking hungrily at all corners of the world—a moment when we could be providing our traditional role within Europe and the world—our myopic response has been to look inwards and backwards, while lying to ourselves and our people that we are doing the opposite: that we are returning somehow to our roots in empire and, to use that dreadful, meaningless phrase, “going global”. It is a claim as facile as it is false.

The reality is that this generation—my generation—of politicians has failed our people. We have failed to rise to the challenges of our age, either within this country or, increasingly it seems, within the world. We have failed to offer an honest analysis of and realistic solutions to the problems of our country and the problems across the globe. The root cause of those problems should be clear to us all. In shorthand, it is that economic development in the east and south has created challenges to our

western economies, driving deindustrialisation, inequality and immigration. The sense of loss that my right hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden) said is felt in his community is felt in mine—a loss of status, purpose and opportunity. Globalisation is the shorthand, but the key thing is that there is no shortcut to solving these problems, and Brexit is absolutely not the solution. Brexit will compound all these problems. “Stop the world, I want to get off,” is not a political prospectus or a realistic view of how to run a global, integrated economy.

The nostalgia and nativism that are so evident on the Government Benches may be enough to feed the beast of the European Research Group, but they will not feed our children. Blaming foreigners and immigrants—the other—while hawking sepia-coloured myths of betrayal and loss has been a tried and tested strategy of populists and worse the world over since time immemorial, but we surely know that it is neither right nor real. It is also neither right nor real to offer some misty-eyed romantic notion of socialism in one state, as some in my party attempted to do. The solutions to globalisation lie in collective international actions on taxation, on economic and environmental collaboration, and in the building of a new generation of institutions to deliver security, equality and sustainability in Europe and beyond.

Building walls never works, because the people eventually smash them down. Earlier generations understood that. They learned it the hard way through their experience of war and they built the means to withstand those problems. Our country played a central role in building those institutions, defeating people who would divide us on race, and defending liberal values of equality, freedom, tolerance and democracy. Now, when that project and the institutions we built need to be renewed and reformed, what are we doing in Britain? We are waving the flag and we are withdrawing from the fight. That seems to me to be neither right nor honourable.

Nor does it seem right to saddle future generations with increased debt and further decades of austerity. We are living in a situation of through-the-looking-glass politics when Ministers produce pamphlets that show we are going to cut our economy by up to 10%, while the very next day they deny the reality of their own predictions. We all know the truth. The experts do not get it right to the decimal point, but their ballpark predictions will be right. They said the Brexit vote would devalue the pound and see a diminution of investment in our country. That was true and it will be true that we will see a drop-off, perhaps as much as 10%, if we go down the route of Brexit.

**Colin Clark:** The hon. Gentleman mentions several statistics, but what about the 500,000 jobs we were going to lose? Does he not agree that the job numbers have actually increased? That was fearmongering. Would he like to comment on the jobs number?

**Owen Smith:** Jobs have increased; I do not deny that for a moment. I think there are good questions about the nature of those jobs, but the most valuable jobs that have been created under the Conservative Government, such as the manufacturing jobs in the automotive industry, many thousands of which I absolutely concede have been created in recent years, are the precious jobs that are most at risk if we exit with no deal and even if we exit with the bungled deal that is currently before us.

[Owen Smith]

Isolated economies do not prosper. That is an economic fact of life in this integrated modern world. We are proposing, whatever the rhetoric, to isolate our economy from its most important trading partners. It does not make economic sense and it does not make moral sense. Never forget that this Government came to power promising to free future generations from debt. It will not be forgiven or forgotten if they saddle future generations with debt. Nor will it be forgotten or forgiven if my party does anything less than tell the whole truth about Brexit and maintain our opposition to it in principle and in practice. My hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson) wrote earlier this week:

“If we thought Brexit was wrong in June 2016, then it is still wrong today - just with more proof.”

He is right. There is no jobs-first Brexit, no Labour Brexit and no better Brexit. I gather the latest iteration is a sensible Brexit. Well, there is no sensible Brexit either. Brexit will eat the jobs and eat the capital, political and financial, that an incoming Labour Government will need to implement the radical programme that my hon. Friends on the Front Bench are rightly advocating.

Any Brexit is irreconcilable with Labour’s traditional social democratic mission and its twin foundations of providing equality and freedom. Throughout history, different wings of my party have always understood that those tandem aims were at the heart of what we stand for. Bevan said that there is no freedom without an end to poverty. Crosland said that our job is to pursue equality and freedom. There cannot be one without the other, just as there cannot be a cake-and-eat-it Brexit. If we are to be true to that mission, we surely cannot accept any outcome that will limit the ability of our people to live and work in this country or elsewhere. What have we come to that we have a Prime Minister who tells the country to celebrate curtailing the rights of our citizens to work and live abroad? It is plainly out of kilter with reality, and it is plainly wrong for our people.

Nor should we in Labour give any succour to a policy that is fuelling the hard-right politics of hatred and repression, the enemies of the social democracy that we all believe in, not even if—I wish to emphasise this point—there is electoral advantage for us in so doing. If there is seen to be electoral advantage for our party letting the Tories carry the can for a Brexit deal that diminishes the living standards of our people and that extends austerity such that we might contest an election and win it on that basis, it would be shaming for my party to pursue that strategy. We would be sacrificing the lives and livelihoods of the people we came into politics to represent.

In conclusion, we have to be clear: Brexit is a terrible mistake for our country, and the only way in which we can reverse that mistake is by asking the people to do so. We have had two years of exposure to the failures, flaws and risks that Brexit entails. Now is the moment for my party to show leadership, to lead the people away from the brink of Brexit, to offer up the proposal that we revoke article 50 and then, crucially, to campaign and win a people’s vote and to stay in the European Union.

8.31 pm

**Gareth Thomas** (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Pontypridd (Owen Smith). I very much agree with his

conclusion that we need to consider the suspension of article 50 and go back to the people of this country.

As others have said, the deal before the House is a bad deal for Britain, and the Prime Minister knows that as well as the rest of us. Her own Government’s analysis shows that there is no Brexit scenario in which we would be better off as a country, and Opposition Members know that it will be the poorest of our country who will be most at risk of losing out further.

Crashing out without a deal is clearly the worst option before us. The prospect of food price hikes due to tariffs kicking in, the supply of key goods being disrupted, and huge transport delays is profoundly worrying. If the Government had handled negotiations better and Parliament had been allowed an earlier vote on this deal, the Prime Minister could have averted much of the huge costs and considerable uncertainty that the country faces. Companies are already transferring assets and jobs, notably services businesses, particularly those in financial services. Car manufacturing industries that are of huge importance to the midlands and the north, such as Land Rover and Vauxhall, have delayed investment, cut jobs and shifted parts of their operations overseas—and that has happened while we are still in the European Union. Many of us know from discussions with those running our public services in our constituencies that the shortages of staff in many of those services have been exacerbated as EU nationals start to believe that they are not welcome in Britain anymore.

The Government would have us believe that the choice is between their deal and no deal, but as others have said in this debate, that is simply not the case. They could take off the table the prospect of no deal. I believe that this deal will be defeated, and I hope that when the Prime Minister comes back to the House, she will move very quickly to rule out the possibility of no deal.

Among the many problems with the Prime Minister’s deal is the fact that we are being asked to commit huge sums of money—£39 billion and upwards—but we will be a rule taker. We will have no say on rules that will continue to have a profound impact on businesses and jobs in the UK. Crucially, none of the detail about our future relationship with our closest trading allies has been locked down. The fact that we have not even begun seriously to negotiate the future trade deal between the UK and the European Union is deeply worrying.

In my seven years as a Minister, from 2003 to 2010, I worked on trade negotiations. I attended numerous meetings of EU Trade Ministers, made many visits to the World Trade Organisation headquarters in Geneva, attended many meetings with ministerial colleagues from around the world and had many conversations with businesses here in the UK, trade experts and non-governmental organisations. Trade deals are immensely complex. Negotiations take years. Each trade deal strand has implications for other trade deals. The House should not underestimate just how lengthy and complex the negotiations with the European Union would be before any signing ceremony for a UK-EU trade deal.

Turning the non-binding wishlist that is the political declaration into a legally binding trade treaty between the EU and the UK will certainly take longer than the 21 months claimed. It is true that trade experts disagree on how long it will take, but Professor Alan Winters of the independent UK Trade Policy Observatory thinks a

further two or three years at a minimum is inevitable. Uncertainty will become the new normal for export and import businesses here in the UK.

Not only are the issues at the heart of the future trade deal between the EU and the UK complex, but the process of reaching an agreement will change after exit; the exit agreement has to be approved only by a qualified majority vote, but the trade deal would require the agreement of every EU state, each with its own specific interests. The French have already made clear that they will have demands on fishing, and Spain has made it obvious that it will have Gibraltar once again firmly in its sights.

There is then the question of services, which others have mentioned. Let us take just one example: although reform is still needed to the financial services industry, it is critical to our country's future, brings huge financial benefit, particularly to my constituents and others in London, and creates thousands of jobs, yet there is little commitment in the political declaration to the UK and the EU trying to provide each other with significant market access for financial services. That is deeply worrying.

Quite apart from any other considerations, it is difficult to see why the UK would be offered better treatment in a trade deal than EU's existing partners, given the most favoured nation protocol. The EU would be required to extend the same better offer to those partners, without receiving anything in return. It is a dangerous myth to claim that there are huge new trade deals just around the corner to offset the economic damage that people on most sides of the debate accept—at least privately—would be the consequence of our leaving the EU. No country will want to negotiate a trade deal with the UK until we have settled our future relationship with the EU. Indeed, 90 countries already have deals with the European Union that give them a back-door route into the UK market. Worse, the European Union will be in a very strong position in trade negotiations with us, because the backstop will protect its £95 billion surplus in goods while doing little to help us get a good deal on services, where we have the surplus. That backstop will kick in years from now unless we can agree terms.

Once upon a time, a trade deal with the US, too, was touted as easy to agree, the benefits being said to be more generous than anything the EU could or did offer. In my experience, the Americans fight even more ferociously than the French for their trade interests. Donald Trump will demand more access to the NHS for big American companies, and significant reductions in our health and safety standards; chlorinated chicken will be just the start.

Brexiters will not admit—to his great credit, the hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr Djanogly) mentioned it—that every trade deal Britain seeks to negotiate on its own will require us to grant immigration access to our country. India will insist on it, Latin America will insist on it, and Europe will insist on it, too.

It is not just the lack of any serious detail about our future trading relationship that I worry about. The country should take seriously the warnings of the cross-party Home Affairs Committee about the implications of the Government's deal for our future security. The lack of progress in locking down the detail about our future relationship with other security services via Europol, about the European arrest warrant and about how security will operate at our borders in the future is a significant concern.

All the great promises made by the different parts of the Conservative party have, one after another, been revealed to be little more than the emperor's new clothes. The Prime Minister promised that a deal would be easy to get, yet here we are, years off from knowing what our future relationship with the EU will look like. There will not be millions of pounds extra each week for the NHS as a result of leaving. The claim by the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis) that there would be no downside to Brexit looks even less believable two years on.

Given that the facts have changed, how divided the House and the country are, and how much more we know now, I remain firmly of the view that we will have to go back to the people. It is not an abuse of democracy to have a further referendum. It would be elitist to think that we in the House know best. The divisions in our country are not a reason not to go back to the people. If anything, they are a major reason why we should. Every serious alternative scenario to the Prime Minister's deal would take time to achieve. To allow those discussions to take place and to allow serious parliamentary discussion, the Prime Minister should bring forward urgent legislation to extend article 50 for at least 12 months. Every careful independent analysis of the benefits and risks of Brexit overwhelmingly reveals that our country will be weaker; we will be weaker with the Prime Minister's deal, and certainly weaker without any deal. I will not vote to make our country weaker.

8.41 pm

**Liz McInnes** (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow West (Gareth Thomas).

I was planning to deliver this speech on 10 December last year, when, three days into the debate on the withdrawal agreement, the Prime Minister suddenly announced that she was going to defer the meaningful vote and seek reassurances from Europe over the issue of the Irish border backstop. So here we are, one month later, and what has changed? It would appear very little. The Leader of the Opposition asked the Prime Minister on 10 December if she would be bringing

“back the same botched deal...in January”,

which

“will not change its fundamental flaws or the deeply held objections right across this House, which go far wider than the backstop alone.”—[*Official Report*, 10 December 2018; Vol. 651, c. 26.]

It would seem that she has done just that. Nothing has changed and the Government have just wasted 30 days.

Nevertheless, in my constituency of Heywood and Middleton, the Prime Minister appears to have achieved what seemed impossible two and a half years ago: she has united both sides of the referendum debate in opposition to her botched deal. Although 60% of my constituents voted to leave, both leavers and remainers in my constituency are urging me to vote against this deal. Of the hundreds of messages I have received, the majority are asking me to vote against, with only around 20% being in favour.

The British people were promised at the time of the referendum that Brexit would deliver a strong and collaborative future relationship with the EU; the exact same benefits we currently have as members of the single market and customs union; fair management of migration; rights and protections defended and maintained;



[Liz McInnes]

national security protected and cross-border crime tackled; and that it would work for all regions and nations of the UK. Those are Labour's six tests, which are routinely mocked by the Prime Minister and the Conservative party. Those six tests merely set out what the electorate were promised during the referendum campaign. People were told that life in the UK would be vastly improved by leaving the EU, so our six tests actually set a pretty low bar in just asking that the British people be given what was promised—no more and no less. So when the Tories mock our six tests, are they really pouring scorn on the electorate for being so gullible as to fall for the promises of the leave campaign?

EU nationals living and working in my constituency have voiced to me their concerns about their future in the UK. My constituent Regine May, who has worked as an academic for the last 20 years educating our students, expressed her outrage to me at being described by the Prime Minister as a “queue-jumper”, and a staff member at Middleton library asked me whether she would still be able to travel to and from the UK using her German passport. The withdrawal agreement provides no clarity and no reassurance, and nor does the invitation issued over the Christmas period to EU nationals to “pay to stay” under the EU settlement scheme. The Government try to dismiss those and other concerns as “Project Fear”, but they need to wake up to Project Reality.

We have seen unseemly jostling for the Tory leadership as a result of the chaos that has been caused. The Prime Minister has survived a leadership challenge, and the Government have survived being found in contempt of Parliament. It seems that the Government's policy is to carry on regardless. Over the last month the media have been full of possible scenarios that would result from the deal's being voted down, and the Prime Minister has supposedly been on a charm offensive to persuade people to back it, but the message seems to be that we should accept a deal that is known to be flawed and that there is no plan B. Last month one of her Brexit Ministers, the hon. Member for Daventry (Chris Heaton-Harris), asserted that

“a responsible Government plans for everything.”—[*Official Report*, 6 December 2018; Vol. 650, c. 1051.]

However, this Government are saying, “Accept this deal: it's the only game in town.” It would seem that the oft-repeated mantra of no deal being better than a bad deal has morphed into “Any old deal, no matter how flawed, is better than no deal.”

In December the all-party Exiting the European Union Committee published a unanimous and scathing report on the Prime Minister's deal, saying that many of the most important questions about the UK's future relations with the EU had been left unanswered. The Chairman of the Committee, my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), said that the deal lacked clarity and represented a huge step into the unknown, and nothing has changed since then. The Committee concluded:

“There are no realistic, long-term proposals from the Government to reconcile maintaining an open border on the island of Ireland with leaving the Single Market and Customs Union.”

The deal does not protect rights at work, and only one paragraph in the political declaration refers to protecting rights and standards, which demonstrates

the low priority that the Government have given to that throughout the negotiations. The TUC has declared that it cannot support a deal that fails to protect rights at work, jobs, and peace in Northern Ireland. It has drawn attention to the weakness of the political declaration, and the fact that it is not even legally binding. Working people have no way of knowing what the UK's future relationship with the EU will really look like, and what impact it will have on their lives. The only certainty seems to be that this Brexit deal will make the country poorer, as is shown by the Government's own economic analysis, with GDP falling by about 3.9% and every region in the UK being worse off.

The UK's overseas territories—places such as The Falklands—did not have a vote, but they will feel the impact of decisions made here in Parliament. They are very concerned about the prospect of crashing out with no deal. Paying tariffs on their trade with the EU will have a major impact on their economies. It would be an act of gross irresponsibility for a Government even to countenance the possibility of no deal, but rejecting this Brexit deal does not give the Government licence to crash out without a deal. It is high time that the Prime Minister stopped threatening such an irresponsible act, which is definitely not in the national interest.

This deal pleases no one. In December I believed that it would be irresponsible of me to endorse it and that I should not support it, and nothing has changed since then. I will not be bullied into accepting this botched deal, because the issue is too important: our country's future, workers' rights, jobs, the economy, security and our international standing are at stake.

8.49 pm

**Gavin Newlands** (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): The proceedings following Prime Minister's questions today highlight yet again the vacuum at the heart of the Brexiteer argument in this place. Having argued until they were blue in the face that Brexit was an exercise—both in the country and in this Parliament—in taking back control, when they were faced with this Parliament taking back control, they were incandescent with rage. That highlights just how hollow their rhetoric is.

A previous Prime Minister naively foisted this vote on a public that had become deeply distrusting of politicians after decades of perceived betrayal and years of brutal austerity measures. Upon defeat, he then ran away with his tail between his legs, abdicating any responsibility whatsoever for the mess that he had created. In any event, the public's patience with this project ran out some time ago, and millions now see it for what it is: utterly pointless and damaging to the fabric of society.

We are now well into January and drawing perilously close to 29 March, but we now have more questions before us than we had in 2016. The Government have tried everything they can to force us into a deal or no-deal scenario, hence the extraordinary scenes in the Chamber today. The right hon. Member for North Somerset (Dr Fox), claimed that supporting the Prime Minister's deal is a matter of honour, but it is a tad rich for the Secretary of State for International Trade to lecture us on honour, so let me tell the House what a matter of honour is. While the Tories and the Labour party are in complete disarray, the SNP is the only main party in this place that can point to a consistent, collective and coherent position, proudly representing Scotland's overwhelming vote to remain in the European Union.

As evidenced twice in two days, the SNP and many other Members across the House will not let this Prime Minister hold a gun to our heads. We will not be forced to choose between chaos and disaster. Many Members on both sides of the House are angry at how the Government have treated this place, and the desperation exhibited earlier by the Government and the hard Brexiters in trying to stop Parliament taking back control exemplifies that arrogance. It is clear to me and, I am sure, most people in here that a minority of the public now want to leave the European Union. Indeed, up to 70% of Scots would now vote to remain if they were given another chance.

This Government's current course of action has been taken only because the Prime Minister is running scared from her own party. Make no mistake, however: the Leader of the Opposition is now as much to blame for the position we find ourselves in. Many Labour Members and a large majority of Labour voters would like him to commit to a second referendum, but he stubbornly refuses to do so. As my hon. Friend the Member for North East Fife (Stephen Gethins) alluded to earlier, that comes despite the good work of the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer). He has managed to inch the Labour party towards a common-sense position, but he is struggling to get the party over the line. That just shows that you can lead the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) to water, but you cannot make him drink. Perhaps he should consider what is in the interests of working people across the UK and in his own constituency.

We are 79 days away from a catastrophic no-deal Brexit that would make people poorer, but our two largest parties are leading the public on a merry Brexit dance, with Labour continually doing electoral maths on the back of a fag packet. If we crash out of the EU, the Tories and Labour will be shamed for decades to come. The right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) is not here this evening, but he claimed that a no-deal Brexit is closest to what the public voted for. What an utterly ridiculous assertion that is when leading leave campaign figures such as Daniel Hannan said that no one was talking about leaving the single market; when Nigel Farage repeatedly asked the public whether it would be so bad to be like Norway—I do not need to remind the House that Norway is a member of the single market; and when the former Foreign Secretary himself said:

“I would vote to stay in the single market. I'm in favour of the single market.”

Let us not hear these self-same people trying to rewrite history.

I have to say that looking back I believe those of us who advocated a remain vote were too complacent. Yes, the remain vote was clear and decisive in Scotland, but considering the relentless negativity and xenophobia displayed for years by papers such as the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Express*, we did not do enough to stand up for the benefits of the EU, and in particular not enough was done to stand up and support freedom of movement.

Every Member of this House has had the option to travel freely across Europe, and many have enthusiastically grasped the opportunity to work and build relationships across the continent. It is impossible to articulate just how valuable this freedom is. My generation, who have

largely grown up not knowing anything else, grew complacent. It is such a positive and common-sense policy that we took it for granted; our children, including my daughters, might not have that same chance and opportunity. Undoubtedly one of the biggest tragedies of Brexit is that we are ripping away the opportunities that freedom of movement provides from today's young people. Given that younger voters voted overwhelmingly to remain, this would be an intergenerational betrayal unlike anything we have seen before.

If we end freedom of movement we will also be bringing an end to further contributions to our society from many EU citizens who might otherwise have chosen to make their homes and lives here. Migrants from across the EU make our NHS function, start businesses and enrich our culture.

With a mind to today's proceedings and next week's immigration Bill, I asked people on my Facebook page to give me their experiences of freedom of movement. One of the contributions I had back was from someone called Ivan. He said his life had been defined by freedom of movement. He was born in Spain 43 years ago. During medical school, he studied in Spain and Italy, but after graduating he got a placement in Ninewells hospital, Dundee. He has been working for the Scottish NHS since 2002. He has worked all over the country: Montrose, Perth, Dundee, Vale of Leven, Crieff, Kirriemuir, Arbroath. Since 2006 he has been living in Glasgow and is currently medical officer for the Drug Court.

Ivan's family has also benefitted from that freedom. His wife is Irish, living in Glasgow since studying at uni in the late '90's. Moreover, in 2010 she started working in Copenhagen for the United Nations. Their first daughter was born in 2011 in Denmark. Then after moving back to Glasgow their youngest daughter was born at the Queen Elizabeth University Hospital maternity unit in 2014. The oldest has a Spanish passport, the youngest an Irish one, but both girls are Scots through and through. And so is Ivan—he is a card-carrying SNP member.

Ivan wanted me to explain why he is now an SNP voter and member, previously having voted Labour. He has been working in addictions for 13 years and he started to see two contrasting positions. For example, Alan Johnson sacked David Nutt a few years ago from the chair of the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs for presenting reputable facts that were not to his political advantage. On the other hand, Ivan saw the Scottish Government trying to implement minimum pricing against public opinion, mass media backlash and two of the strongest lobbies in the nation: the supermarkets and the drinks industry. Ivan says that if he sees a political party willingly going against its own political interests because it believes it will benefit the whole nation, he will pay attention—and that was before this Brexit debacle. In Ivan's team there are doctors from Hungary, Germany, Spain and Italy. His name is Ivan Fernandez Cabrera. To me, and to the vast majority of Scots I am sure, Ivan and his family are every bit as Scottish as my family, my colleagues on these Benches, and even colleagues on the Benches opposite. I am grateful for the huge contribution he and his wife have made to life in Scotland.

We have been strong on this issue. The SNP is clear: we will always stand up for EU citizens and everything they do for our society. Some in the leave campaign

[Gavin Newlands]

cheated and very probably broke the law to deliver that 2016 result, and I will concede that they were extremely effective in selling their version of Brexit to the public, but this vision was an abject lie at best and dog-whistle racism at worst. I am instantly reminded of Nigel Farage standing in front of the infamous “Breaking point” billboard, which conflated the refugee crisis with the EU and treated desperate human beings escaping conflict and seeking safety as if they were a threat. Scotland rejected this bleak, insular vision, and instead chose a different approach: Scotland voted to retain its place in Europe, a fact this Government have tried their level best to ignore since day one.

England and Wales voted to leave the EU and, should the Government get something through, are getting what they voted for. Northern Ireland voted to remain and, for good reason, may have a compromise, which we respect; yet Scotland is being dragged out against its overwhelmingly expressed will and without any of the caveats afforded to Northern Ireland.

The Scottish Government proposed the compromise of staying in the single market and customs union, which would mean retaining many of the economic advantages of being in the EU while leaving its political aspects. Again, this was ignored but, to be fair, Scotland is used to being ignored by Westminster. The actions of the Prime Minister and her Government since the EU referendum are perhaps the best example of that wilful ignorance.

The UK has lurched from crisis to crisis for years. It is clear that the UK is broken and that no Westminster Government will be able to make meaningful strides towards a brighter future, which leaves one inescapable conclusion: that to ensure good governance and the chance of building an economy and a society that is open to the world, tolerant and gives everyone the opportunity to flourish, Scotland must become an independent country.

9 pm

**Tony Lloyd** (Rochdale) (Lab): This has been an interesting and passionate debate, with a wide range of views expressed. The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster may be in a small minority among those who have spoken, but nevertheless, I know he is up for the debate.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) told us earlier that nothing much has changed since the debates before Christmas but, of course, one significant thing has changed. I am happy for the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and me to be winding up this debate, but the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland was due to speak in the original series of debates. The change is a matter of great regret given that Northern Ireland, which did not figure very much in the referendum—although I recognise that the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster spoke in Northern Ireland numerous times—has now come to be probably the single most dominant issue. I propose to devote the bulk of my remarks to the situation in that part of the United Kingdom.

It is a shame and a mistake that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has not been with us at some point in today’s debate, and I hope the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster will take that message back. It is

obvious that, although a no-deal Brexit would be very difficult for my constituents in Rochdale and for constituents across this United Kingdom of ours, it would be potentially catastrophic in Northern Ireland.

I recognise there are different views, and hon. Members from Northern Ireland have expressed those views, but I have to disagree with the hon. Member for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson), who told the House that the European Union did not figure as part of the Good Friday agreement. In fact, the context in which the Good Friday agreement was able to flourish existed precisely because, when the agreement was drawn up, both the United Kingdom—Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom—and Ireland were part of the European Union. There was no question of a hard border across the island of Ireland, and no question of regulatory non-alignment down the Irish sea.

**Gavin Robinson:** I am grateful to the shadow Secretary of State for allowing me to intervene, because there is a danger that he misunderstands my point. I was referring to the suggestion that there were provisions in the Belfast agreement that specifically said there could be no border infrastructure. I entirely recognise not only the support that is given but the encouragement and full co-operation in developing mutual understanding and respect and in building relationships. Those are the grounding principles to which he refers, and I think they will endure no matter what.

**Tony Lloyd:** The hon. Gentleman and I are on the same page in hoping that those relationships do endure and are not put at risk.

When I say that a no-deal Brexit would be potentially dangerous, it is not a personal view. It is a view that many people in Northern Ireland have expressed to me, and one of the most influential of those voices is that of Chief Constable George Hamilton. He has put it on the public record many times that he thinks a no-deal Brexit, with the possibility of a hard border and some kind of infrastructure—and not necessarily only on the border—would be a potential source of difficulty for his officers and, ultimately, a potential source of danger to the people of Northern Ireland and, beyond that, the people of the island of Ireland and of Great Britain, too. My constituency at the time was where the last IRA device went off in Great Britain. We are all aware of the absolute ambition not to go back to those days, and a no-deal Brexit is simply unconscionable in that context.

In that light, it is not surprising that the Irish Government have wanted to work hard on this issue. I understand why the backstop was put into the agreement; there is no disagreement among the Opposition that there is a need for a guarantee that there be no hard border on the island of Ireland. What is difficult, though, is to recognise that equally important to the Good Friday agreement was the idea that there be no regulatory misalignment between Great Britain and Northern Ireland. That is the problem that we are currently confronting.

The current situation arose because although both elements I have mentioned are important parts of the Good Friday agreement, the Prime Minister introduced a third element in her Lancaster House speech when she said that there would be no customs union, no single market and no reference to the European Court of Justice. In doing that, she created three incompatible



positions. With any two of those three positions, it would be possible to get a deal, but it is not possible to have a Brexit agreement that satisfies all three. That is the situation we now face. The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union extolled the virtues of this new document earlier but, although I do not wish to be unkind, it says nothing new. There is nothing in it that gives succour to Members who represent Northern Ireland constituencies or to those of us who believe that we should stay together as one United Kingdom in this process.

I refer the House back to the December 2017 joint report of the United Kingdom and the European Union. Paragraph 50 made it clear that

“the United Kingdom will ensure that no new regulatory barriers develop between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom, unless, consistent with the 1998 Agreement, the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly agree that distinct arrangements are appropriate for Northern Ireland.”

There was a guarantee in December 2017, but that guarantee had disappeared by the time we got the protocol. I use moderate words, but that is not acceptable. The House has to understand the emotional setting of the Good Friday agreement. It is not simply about technical trade agreements; it is of emotional significance. It is an agreement about a balance between the two communities. The need for there to be no hard border across the island of Ireland, but also no regulatory dislocation down the Irish sea, is fundamental to guaranteeing the continuation of what the Good Friday agreement achieved.

**Gavin Robinson:** It would be remiss of me not to intervene again. The point that the shadow Secretary of State is making is incredibly important. The rationale behind paragraph 50 was that it replicated paragraph 12 of strand two of the Belfast agreement. It is now impossible for the Government to say that they implement and respect the Good Friday agreement in all its parts, because paragraph 50, and the parts of the Belfast agreement that I have referred to, do not feature at all in the withdrawal agreement.

**Tony Lloyd:** Again, the hon. Gentleman and I are on exactly the same page. The Prime Minister also agreed with that viewpoint. On 28 February last year, the hon. Member for Upper Bann (David Simpson) asked her to “reinforce her earlier comments”

and  
“confirm that she will never agree to any trade borders between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom”.

The Prime Minister replied:

“The hon. Gentleman is right: the draft legal text that the Commission has published would, if implemented, undermine the UK common market and threaten the constitutional integrity of the UK by creating a customs and regulatory border down the Irish sea, and no UK Prime Minister could ever agree to it.”—[*Official Report*, 28 February 2018; Vol. 636, c. 823.]

This Prime Minister has agreed to it.

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster now has to explain how we get out of this morass. Frankly, it will not be enough to adopt the amendment tabled by the right hon. Member for East Devon (Sir Hugo Swire), which suggests that there can be a unilateral British disruption of the “no hard border” guarantee, because of course that will not be acceptable to the European Union. When the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster

replies, he needs to sort out how we can unpick this. Back-peddalling may be necessary to try to bring on board votes to keep this deal going, but it will betray the principles on which the Good Friday operates, and we cannot allow that.

There has been a wide debate today about trading relationships, which are crucial. It is important that trade continues. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras tried to reach out across the House on that. It is interesting to see how much the debate has already begun to move on from the Government’s deal to the possibility of a wider deal that Parliament will have to strike. When this deal fails next week, as, I think, most of us believe it will, the House will have to begin a thoughtful process of bringing together the consensus that can take this nation of ours forward.

To return to the Good Friday agreement and the impact of Brexit, as the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster knows, this is not just about trade but about the important issue of security. In his earlier role as Minister for Europe, he told the *Belfast Telegraph* in the run-up to the referendum that

“the ease with which security agencies in the EU could share intelligence provided the best protection against terrorist threats.”

He went on to say that

“while extradition of criminals in Europe in the past could have taken years, it now happens within weeks.”

He said that police can also more easily and quickly share evidence such as fingerprint and DNA files. Importantly, he said this to the people of Northern Ireland—and to the people of the whole of the United Kingdom:

“If you’re outside the EU you can try to negotiate an arrangement, but you’re going to be at the back of the queue”.

As of today, because of this blind Brexit process that we have been offered, we have no knowledge of what will happen with the European arrest warrant, and no knowledge of whether we will be able to continue to use the Secure Information Exchange Network Application and the European Criminal Records Information Exchange System. Those databases are fundamental to law and order across the whole United Kingdom, but also fundamental in the Northern Ireland context. I hope that the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster can say something a lot more positive than simply that we can rely on a blind Brexit to guarantee the safety of our citizens.

I also say to the Government that their lack of preparation for the possibility of a difficult Brexit is remarkable. My hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Nick Smith) referred to “fridgegate” and the improbability of the Health Secretary buying in so many fridges, but at least there is some sense of preparation there. In the context of Northern Ireland, the Police Service of Northern Ireland has been asking for extra police for a long time. When my hon. Friend the Member for Pontypridd (Owen Smith) was shadow Northern Ireland Secretary, he pressed the Government on the issue many times, asking when those extra police—the Patten numbers—will be made available. At last, those numbers have been announced. But to recruit and train a police officer is about more than just a Government press release. It takes months and months to get them operational. The Government have said that they rely on mutual assistance from police forces in the rest of the United Kingdom, but as a former police and crime

[Tony Lloyd]

commissioner with the knowledge of how stretched our police services are here in England, Scotland and Wales, I must say that the idea that mutual assistance should be the mainstay of the way in which we police Northern Ireland is, frankly, ridiculous.

The one point on which I hope the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster will agree with me is that, while there is the possibility of the armed forces being used during the Brexit process in the rest of the United Kingdom, the one place that the return of the Army would be very difficult to explain and unacceptable is Northern Ireland. I hope that tonight, the Government will guarantee that the use of the Army in Northern Ireland will simply not be on the agenda.

I welcome the 300 extra police officers, but the Government must begin to get real and say that if we are looking at a Brexit-related security situation in Northern Ireland, the PSNI needs the resources to do the job. That feeling should be common across this House. It is a matter not of party political dialogue but of common sense, and I hope that the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster will take that point on board.

One of the problems with the Brexit debate is that in some ways it has been very dry and technical. The people my right hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden) talked about—those who felt they had been left out—simply did not know what this debate was all about. That is a really important point that this House has to understand. In the end, this is about the nature of the society that we are. One thing about the Good Friday agreement that was fundamentally important and that went beyond the technical issues, the institutions and all the rest was the process of human reconciliation; it was about saying that we can live better together than apart.

**Mr McFadden:** While my hon. Friend is on the point of communities that feel left out of the national story, does he agree that nobody in the European Union is preventing us from building more houses, challenging educational inequality, improving the physical environment or doing many of the things that we need to do to create a better future for the type of communities we are talking about?

**Tony Lloyd:** I fundamentally agree with my right hon. Friend. That is true for those in the west midlands, the north-west of England and other parts of Great Britain, and especially in Northern Ireland, where jobs, housing and decent health services are so important but are not yet on the agenda. Raising our aspiration there is of fundamental importance.

If we are to be true to the Good Friday agreement when it comes to Brexit, the present deal does nothing for the process. This deal divides people. We have heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) about the level of hate that has come out of this debate. In Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK, we have to get back to a more rational politics that builds hope for the future, but that is not on the agenda with this deal. That building of hope is fundamental in Northern Ireland. When people felt dispossessed, they turned to violence. When people feel dispossessed, they turn to despair. We know the price that society pays for that, and we know

the price that people in Northern Ireland and throughout the rest of the country have paid for that in the past. The Government have to raise their sights, recognise that this Brexit deal will not work, and move on. They must bring this House of Commons together in a way that allows us to get the consensus we need to build a Brexit that offers hope for the future to all the people of this country.

9.17 pm

**The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Mr David Lidington):** As the hon. Member for Rochdale (Tony Lloyd) said, this has been a genuinely interesting debate. It has been good to hear voices from all four nations of the United Kingdom. I have been struck by the fact that, from the opening remarks of the shadow Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), the tone has been moderate. Even when there have been some profound differences—as inevitably there would be in a debate on this issue—for pretty well the entire period of this debate, those differences have been expressed in a spirit of mutual respect and readiness to listen, if not to agree, with what an opponent has said. To take up the final comments of the hon. Member for Rochdale, I hope that that is a harbinger of how this House might proceed for the rest of this debate and in the decisions that will face us in the days, weeks and months to come.

Many contributions so far have focused less on the withdrawal agreement than on the nature of the future relationship. When kicking off the debate, the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras said that his preference was for a customs union with the European Union and close future regulatory alignment. Those points of view have been expressed elsewhere in the debate, and we heard hon. Members from Scotland and Wales reflecting the views expressed in the resolutions passed recently by the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly to that effect.

The key decision that faces this Parliament next week is not over what the new relationship should be in the long term. That can only be negotiated, in terms of the European treaties, once we have left membership and become a third country. What we need to do is to take a decision about the terms of the withdrawal agreement. The withdrawal agreement is the unavoidable gateway whether to a Canadian, a Norwegian or a Chequers destination, or to wherever on the spectrum of a future relationship any particular right hon. or hon. Member wishes to end up.

Nor do I believe that it is going to help to argue, as some hon. Members have advocated today, that the way forward is to conclude that these problems are too difficult and there is insufficient consensus, and therefore we simply postpone the article 50 deadline. The policy dilemmas, choices and trade-offs that face us as a Parliament and as a country are not going to go away in that time. Nor are the EU27 and the European Commission going to suddenly start to open detailed negotiations about the nature of the future partnership between us and them until we have actually taken the step of leaving, because while we are a member, we are subject to the obligations of, and have all the rights of, every other member state of the European Union. The treaties, yes, allow and encourage the EU to make trade and political co-operation agreements with third countries,

but only with third countries—it cannot conclude or, indeed, negotiate such an agreement with one of its own members.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said earlier, the House has to confront the fact that the default position both in United Kingdom law and in European law is that we leave on 29 March this year whether or not a deal has been agreed and ratified, and if the House wants to reject no deal, the House has to vote by a majority for a withdrawal agreement that provides for a smooth and orderly exit.

**Mr Leslie:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr Lidington:** I will, and then I want to make some progress, particularly to respond to some of the points made by the hon. Gentleman's Front Benchers.

**Mr Leslie:** Will the Minister elaborate on something? It is not just about voting for the Prime Minister's deal; it would also potentially be about requesting an extension of article 50. He will acknowledge, will he not, that that facility is permitted under article 50?

**Mr Lidington:** An extension of article 50 is permitted under that article of the treaty—the hon. Gentleman is right to that extent. But of course such an extension has to be by unanimous consent of both the departing member state and all existing member states. What I am quite clear about in my own mind is that regardless of what opinions were expressed here, or by this or any other British Government, the EU27 are not interested in some sort of extension of article 50. They want this process brought to an orderly conclusion because they have other things, like a future budgetary process, that they need to get on with and think about after the United Kingdom's departure.

**Stephen Gethins** *rose*—

**Mr Lidington:** I will give way once more and then I want to make progress.

**Stephen Gethins:** I respect the way the Minister is going about this, and his generosity. On the article 50 extension—which is critical, regardless of what he thinks—achieving what we all want to achieve by 29 March, and having a proper discussion and getting solutions in place, will be very, very difficult. Has he at least explored the possibility of an article 50 extension with the 27 member states?

**Mr Lidington:** I have had no discussions with the Commission or with the Council about that. The Prime Minister has made the Government's position very clear on this particular point.

**Stephen Kerr:** What would any extension of article 50 mean in relation to the European elections? Surely we would not be fielding candidates for the European Parliament—that does not seem to add up.

**Mr Lidington:** There are certainly no plans to hold elections in this country to the European Parliament. In any hypothetical extension of article 50, that would be an important point for the EU27, because there could be a question mark about the legality of actions by a European Parliament in the future if not every member state had members of that European Parliament who

had been properly elected. That is yet another reason why it would not be sensible for Members of this House who advocate an extension of article 50 simply to assume that the EU27 would happily be prepared to accept that. I do not believe that that is the case at all.

I will now turn to some of the points made. Like the hon. Member for Rochdale, I want to spend a lot of the time I have speaking about the Northern Ireland question, which came up not only in the extremely moving and compelling speech from the hon. Member for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson), but in speeches from Members in different parts of the House.

First, the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras challenged the Government over the paper that we published earlier today and said that he did not think there was any new commitment in it. There are two things that are completely new. On the other matters, we have put greater flesh on commitments that had already been given at a high political level. But we have not previously committed to requiring Stormont agreement to any new laws that the EU proposed to add to the backstop, and we have not previously committed to giving a restored Northern Ireland Executive a seat at the table at the committee overseeing the Northern Ireland backstop.

I accept, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State did, that the paper we have published today will not be sufficient to meet all the concerns that the hon. Member for Belfast East and his colleagues have expressed, but it marks a genuine step forward in giving expression to our wish to make it very clear that we see Northern Ireland's place in not only the political union of the United Kingdom but the single economic internal market of the United Kingdom now and into the future.

The hon. Member for Rochdale said that his personal test was that there should be no regulatory divergence between Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Of course, as he will know, there are some sectors where there is such regulatory divergence at the moment—notably on animal health and trading in livestock—for good practical reasons that are long established. One element of today's package is greater clarity than we have given before that Northern Ireland goods under all circumstances would have full access to customers and markets in Great Britain, and that in the event of a backstop ever coming into operation, we would seek to align regulations in Great Britain with those that applied in Northern Ireland for the duration of the backstop.

**Tony Lloyd:** This is a serious point, not a polemical one. We now have a situation where the rest of the UK will follow Northern Ireland. If that is the case, why was that not the base case written into the protocol?

**Mr Lidington:** Because these things are about the sovereign constitutional order of the United Kingdom. They involve decisions that we in this House make and that, in respect of certain devolved matters, we would need to make in partnership and consultation with the Governments in the three devolved areas of the United Kingdom. That is why these are things that we are expressing unilaterally.

**Tony Lloyd:** This comes to the nub of things, and it is the point that the hon. Member for Belfast East made. If I disagree with the Government proposing any form of regulatory change that affects my constituents in



[Tony Lloyd]

Rochdale, I can vote in this House. The hon. Member for Belfast East does not have that same facility, and that is what is different about this agreement.

**Mr Lidington:** I want to come on to talk more generally about the backstop. I am not going to hide the fact—the Prime Minister has said it openly—that this is something we find uncomfortable as a Government, but we do not believe it poses the risks to the Union that are expressed by its critics.

I want to take up the point about the Belfast agreement. The question has been raised in this debate and previously, including by the hon. Member for Belfast East, as to whether the protocol breaches the integrity of the three-stranded approach that is embodied in the Belfast/Good Friday agreement. It is clear to me that the text of the protocol says in terms that it protects the 1998 agreement “in all its parts”. That is on page 303 of the document that is on the table. The protocol also refers to the scope for possible new arrangements for north-south co-operation but then goes on to define those as being in accordance with the 1998 agreement.

The Government’s own legal position is clear that article 13 of the protocol does not alter the remit of the North-South Ministerial Council or the north-south implementation bodies; nor does it alter strand two in any way. However, to avoid any doubt on this matter, in the paper today we have again given a commitment to legislate to provide explicitly that

“no recommendations made under Article 13(2) of the Protocol will be capable of altering the scope of...the North-South Ministerial Council, nor establishing new implementation bodies or altering the arrangements set out in the Belfast Agreement in any way.”

**Gavin Robinson:** The right hon. Gentleman is touching on a fundamental point. The protocol makes reference to compliance with the Good Friday agreement “in all its parts”, but as has been mentioned, paragraph 12 of strand two specifically requires not consultation or involvement but the approval and consent not only of the Northern Ireland Assembly but of the Oireachtas. When we consider new regulations and new engagement with the Irish Republic, that will impinge on north-south co-operation.

**Mr Lidington:** As I have just said, the Government’s own legal position does not pose the threat that the hon. Gentleman has expressed. Probably the best way for me to respond is, having consulted the Attorney General—who supervised the compilation and publication of the Government’s legal position—to write directly to the hon. Gentleman to set out our case in greater detail.

I oppose a no-deal exit not just because of the economic harm but because I actually believe that a no-deal exit would cause profound and possibly irreversible damage to the Union of the United Kingdom. The tensions in Northern Ireland and in Scotland resulting from such an outcome would be severe. The hon. Member for Belfast East was right to say that there was no express provision in the 1998 agreement for open trade across the border. It is also true that there was provision in the Belfast agreement for the removal of border infrastructure related to security matters.

The hon. Member for Rochdale was also right to point out that at the time of the 1998 negotiations and agreement, this country and the Republic of Ireland had been members of the European Union for many years. The single market had been established, and the assumption that everybody made at that time was that that economic order was going to continue. The question of whether border issues would arise in the event of the hypothetical departure of either state from the European Union was just not considered at the time. It was not a live issue. Indeed, the completely frictionless, seamless traffic of individuals and freight across the border has been one of the elements that has helped to support the peace-building process. We should take note of the Chief Constable’s concerns about security tensions that could arise from a no-deal exit, and we should also be aware of the symbolism of any kind of infrastructure on the border.

I want us to remain in a situation in which people living in Northern Ireland who identify themselves as Irish but have fairly moderate political views continue to support the Union with the United Kingdom. I see opinion polls and I have conversations with people from that tradition in Northern Ireland. Members can aim off opinion polls or aim off anecdotal experience, but I am hearing from moderate people on the nationalist side who have been content with the Union that they are becoming more anxious, more hard-line and more questioning of Northern Ireland’s constitutional status. Their consent, to use the key term, to the Union seems to me to be hugely important to preserving the Union, which I passionately want to do. I completely respect the argument the right hon. Member for Belfast North (Nigel Dodds) put to me and to the House, but I differ from him on the implications of the backstop.

**Mr McFadden:** The Minister is making an important point, because the Good Friday agreement says that people in Northern Ireland can choose to be British, Irish or both, and that “both” is hugely valuable. Is not the danger of Brexit that it upsets the equilibrium that allows people to choose to be both?

**Mr Lidington:** I do think that that is one of the downsides. I am not going to refight a campaign that I fought and lost, along with the right hon. Gentleman, in 2016. As the hon. Member for Rochdale was kind enough to say, I did actually go to Northern Ireland and campaign on the remain side there. We are where we are. It seems to me that the duty we have as a Parliament, confronted with how the people of the United Kingdom voted, is to do our utmost to find a way that delivers on that democratic verdict while, in the context of this particular debate, minimising to the extent possible the rise in the kind of tensions that the right hon. Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden) has described.

The backstop is an insurance policy designed to guarantee that we can in all circumstances meet our commitments, as a Government and as a country, to avoiding a hard border on the island of Ireland. I think it also has the advantage of acting as a safety net for Northern Ireland’s economy. It does of course still take Northern Ireland, along with the rest of the UK, out of the common fisheries and agricultural policies. As I have said before, I do not think we are shying away from the fact that this is an uncomfortable solution for the

UK, but it is an uncomfortable solution for the European Union as well. Both the United Kingdom and the EU have a mutual interest in ensuring the backstop is never needed, and if it ever were, it would be only a temporary arrangement.

**Nigel Dodds** (Belfast North) (DUP): I have listened with great patience to what the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has had to say, and I respect the way in which he has put his arguments. However, I have to confess to a slight degree of frustration, because these arguments and some of the issues he has raised were all put in a previous debate; after three days, the Prime Minister came to the House and said that it was clear that her deal would be voted down by a substantial margin, because of the concerns that had been expressed, and that she would go away and get legally binding assurances. I have listened to what the Minister has said, and there is nothing new there; I do not think he will persuade anybody who has not already been persuaded. Where is the delivery of the changes promised by the Prime Minister? What has changed since these arguments were advanced previously?

I hope at some point in this debate, on another day, to deal in detail with all the issues the right hon. Gentleman has raised—all the anecdotal stuff he has talked about and what he has heard—because really what he is arguing in terms of Brexit, nationalism and the future of Northern Ireland is that we should just forget about Brexit. That is the logic of what he is saying. What I would like to hear from him is this: what is new, as far as what the Prime Minister promised is concerned? That is what we are waiting to hear.

**Mr Lidington**: As the right hon. Gentleman knows, the Prime Minister will respond to the debate in the final speech next Tuesday. She has been talking to a number of European leaders in the weeks since this debate was postponed. She will obviously want to respond to the questions that the right hon. Gentleman fairly puts, either during her speech in that debate, or possibly earlier. That is the most I can commit to on behalf of my right hon. Friend this evening. I also say to the right hon. Member for Belfast North and his colleagues that there is certainly a recognition—indeed, an understanding—on the part of the Government of the concerns that they have expressed. We continue to discuss with him and his colleagues how we can seek to provide the necessary assurances about the Union that he is asking us to provide. I will make sure that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is aware of his wish to have a more detailed response to the points he has raised this evening.

I think it is worth the House reminding itself that the EU has an interest, just as we do, in bringing the backstop to an end quickly, should it ever be needed at all. Of course, the fear is often expressed, here and outside, that despite the legal obligation in the withdrawal agreement for the backstop to be temporary; despite the explicit provision in the withdrawal agreement for technology or other measures to be deployed to make the backstop superfluous; despite the duty to replace it as rapidly as possible; and despite, for that matter, frequent public statements by the Taoiseach, the European Commission and other leaders that they have no wish or interest in having the backstop as anything more than an insurance policy, we will still be trapped in it for

many years, or even indefinitely. Ultimately, this boils down to a lack of trust within the United Kingdom in the good intentions of the European Commission and some member state Governments.

The irony is that there is a lack of trust of the United Kingdom on the other side of the table, too. One of the most striking developments since the withdrawal agreement was finalised and published has been the fierce criticism levelled at Michel Barnier by Governments in some EU member states. For them, the backstop, should it ever be used, would allow goods from the entire United Kingdom, including agricultural produce, to access the whole of the EU single market, without tariffs, quotas or rules of origin requirements, and that would be granted without the UK paying a penny into the EU budget, without the UK accepting the free movement of people, and with the UK accepting a much less onerous set of level playing field requirements than those demanded of EU member states.

**Alex Chalk**: Is it not a fact that what from our point of view might be considered a backstop is, from the European Union's point of view, a back door? Does that not express the EU's concern that we would be paying not a penny piece for something that would provide a material advantage—an unfair advantage, as some would see it—in terms of access to the single market?

**Mr Lidington**: My hon. Friend is right. Indeed, that fear reinforces the concern that the EU has about the important legal principle that a free trade agreement or association agreement with a third country cannot be based on an article 50 withdrawal agreement, which was intended by the treaty to cover the necessary legal arrangements for a member state's departure from the Union. The Commission knows that for exactly the reason my hon. Friend gives, the longer any backstop were to last, the greater legal risk it would face of challenge in the European courts from aggrieved businesses, whether in the Republic of Ireland, France, Belgium or elsewhere, complaining that that principle was being breached to their commercial disadvantage.

We should not underestimate the importance of the guarantee of no hard border on the island of Ireland and no customs border in the Irish sea. It is no coincidence that the Northern Ireland business community is overwhelmingly and vocally supportive of this deal. However, there are aspects of the backstop that are and will remain uncomfortable. If it were needed, it would mean that a portion of EU law would apply in Northern Ireland for the duration of the backstop—about 40 pages of the 1,100 pages of single market acquis legislation.

The Government, as I said earlier, are mindful of the fact that we already have some regulatory differences between Northern Ireland and the rest of the country. We have sought, both in previous statements and in the package we put forward today, to identify ways in which the practical impact of any such requirements can be minimised, so that ordinary businesses and customers in Northern Ireland or Great Britain see as little change as possible.

**Nigel Dodds**: I promise not to intervene again, because I will deal with these points at a future date. The Minister has mentioned for the second time that there are already regulatory differences. He knows that they

[*Nigel Dodds*]

are extremely small in number, and that they were instituted with the democratic will of the Northern Ireland Assembly under the previous regime in Northern Ireland. They were democratically agreed, and they are for the purpose of controlling animal health effectively. They are not part of a regulatory difference because we are under a different regime for goods or agri-food, so it is entirely spurious and wrong of him to build that argument on the basis that there are already regulatory differences. Having rules about a large part of our economy set by people not in this House and not in the Assembly is a gross offence to democracy in this country.

**Mr Lidington:** Of course, the arrangements come into force only if this House gives assent to them. This House has a say in what is proposed. Any future additions to areas of law that are covered would require the agreement of both the European Union and the United Kingdom. We have said again today that as far as the United Kingdom's decision was concerned, we would have a legal obligation on UK Ministers to seek agreement from the Northern Ireland institutions before agreeing to any such additions.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): The Minister mentions the issue of trust between the EU, the UK Government and Parliament. I say very, very gently to the Minister that there is also an element of trust between the Government and the Democratic Unionist party. There is trust in what the Government are trying to put forward as a solution, but the solution in relation to the backstop is not acceptable. That has to be addressed.

**Mr Speaker:** That that was an intervention of intoxicating significance I do not doubt for one moment, but may I just say to the hon. Gentleman that as a result of his intervention, he has helped the Minister to double the ration allocated to the shadow Minister? These are important matters, but I think the Minister is approaching his peroration.

**Mr Lidington:** I do want to make progress. I will just say in response to the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) that, as I have said to his hon. Friends, we accept and understand their concerns, and we will continue conversations with them to try to seek agreement.

All businesses in our country want certainty. Since the deal was announced, organisations in every part of the United Kingdom—large and small, manufacturing, farming and fisheries—have said they want to get on and see a deal sorted, so they can plan for the future. They are aware, too, of the risks that no deal would carry: 40% tariffs for Scottish beef and Welsh lamb exports, 10% tariffs for cars from Sunderland, Swindon and the west midlands, and the inspections, regulations and form-filling that will go with such arrangements under WTO terms.

I believe that what we have now is an outcome that both those who supported leave and those who supported remain should be able to accept. Let us not forget that

people who voted to leave the European Union were a significant minority in some parts of the UK, and in some demographic groups in the population, in which the majority in 2016 voted to remain. The deal gives the certainty of leaving the European Union. It removes this country from the political structures of the EU and any commitment to an ever closer union. It ends the automatic freedom of movement under European law, leaving it to Governments and Parliaments in the UK to decide how generous or restrictive our policies should be, and it ends the jurisdiction of the European courts in this country.

For those who voted to remain in the European Union—again, they were a significant minority in those places where most people voted to leave—the deal offers a deep and special future partnership between the UK and the EU, reflecting the reality of our deep-rooted ties of history, geography, culture and democratic commitment, and reflecting, too, the fact that, for as far ahead as any of us can see, the EU is likely to remain this country's single most important trading partner.

I believe that compromise in politics is not an insult. The deal that we have on the table, endorsed not just by the British Prime Minister and Cabinet but by the 27 other Governments of the European Union, is one that has been the product of compromise. It has meant difficult negotiations and give and take on both sides. Like most things in politics and in life, it is not perfect, but I believe that it provides a good foundation for us to move forward from the divisions and the agonies of the last two years, towards a future in which the United Kingdom and the European Union can work as close neighbours, friends, allies and trusted trading partners for many years into the future.

*Ordered,* That the debate be now adjourned.—(*Amanda Milling.*)

*Debate to be resumed tomorrow (Order, this day.)*

## Business without Debate

### DELEGATED LEGISLATION

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),*

#### ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

That the draft Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 (Amendment) Order 2018, which was laid before this House on 5 November 2018, be approved.—(*Amanda Milling.*)

*Question agreed to.*

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),*

#### EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (FINANCIAL SERVICES)

That the draft Money Laundering and Transfer of Funds (Information) (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2018, which were laid before this House on 29 November 2018, be approved.—(*Amanda Milling.*)

*Question agreed to.*



## Royal Marines: Basing Arrangements

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—(Amanda Milling.)

9.52 pm

**Luke Pollard** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): It is time to put an end to the uncertainty over where our Royal Marines will be based in the future. At the outset, I pay tribute to all those who serve in the Royal Marines. As the UK's high-readiness, elite amphibious fighting force, they offer the UK hard power options when diplomacy fails and when disasters strike. Their contribution to our country has been delivered in blood and sweat, and I want to thank the Royal Marines in uniform today; those veterans who have served for their contribution to our national security; and forces families for their support for those who have served.

Tonight I want to focus specifically on the Royal Marines base in Stonehouse in Plymouth. In 2016 it was announced that this historic and spiritual home of the Royal Marines would close in 2023, but three years on we are still not certain where the Royal Marines will move to when Stonehouse barracks close.

This is not the first debate today about the Royal Marines. Earlier my fellow Devon MP, the hon. Member for North Devon (Peter Heaton-Jones), made the case to keep open the Royal Marines base at Chivenor. MPs with Royal Marines on their patches are not fighting among ourselves; indeed, there is agreement that we need certainty for the Royal Marines' long-term future, wherever that may be. Certainty is required for 40 Commando in Taunton, as well as for those Royal Marines at Chivenor and those in Stonehouse. As the Member of Parliament for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport, I am proud to make the case for the Royal Marines—the pride and joy of our armed forces—to continue to be based in Plymouth, their spiritual home for more than 300 years.

We all know that the Royal Marines are the UK's finest fighting force, with unique and valued capabilities. I have seen that for myself at the Commando training centre at Lymington, with the commando obstacle course and at passing out parades. I have seen it in Plymouth, with the Royal Marines at Stonehouse, the Royal Marines band school in Portsmouth, and, on a rather blustery day, on the back of an offshore raiding craft on the River Tamar with Royal Marines from 1 Assault Group.

It is with great regret that I say that the morale of our Royal Marines is suffering, in part due to the uncertainty about their future basing. I know that from speaking to many of them off duty in bars around Plymouth and while door knocking in my city. The latest annual armed forces continuous attitude survey suggests there has been a significant fall in morale across the services. Two years ago, 62% of Royal Marines officers rated morale in the service as high; now, that figure is just 23%.

Since 2010, Plymouth has been on the hard end of cuts to our Royal Navy and Royal Marines. With the cuts to 42 Commando, the loss of the Royal Citadel and the sale of our Royal Navy flagship, HMS Ocean, at a bargain price to Brazil, Ministers have cut more often than they have invested. That must not be the end of the story for the Royal Marines and their long and proud association with Plymouth.

Talk of further cuts continued last summer, when there was speculation that Devonport-based amphibious ships HMS Albion and HMS Bulwark could face the axe, too. If those cuts had gone ahead, there would have been a logical threat to the existence of the Royal Marines. Rumours last April that the Marines might be merged with the Paras only added to concerns that that was being lined up as a real possibility. Time after time, I have stood up in this place to demand answers but, unfortunately, Ministers have refused to rule out the loss of those capabilities. The petition I launched to preserve the amphibious ships and the Royal Marines attracted 30,000 names, the bulk of them from the far south-west.

I am pleased to say, though, that in September, after a long, hard-fought campaign, we were relieved to hear that the Government had decided to save HMS Albion and HMS Bulwark. That was the right decision, and I thank the Minister for championing those ships and the Royal Marines.

**Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman for his work on saving our amphibious capability; I think he would acknowledge the work the Select Committee on Defence did, too. Does he agree that we all should acknowledge the contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer), who is another local MP, and the willingness of the Defence Secretary to take on board the message we were trying to relay? He even announced his decision ahead of the modernising defence programme announcement—at the Conservative party conference, no less.

**Luke Pollard:** Sadly, I did not get an invitation to the Tory party conference this year. I appreciate the point that the Chair of the Defence Committee makes. Our campaigns as a city are best fought when they are cross-party, and I hope that in the future the hon. Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer) will be here to make the case, too.

Stonehouse barracks is the oldest operational military barracks in the country. Since the Corps of Royal Marines was formed in 1664, it has had a base in Plymouth, close to Devonport. Stonehouse barracks, which opened in 1756, was the Royal Marines' first ever dedicated and purpose-built barracks. There were similar barracks in Chatham and Portsmouth, but Stonehouse is the only one remaining.

Since world war two, Stonehouse has been home to elements of 41, 42 and 43 Commando, and it was home to 45 Commando until it moved to RM Condor in 1971, when Stonehouse became the headquarters of 3 Commando Brigade. I am pleased that the Minister confirmed yesterday that Condor is safe; I hope he will have similar good news in due course for the rest of the Royal Marines bases.

The estate optimisation strategy, "A Better Defence Estate", which was published in November 2016, announced the Ministry of Defence's intent to

"dispose of Stonehouse Barracks by 2023 and to reprovide for the Royal Marines units in either the Plymouth or Torpoint areas".

The promise to provide a "super-base" in Plymouth is much touted by Government Members, and I believe it is a good one, but we have seen little evidence of where that base will be built. As part of a major defence

[*Luke Pollard*]

shake-up, the Army's 29 Commando will also leave Plymouth's Royal Citadel, which the MOD leases from the Crown Estate. In answer to a parliamentary question a few months ago, I was told:

"Further assessment study work is being undertaken to inform the final decision."

It is right that decisions about basing are taken on the grounds of military strategy by those in uniform rather than for party political reasons, but Ministers need to take a decision to address the uncertainty.

**Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way—as Members know, I am a fellow Janner, having been born in his constituency. Does he agree that, much though many of us have great affection for places such as the citadel, which for historical reasons has more guns over the city than it has over Plymouth sound, we must ensure that modern facilities are provided? It will be sad to see these places with great histories go, but we want modern facilities for the Marines, who are a cutting-edge fighting force, rather than to defend a 300-year-old barracks.

**Luke Pollard:** The hon. Gentleman pre-empted a piece of my speech, and he is exactly right. We need to make sure that the facilities for our Royal Marines and all our armed forces are up to scratch, and 300-year-old barracks are not providing the quality of accommodation required. It is right that in repurposing and re-providing those facilities in Plymouth we provide the Royal Marines with the finest facilities. I agree with him on that point.

Given the months and months of uncertainty, I was disappointed that a decision on basing the Royal Marines was not included in the recently published modernising defence programme. I said prior to its publication that if the MDP did not guarantee the future of the Royal Marines, it will have failed, and it did not even mention the words "Royal Marines", let alone their future basing arrangements. That said, I am encouraged by the words of the Minister about news of their future coming soon.

The lack of clarity is a cancer to morale. Falling morale hits the Royal Navy's and the Royal Marines' ability to recruit and retain the very best. It affects capability, and capabilities affect our strategic options in tough times. The logic of basing the Royal Marines in Plymouth, close to amphibious ships, Royal Marines Tamar and training grounds is sound, but if a base is to be operational by 2023, after Stonehouse barracks closes, work needs to begin this year.

There is strategic importance in keeping the Royal Marines, Plymouth and Devonport together. When the defence review in 2010 reconfigured our defence capabilities, Plymouth was promised it would be the centre of amphibiousness for the Royal Navy. That is a promise that the Government must keep, and Royal Marines Tamar is a good sign that the MOD intends to keep that promise, but without a new home for the Royal Marines, it looks a hollow pledge. Plymouth and Devonport in particular must remain a centre of amphibiousness, in name as well as in strength, and that means not only having it set forth in a strategy but having the ships and the Royal Marines that make that capability what it is today: a world-leading capability that is a deterrent to our adversaries and a support to our allies.

In looking at what facilities can be re-provided for the Royal Marines after Stonehouse barracks closes, the Minister will know—because we have spoken about it several times—that I am also keen to look at the memorials in Stonehouse to Royal Marines who have died to make sure they are relocated sensitively or protected in their current location.

As a proud Janner—someone born in Plymouth who lives in Plymouth—I feel I can say that Plymouth all too often hides its light under a bushel, and then hides the bushel.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate. Does he agree that it is essential that there remains a strong military presence that feeds into the local economy and community and that bases are not completely separate from but involved in and a help to the local area?

**Luke Pollard:** I agree entirely. Military bases might be surrounded by fences and razor wire, but they have bridges to the communities, connections to our economies and bonds deeper than any moat.

Royal Marine bases, such as that at Stonehouse, are part of the social fabric of our city, and I think we should say loudly that we are proud of them, we value them and we want them to remain part of the vibrant fabric of our community, contributing economic activity, expertise and the commando spirit of cheerfulness in the face of adversity to all things Plymouth.

A number of options have been or should be considered in the basing of this future super-base. Whether it is decamping 3 Commando Brigade to the Royal Citadel while Stonehouse barracks is refitted, building a new base at Devonport dockyard or Bull Point, expanding HMS Raleigh to accommodate the Royal Marines, building alongside Royal Marines Bickleigh or brownfield and greenfield options, Ministers must have a plan and make it public shortly.

Plymouth City Council stands ready to work with the Ministry of Defence, especially in assisting in land purchase, if the suggested locations currently fall outside the 3% of the country the MOD already owns. I fear there is little logic in disposing of Stonehouse barracks if Ministers seek to make a profit from the land. It will not deliver any profit and will require a significant multi-million-pound dowry if any developer is to take it on.

Royal William Yard, only a few hundred metres from Stonehouse, has shown that old military buildings can be repurposed beautifully but not without significant investment, ongoing capital support and massive public subsidy. I doubt the MOD is planning on such a scale of public subsidy for the Stonehouse site after it sells it. As a Grade II\* listed building, it is not attractive to developers in its current form. Equally, the dated and historic facilities, lack of hot water, problems with heating and dormitory-based set up is not suitable for Royal Marines in the 21st century.

In conclusion, when does the Minister expect to have a long-term base for the Royal Marines announced, and what plans does he have for the Royal Citadel after the departure of 29 Commando? The Royal Marines dedicate their lives to the protection of our country and our national interests. The least we need to do is ensure they have certainty about where they will be based, be

it at Plymouth, Taunton or Chivenor. I welcome the announcement that Ministers will make an oral statement about the better estates strategy in the coming weeks, and I encourage the Minister to use all the energies of his office to ensure that Brexit does not bounce or bump this statement. The Royal Marines and their families, be they in Taunton, Plymouth or north Devon, all deserve certainty about where the Royal Marines will be based in the future.

10.4 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Tobias Ellwood):** I was not sure whether we would reach this point, given the proceedings earlier today, but I am very pleased that we have.

Let me begin, as is customary, by congratulating the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard) on securing this important debate. It has been quite a week for parliamentary interest in the Marines. That, I think, is absolutely fair and understandable, and reflects Members' active interest in and passion for supporting our armed forces and the communities in which they sit. The hon. Gentleman is no exception, as he has illustrated in his powerful and passionate speech tonight.

I can say—and I could then sit down, but I will not—that answers are coming. The hon. Gentleman hinted at the fact that there will be a major statement on the rationalisation of our real estate and some of our assets in the very near future. I hope he recognises the importance of our carrying out due diligence correctly. As he mentioned, many stakeholders are involved. It is important for us to do our homework correctly and then make our announcements accordingly, because so many factors are involved.

The hon. Gentleman touched on the importance of what our military bases represent. They are not just defence assets. They provide homes, jobs and a way of life, and are sizeable communities in their own right. They often have a significant input into the local economy. They are, in essence, living organisms that have a symbiotic relationship with the wider community. Many of our military establishments—Stonehouse is a fantastic example, having been the first purpose-built garrison in the country—have been there for so long that they help to define the areas in which they sit, and add to their reputation.

Members will, however, be fully aware of the wider need to rationalise our defence real estate. It has grown over literally hundreds of years, and now represents 3% of UK land. We do not need it. It is superfluous to requirements, and indeed some of it is required for other purposes, such as housing. We need to use our defence budget wisely. It is simply not possible to retain huge defence real estate in the way to which we have been accustomed in the past—the legacy of sea, air and land assets that were often required and used during two world wars. We have therefore been obliged to conduct a wide-ranging study of Ministry of Defence land, with a view to transforming our estate into one that better supports the future needs of our armed forces.

With that, however, comes more bespoke investment. The hon. Gentleman suggested that Stonehouse was no longer appropriate. I visited that location; the shower units do not work, and Marines are living in eight-man

accommodation. That will not attract the next generation of potential recruits. It is important that we build for the future, which is why we are investing £4 billion over the next 10 years to create a smaller, more modern and more capability-focused estate.

Before I turn to the UK Marine footprint, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not mind if I echo some of the words used in a Westminster Hall debate earlier today, which focused specifically on RM Chivenor. The Royal Marines play a critical and unique role in the wider spectrum of our armed forces capability. This year they celebrate their 350th anniversary. They have much to be proud of in their long history, including a vital role in Lord Nelson's victory at Trafalgar, securing and defending the Rock of Gibraltar in 1704, the infamous raid on Zeebrugge in 1918 that earned two of them the Victoria Cross, and the D-Day landings in Normandy, where 17,500 of them took part in the largest amphibious operation in history. More recently, in 1982, they were essential to the recapture of the Falkland Islands.

Today, the Royal Marines are the UK's specialised commando force—our elite unit, held at high readiness, trained for worldwide rapid response and able to deal with a wide spectrum of threats and security challenges. They often operate in dangerous and extremely difficult circumstances, from amphibious operations to littoral strikes and humanitarian operations. They are specialists in mountain and cold-weather warfare and jungle counter-insurgency. When diplomacy fails, the Royal Marines provide the UK Government with an impressive spectrum of hard power options with which we can respond. To every one of those Royal Marines, and to the veterans who have earned the coveted green beret, I say thank you on behalf of a grateful nation.

The 2015 strategic defence and security review confirmed our commitment to the Royal Marines. I am sorry that there was much speculation about the future of assets and locations and about the size of the Royal Marines. I hope that the publication of the modernising defence programme has put some of those concerns to bed, with the confirmation that the futures of HMS Bulwark and HMS Albion have been secured.

The House will be familiar with the family of units that make up the Royal Marines Orbat, which is heavily weighted towards the south-west: 3 Commando Brigade is headquartered at Stonehouse in Plymouth, which it is expected to vacate by 2023; 40 Commando is based at Norton Manor Camp in Taunton and is earmarked for a move; and 42 Commando is based at Bickleigh barracks in Devon. In addition, Lympstone is home to the amazing commando training centre. The hon. Gentleman said he had visited the centre, and I have visited it too. It is an incredible place that not only trains UK commandos but attracts trainers from other parts of the world, who come to see our standards of professionalism. The hon. Gentleman also mentioned 29 Commando Royal Artillery, which is based at the Royal Citadel. Again, that accommodation is no longer fit for purpose. We cannot even get the artillery vehicles through the front doors any longer, so we cannot stay in that location. The Commando Logistic Regiment is based at RMB Chivenor, which was debated at length in Westminster Hall this morning. At the other end of the country, 45 Commando is based at Condor, which was also the subject of debate this week. Finally, there is 43 Commando, the Fleet Protection Group, which looks after our nuclear assets.



[Mr Tobias Ellwood]

Turning to the policy surrounding the future basing arrangements, the Government made a series of announcements following the 2016 basing review, with a view to delivering a more efficient and sustainable defence estate. Subsequent feasibility work has revealed that the original plan needs further technical and affordability assessments to ensure that it delivers the Navy's capability requirements while ensuring value for money for the taxpayer. That work has been under way for some time, and as I said earlier today, further announcements will be made in the near future.

The MOD remains acutely aware of the impact of the uncertainty around the final decision, of which the hon. Gentleman spoke, on our service personnel and their families. The principles underlining the future of the Royal Marines basing plan include maintaining operational capabilities, which is first and foremost. Much though any Member would like assets to remain in their locality, we must recognise the duty laid out in the 2015 SDSR, and that operational commitments must come first. The provision of modern, enabled and co-located command and control facilities to manage small and medium-scale enduring amphibious operations is at the core of what our Royal Marines do. They must also have the ability to generate the force, so we must be able to maintain the Royal Marines in the south-west, which will provide easy access to specialist amphibious shipping and land and sea training areas that will enable the Royal Marines to generate the force and deliver the primary amphibious outputs that we expect of them.

Turning to estate optimisation, the Royal Marines will, over time, reduce their overall infrastructure asset base to focus available resources better into a smaller footprint that will be fit for purpose, efficient to operate and sustainable. Of course, the morale component of garrisoning units and their provision of domestic stability must also be protected. The hon. Gentleman touched on that. The morale of our armed forces is important, and co-locating units into smaller geographical areas allows them to support each other and focus on the collective operational output. It also provides opportunities for families to move, but not too far from each other, so that they can invest in a single home

rather than constantly having to move. All of that helps to recruit and retain people into the Royal Marine family.

This consolidation has not just taken place over the past couple of years; it has been part of a 25-year package, which will see the Royal Navy focus more on centres of specialisation. In the long term the aim is to rationalise the number of Royal Marine barracks in the south-west, as I think the hon. Gentleman understands, but also to combine military and infrastructure expertise in order to transform the places where the armed forces live, work, train and operate.

The part our Royal Marines play in fitting into the wider jigsaw of the UK defence posture has come up in all the debates on the subject, and I stress that point because from where I sit the world is changing fast and becoming more dangerous and complex. The threats are diversifying and intensifying. We are a nation that for so long has retained an ability, and indeed a desire, to help shape the world around us as a force for good, but I believe we will soon reach an inflection point beyond which our role on the international stage will be permanently diminished unless we invest more in defence. We will not be able to assist our allies who look to us for international leadership, we will not be able to defend our existing and new trade routes in a post-Brexit world, and we will not be able to robustly defend ourselves in the new arenas of conflict such as cyber and space if we do not invest in defence, and that includes investment in our brave Royal Marines.

I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising this issue and allowing us to debate it, and for giving me the opportunity to underline the MOD's commitment to our Royal Marines and our armed forces in general. We are committed to their capabilities and to their families, whose support is critical. That is why their interests and needs must be a factor in the estate equation.

As I said this morning, the rationalisation of more than 90 military locations continues, and I look forward to making a statement in the next round—in the very near future—with a detailed announcement of the number of locations.

*Question put and agreed to.*

10.17 pm

*House adjourned.*

# House of Commons

*Thursday 10 January 2019*

*The House met at half-past Nine o'clock*

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## Oral Answers to Questions

### TRANSPORT

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### Rail Fares

1. **Peter Kyle** (Hove) (Lab): What recent progress his Department has made on simplifying the fare structure for rail services. [908471]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Andrew Jones):** It is vital that passengers feel confident that they are buying the most appropriate ticket for their journey, which was why we committed in our manifesto to review rail ticketing, removing complexity and perverse pricing. The rail review will take a longer-term look at how the railway can support a fares system that delivers value for money for both passengers and taxpayers.

**Peter Kyle:** I am grateful to the Minister for that answer. Last April, the then rail Minister wrote to me to say that he was conducting a review of fare simplification on the Brighton main line. In oral questions that month, he said that the review would be completed “rapidly”. Only the context of this Government’s handling of rail fares could the best part of a year be called rapid. When will that review be completed and when will fares be simplified on the Brighton main line?

**Andrew Jones:** My predecessor undertook to review the matter and remove some of the anomalies, and that work has already started, including in the fare review we saw earlier this year and the big piece of work reviewing how pay-as-you-go can be extended across the south-east. There has been a piecemeal approach where it has gone into Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire and parts of Surrey, and we are taking a strategic approach to it and that will be happening in the first half of this year.

**Chris Green** (Bolton West) (Con): Devolution to Greater Manchester offers enormous opportunities to simplify rail fares across the area. What has so far been achieved in that regard, and what opportunities have been taken to broaden out the ease of using different modes of public transport across Greater Manchester on a single ticket?

**Andrew Jones:** That is very much a question for the Williams review of devolution structures in our transport sector. The principle of my hon. Friend’s question, which is about making things more convenient for passengers through smart ticketing, is absolutely right. If we make things easier for passengers, they will be

more likely to use the services. That is a key question for the Williams review, and I will make sure that my hon. Friend’s question is fed through to Mr Williams.

**Emma Hardy** (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): Fares have gone up everywhere, including for Hull Trains, which has been particularly difficult for residents of Hull to swallow because the reliability of the trains has been so poor. I will offer the Minister a gift this morning—an opportunity to be a hero cost-free. I would like him to contact First Group and put extreme pressure on it to give Hull Trains a new train six months earlier than promised. If he can do that, it will improve reliability—and I am not even asking him for any more money.

**Andrew Jones:** That is quite unusual, to be honest, as we have a lot of requests for money. I will look into what the hon. Lady says and get back to her.

#### Leaving the EU: Aviation

2. **Mr Virendra Sharma** (Ealing, Southall) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the potential effect of the UK leaving the EU on the viability of the aviation sector. [908472]

**The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling):** The UK Government and European Commission have agreed in principle that the two sides should negotiate a comprehensive air transport agreement. The Department is working closely with the aviation sector to ensure its requirements are factored into negotiations. The Department’s aviation technical notices and the European Commission’s published plans for aviation contingency preparations, alongside proposed EU regulations published on 19 December, clearly demonstrate that, in a no-deal scenario, both sides are committed to maintaining aviation connectivity.

**Mr Sharma:** I thank the Secretary of State for his response to my question. What is the Department’s estimate of the effect of leaving the EU on the opportunities for the thousands currently employed in the aviation sector as apprentices?

**Chris Grayling:** I think that the aviation sector will continue to grow and develop as it has in recent years. We will continue to have connections across Europe, as we do at the moment, and, of course, with the plans for the expansion of Heathrow airport, there will be a real opportunity for apprenticeships in the sector and to open up new routes around the world, for example to emerging markets in Asia. I see the next 10 years as ones of great opportunity for the aviation sector.

**Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): The EU’s contingency arrangements are welcome, but what estimate has the Secretary of State made of the prospects for airports such as Bournemouth that want to increase their routes to Europe over the next year?

**Chris Grayling:** The European Union has said that it wants to keep flights at the current levels, and I suspect that they will find that that is not a universally held view among member states.

**John Spellar** (Warley) (Lab): I am sure that the Secretary of State can chew gum and walk at the same time, so while he is dealing with future viability with our leaving the EU, will he also deal with the current crisis over drones affecting airports? May I give him the opportunity to answer the questions that he did not answer earlier in the week? Were contingency plans agreed with the Ministry of Defence and the Home Office to protect our airports from drone incidents and others, and if not, why not? Were such plans not activated in time because of dithering? Why did they not work? Was that the fault of the Secretary of State's Department, the Ministry of Defence, the Home Office or, indeed, the Cabinet Office?

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I listened to the right hon. Gentleman's question with great interest. It was tangential to the substantive question, and I just say gently to him that I had been thinking of offering him an Adjournment debate on the matter, until I realised that he had, in fact, just conducted one.

**Chris Grayling:** Indeed he has, Mr Speaker.

I would simply remind the right hon. Gentleman of two factors. First, the disruptive attack at Gatwick was unprecedented anywhere in the world, and as a result we have been approached by airports around the world to learn more about how we tackled that. Secondly, as I have said, I am not able to discuss in the House the nature of the technology used for security reasons, but when a similar issue arose at Heathrow earlier this week, the response was very rapid indeed.

**Colin Clark** (Gordon) (Con): Does the Secretary of State agree that regional air connectivity within the UK is a priority as we leave the EU? Can he remind operators such as British Airways that reducing routes from Aberdeen International airport in my constituency disrupts business and leisure travel?

**Chris Grayling:** I agree with my hon. Friend, and that is why we have put down a clear requirement that as Heathrow expands a proportion of its capacity is set aside for regional connectivity within the United Kingdom. It is really important that an expanded Heathrow is a gateway for the whole United Kingdom to opportunities around the world, as well as within the country.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I chair the parliamentary air safety group, and I know a little about the aviation sector. During consideration of a statutory instrument upstairs recently, I challenged a Minister to tell me which chief executive or chair of any airline he had talked to about this subject. I have talked to them, and they are terrified of the impact of a no-deal Brexit. He could not name one.

**Chris Grayling:** I have talked to the chief executives of every major UK airline. I have also talked to representatives of a significant number of international airlines.

**Christine Jardine** (Edinburgh West) (LD): As the Secretary of State has spoken to the chief executives, he will of course be aware of their concerns about the contingency agreement only allowing for a freeze in the services of British airlines as they stand at the moment

. What reassurances can he give airports such as Edinburgh that this will not in fact be the case, and that expansion will happen should we have to leave the EU?

**Chris Grayling:** The hon. Lady says, "should we have to leave the EU". The country has already voted to leave the EU and we will next week vote on an agreement that would continue current aviation arrangements. If she is concerned about the contingency plans put in place by the European Union, will she join the Government in the Division Lobby next week to support the agreement?

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): Can the Secretary of State further outline discussions held with Belfast City and Belfast International airports to secure enhanced trading routes post March, and to evaluate what changes the airports may have to make?

**Chris Grayling:** I have had regular conversations with the leadership of the Belfast airports. Working with them in several areas, I want to see them expand their international flights. More flights are, of course, being planned for next summer, and I hope and believe that they have a strong and prosperous future with better links around the world.

**Karl Turner** (Kingston upon Hull East) (Lab): The Prime Minister's deal looks dead and we could well be heading into the chaos of a no-deal Brexit. If that is the case, we will no longer be a member of the European Aviation Safety Agency. Given that we do not currently have a bilateral air safety agreement with the US, can the Secretary of State give a guarantee that in the event of no deal there will be no disruption to flights?

**Chris Grayling:** Yes. The Civil Aviation Authority has been working for well over a year to ensure that in the event that we do not continue as a member of EASA we have a properly functional British alternative.

### Community Transport

3. **Alex Cunningham** (Stockton North) (Lab): What steps his Department is taking to support community transport operators. [908474]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Ms Nusrat Ghani):** The services run by community transport operators are of vital importance to our transport sector and communities. During the most recent financial year, the Government supported community transport operators with almost £3.1 million through the bus service operators grant. A number of projects from the £11.5 million building connections fund will also provide new community transport links to support those most at risk of isolation.

**Alex Cunningham:** That is a tiny amount to invest in community transport. My constituency is largely rural, and people in our villages—particularly older people—are left isolated because profit-making bus companies are not interested in serving them. There is some community provision, but very little funding. Will the Minister offer my isolated communities some comfort and commit more money to that sector, either directly or through the combined authority?



**Ms Ghani:** The hon. Gentleman will be aware that community transport operators, even within his own community, opened a new service as recently as a few months ago, with extra support from the Department and the bus service operators grant fund. I looked on his local council website to check what was happening with community transport, and there was a reference to the funding that the Department for Transport had provided. The council said that the excellent public community transport in the borough was being provided by funding provided by the Department for Transport.

**Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con):** Until recently, the No. 5 bus service that passes through South Killingholme in my constituency was supported by a Government grant. The local authority is making provision for community transport to provide an alternative, but it will not replace the existing service. Will the Minister agree to meet me to discuss whether other funding streams can be found to support the service?

**Ms Ghani:** My hon. Friend is a strong advocate for his constituency. I am not exactly sure which funding stream he is talking about, but let us sit down and talk about it, and see what we can do.

**Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab):** Meadowgreen health centre in Sheffield is moving, leaving the entire Lowedges estate completely unconnected to its GP surgery. Does the Minister agree that, under such circumstances, passenger authorities should be required to consult on bus routes to ensure that they are connected to GP surgeries? Will she write to South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive to ensure that it does just that?

**Ms Ghani:** The hon. Lady raises two very important issues. I will meet her to see what I can do to help out. She is right that if bus services are being changed, there needs to be communication with not only the traffic commissioner, but the local community. I am more than happy to sit down with her to see what is happening.

**Robert Courts (Witney) (Con):** When can we expect a full Government response on the sections 19 and 22 permits?

**Ms Ghani:** Those are two very important permits, and I know that they have previously caused some anxiety in the sector. Of course, we carried out a consultation. I want to make sure that we respond appropriately, which is why we will take our time to make sure we get it absolutely right. It is important to note that we are working with community transport operators and the Community Transport Association, which receives a substantial amount of funding from us. It is important to note that the status quo as it is today for community transport operators continues.

**Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP):** What steps is he taking to ensure that community transport groups will not require a licence when the Government align sections 19 and 22 permits with EU regulations? The proposals that went out for consultation still carry a risk that small and medium-sized groups will need to pay in the range of

£80,000 to £100,000, which would lead to the widespread disruption of those services. Does the Minister understand those risks?

**Ms Ghani:** I no doubt do not need to point out to the hon. Gentleman that I am a she, not a he, but no matter.

We are very supportive of community transport operators, which was why the consultation was so important. We will make sure that our response actually fits the fantastic voluntary work that takes place within our community transport network.

**Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab):** Community transport is a lifeline for many older or disabled people who would otherwise be trapped in their own homes, yet the Government propose to introduce a significant and unwanted extra burden on the charities that run those vital services. Age UK has reported that the majority of its community transport services would be forced to close because of the Government's mistaken proposals. Will the Minister commit to reconsidering her approach and to working with, rather than against, the charities that run those vital services?

**Ms Ghani:** I am a little confused by the hon. Gentleman's statement, because the Government are yet to put out our response. We are working with the charities sector, including with the Community Transport Association and community transport operators. There is an EU regulation that we are trying to make this fit into, but we are committed to ensuring that our community transport operators continue to operate. That is why we have the £3 million fund and the £11.5 million building connections fund.

### Leaving the EU: Ports

4. **Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP):** What steps he is taking to reduce potential disruption to travel at UK ports in the event of the UK leaving the EU without a deal. [908475]

9. **Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP):** What steps he is taking to reduce potential disruption to travel at UK ports in the event of the UK leaving the EU without a deal. [908480]

16. **Sandy Martin (Ipswich) (Lab):** What recent steps he has taken to prepare UK ports for when the UK leaves the EU. [908487]

**The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling):** The Department has been working for some time to ensure that traffic can continue to flow through UK ports as frictionlessly as possible in all scenarios when we leave the European Union. This has included engaging closely with others across Government, and with ports and their representative bodies. As regards ferry capacity, I refer the House to the two statements I made earlier this week.

**Tommy Sheppard:** The Government will forgive the House some scepticism about their efficacy and intention in this regard. Surely the Seaborne fiasco shows that only one of two things can be happening: either there is abject incompetence in the preparations for no deal; or the Secretary of State and his Department are not really taking them seriously. Which is it?

**Chris Grayling:** What is disappointing is that I would have hoped that the hon. Gentleman, as a Scottish Member, would welcome the additional opportunities for Scottish business as a result of expanded services from east coast ports to northern Europe provided by DFDS, which is a very substantial part of the contracts that we have let.

**Martyn Day:** Seaborne Freight has negative equity of just over £374,000, with one director being investigated by the Government for a trail of debt related to previous companies, yet due diligence did not flag this up. Can the Secretary of State confirm whether that is because due diligence guidance was to look not at individuals' trading history, but only at Seaborne's proposals? Why was such guidance provided?

**Chris Grayling:** As I said in the House earlier this week, we will not be paying Seaborne until ferries operate. From the point of view of business in Scotland, we have made sure that there are additional routes available from the east coast ports to northern Europe. In the event of a no-deal Brexit, which I hope will not happen, that should be a really valuable alternative for Scottish business, and the hon. Gentleman should welcome that.

**Sandy Martin:** How long has the Minister's Department estimated it will take to recruit and train the thousands of additional customs officers who will be required if we leave without a deal, and what conversations has he had with Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs about this?

**Chris Grayling:** I am very confident, as I have said, that HMRC will be ready. Of course, the point is that, at the moment, we do not collect customs tariffs or carry out checks. The Government have said very clearly that our prime priority in a post-Brexit world will be the fluidity of trade; other things can follow. Security, of course, remains of paramount importance, but beyond that, other things can follow. That is the approach the Government have taken.

**Stephen Crabb** (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): I have two ports in my constituency, with ferry connections running from Milford Haven and Fishguard to Ireland. Those ports assure me that they have the skills and the capacity to handle a variety of Brexit scenarios, but all they see at the moment is the promise of further argument and gridlock in this place. Does my right hon. Friend agree that we have a duty in this House to provide a way forward for this industry? Those who take comfort in just opposing everything are failing in their responsibilities.

**Chris Grayling:** I agree with my right hon. Friend. The reality is that it is all well and good Labour Members saying, "We don't want no deal," but then they are going to vote against the deal. They have not come up with any credible alternative plan, so I am afraid I take with a very large pinch of salt most of what the Labour party says at the moment.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): Will the Secretary of State confirm to the House that the Government have signed the common transit convention, which means that, in the event of a no-deal Brexit, customs declarations and import duties, as now, will be required to be paid only when the goods arrive at their final destination?

**Chris Grayling:** That is absolutely correct. In very many international trading scenarios using the common transit convention, customs processes can be at the start and the end of the journey. That is one reason why I felt able to say to the House earlier this week that I was confident that, in all circumstances, trade would continue to move relatively freely.

**Lilian Greenwood** (Nottingham South) (Lab): It has been reported that the Secretary of State's Department is in talks with two rail freight companies about options to provide additional services via the channel tunnel and High Speed 1 to ensure supplies of food and medicines in the event of blockages at Kent ports. It is also claimed that the Department has written to Southeastern trains warning of possible disruption to its services if additional daytime freight movements are required. Is his Department really contemplating emergency rail timetables in the event of a no-deal Brexit? Has he written to Southeastern regarding such contingency plans? Should the many thousands of rail commuters in Kent be bracing themselves for possible disruption?

**Chris Grayling:** No. The story is untrue.

**Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudon) (SNP): The Secretary of State's responses in Tuesday's urgent question on the Seaborne fiasco were disgraceful. He has awarded an emergency ferry contract to a company with no boats, no ports agreement, no personnel, debts and key personnel with dubious trading pasts. Parliament needs answers. How was Seaborne identified as a company that merited direct negotiations for an emergency contract?

**Chris Grayling:** It is a bit like the proverbial stuck gramophone record. I said very clearly, earlier this week, that we have let contracts with a number of operators, of which Seaborne represents about 10%, and we pay no money unless the service is delivered. To clarify further what the Chair of the Transport Committee said a moment ago, we are talking to a number of other potential outlets, in case extra capacity were to be needed—rail, ports, maritime—but nothing else has been decided. We have not issued instructions to any rail company about disruptive timetables and we have not taken any further steps to put additional measures in place. We are simply checking the lie of the land so that we can respond to all eventualities.

**Alan Brown:** This is an emergency contract that the Secretary of State thought was so critical it could circumvent EU procurement rules for direct negotiation, yet he says, "It's only 10%" and "Don't worry, if they don't deliver, they don't get paid." That means they don't deliver that emergency service. We know how sensitive Dover is; there are predictions of delays that could lead to 30-mile queues. If that 10% is not delivered, what is the impact on Dover?

**Chris Grayling:** This is why 90% of the new contracts are with DFDS and Brittany Ferries. As I said, I am disappointed that the Scottish National party does not welcome the DFDS contract that will provide additional routes from east coast ports to northern Europe, which will be beneficial to Scottish business.

**Andy McDonald** (Middlesbrough) (Lab): Putting to one side the ridiculous and desperate allegations of the Secretary of State that Labour is anti-business and his

banal allegations over Brexit, I point out that the Seaborne fiasco lays bare his total incompetence and the complete failure of due diligence. Before granting the ferry contract, was he aware of the debt or the promissory note between Ben Sharp, now Seaborne's CEO, and Mid-Gulf Offshore, acknowledging Sharp's indebtedness to that company of over \$1 million, which remains unpaid?

**Chris Grayling:** That clearly got under the hon. Gentleman's skin because he really does not like Government supporting new start-up businesses. The reality is, as I said earlier this week, that due diligence on this contract was done by Slaughter and May, Deloitte and Mott MacDonald, as he would expect, and off the back of that we formed a contract which we pay nothing for until the service is delivered.

**Andy McDonald:** Here's another one the Secretary of State might not answer. As a result of this debacle, a variety of legal challenges to the Secretary of State may well flow from, among others, existing freight service providers with capacity. On Tuesday, he said that Seaborne will be able to run ferry services immediately, but on Wednesday the Government said that Seaborne will not be able to open the route between Ramsgate and Ostend until late April at the very earliest. Surely that puts Seaborne in default of its contract to deliver services from 29 March and the contract is therefore void. In those circumstances, should not he reverse his appalling judgment and cancel the contract without delay?

**Chris Grayling:** We will hold all the companies that have presented us with proposals to the terms of their contracts.

### CrossCountry Rail Franchise

5. **Luke Pollard** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): Whether the next CrossCountry rail franchise will include a requirement to purchase new rolling stock. [908476]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Andrew Jones):** The current CrossCountry franchise runs until October this year, with a possible extension to October next year. The hon. Gentleman should be assured that we are working to look at all options for the new CrossCountry franchise, including rolling stock. We will look at adding much needed capacity to the CrossCountry services as soon as trains become available.

**Luke Pollard:** In November, an unbelievable 30% of CrossCountry trains to Plymouth terminated early at Exeter because the Voyager trains could not get through Dawlish in bad weather. As well as placing orders for new rolling stock for the long term, will the Minister look at requiring CrossCountry to use the GWR HST trains that are currently being replaced with newer trains, to give Cross Country extra, interim, Dawlish-proof capacity?

**Andrew Jones:** I had a very positive meeting with the hon. Gentleman and his local council leader yesterday. We agree on the importance of the south-west economy, in particular its connectivity, and we recognise entirely the issue with the Voyager trains and how they are affected by the salt water to which they are exposed.

CrossCountry is working on an engineering solution to that and we are working on adding capacity to the franchise. Passenger numbers have grown by 25%, so we need to put more rolling stock into it. We will look at where we can get the trains from to expand that capacity.

15. [908486] **Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): As the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard) outlined, there are constant issues with CrossCountry services west of Exeter due to their lack of resilience on the Dawlish coastal stretch. Can the Minister outline to me, and reassure me, that both the future rolling stock requirements and the work that we are doing to improve the resilience of this iconic coastal line will make a difference?

**Andrew Jones:** My hon. Friend is absolutely correct. Protecting the line at Dawlish is crucial and sends a broader signal that the south-west is open for business, with all the connectivity that implies. So this is a national priority. Essential work is under way now to repair four existing breakwaters in the area. We have committed £15 million for further development work. Ensuring that the line is resilient, and that the south-west is open for business, is a priority.

**Mr Clive Betts** (Sheffield South East) (Lab): Before Christmas, I travelled between Leeds and Sheffield on a CrossCountry train and experienced what my constituents regularly experience—as many passengers standing as sitting. The simple fact is that the four-car trains on the busiest part of the route between Leeds and Birmingham are simply inadequate. When we get a new franchise, will the Minister ensure that those four-car trains are extended, so that there is the capacity for people to actually get a seat on them?

**Andrew Jones:** I recognise entirely the crowding issues that the hon. Gentleman describes and has experienced personally, and which I have also experienced personally, so we are certainly looking to add capacity in the next franchise. We are also looking to add capacity before that franchise comes into force, if we can find it.

**Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield) (Con): Like Sheffield, we do not get much salt water in the west midlands, but West Midlands Railway is now purchasing over £1 billion-worth of new rolling stock. Could not the Minister use that model with the CrossCountry franchise?

**Andrew Jones:** I am aware of the new rolling stock that is coming in to the west midlands; indeed, it is coming in across many parts of our network. We have a fantastic story on rolling stock coming in over the next two years. I will look at what my hon. Friend says and get back to him with an answer.

### Manchester Oxford Road Station

6. **Graham Stringer** (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab): What steps he is taking to reduce delays at Manchester Oxford Road station. [908477]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Andrew Jones):** Richard George was appointed by the Secretary of State to review the operational performance challenges on the railway in the north of England,



following the introduction of the May 2018 timetable. That includes the performance of services operating through the Castlefield corridor, which includes Oxford Road. The Department continues to work with Transport for the North, Richard George and the industry to find solutions to improve performance.

**Graham Stringer:** A review simply is not good enough. More than three quarters of trains at Oxford Road do not comply with the timetable. We have had delays, cancellations, reviews. We need an immediate implementation of the Northern Hub investment programme—extra platforms at Salford, and extensions of platforms at Oxford Road, moving to new platforms 15 and 16. Will the Minister do that, and reject the ridiculous idea that this problem can be solved by digitising the signalling system, when there is such mixed rolling stock on these rails?

**Andrew Jones:** The problem, which is clearly there because the Castlefield corridor is a bottleneck on our network, will be solved using a variety of solutions, some of which will be technical. Funding has been set aside in CP6 and we are working on what that will be spent on.

**Kate Green** (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): My constituents, who use the line from Oxford Road through my constituency to Liverpool Lime Street, continue to experience repeated delays and overcrowding, and they are told to expect that situation to continue at least until April. What penalties will Northern face, as much of this seems to be due to lack of rolling stock or of train crew?

**Andrew Jones:** If any of the train operating companies is in breach of its franchise, there are mechanisms to hold it to account. Northern is run through the Rail North partnership, which is a combination of the Department for Transport and Transport for the North.

### Rail Travel: Affordability

7. **Mary Creagh** (Wakefield) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the affordability of rail travel. [908478]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport** (**Andrew Jones**): The Department is very mindful of the affordability of rail services and we have capped regulated fares in line with inflation for the sixth year in a row. Last week we announced our intention to extend the 16-17 railcard, offering 50% off all rail journeys. Together with the recently launched 26-30 railcard, this means that everybody up to the age of 30 will have access to discounted rail fares.

**Mary Creagh:** I thank the Minister for that reply, but 2018 was an abysmal year for rail travel, with tens of thousands of services cancelled in Yorkshire and across the country. Services in Yorkshire are among the least reliable anywhere in the UK and it is having a huge impact on Wakefield city centre. Will the Minister look again at the Transport Committee's excellent recommendation to enable season ticket holders to have a discount on their season tickets on the worst-performing lines, which at the moment are TransPennine Express

and Northern? Both are heavily used by my constituents, who do not have time to claim for every train service that does not turn up on a daily basis.

**Andrew Jones:** I am acutely aware that passengers across the north—and, indeed, other parts of our network—did see an unacceptable service in 2018. Those Northern passengers most directly affected received targeted compensation worth about 8%—obviously, far more than the increase that we have just seen. Further compensation funds are available. We are agreeing with Transport for the North about how that money should be spent.

**Huw Merriman** (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): I warmly welcome the decision to extend discounted fares for 16 and 17-year-olds. Four of the five secondary schools in my constituency have no sixth form. We require our students to stay in education until they are 18, and they have to travel by train either north to Kent or to the south coast.

I have always been a big believer in giving it 100%. May I encourage Front Benchers to have that as their long-term aspiration, so that we give a 100% discount on rail fares for 16 and 17-year-olds?

**Andrew Jones:** That would indeed be a very bold aspiration. Obviously, we want to make sure that we have a viable rail service. If we can offer greater value, we certainly will—that is why we have capped rail fares in line with inflation for the sixth year in a row. We are keen to offer value across the rail network wherever we can.

**Derek Thomas** (St Ives) (Con): Ministers will be aware of how long it takes to get right down to Penzance in my constituency.

**Mark Garnier** (Wyre Forest) (Con): Too long!

**Derek Thomas:** Too long. They will also be aware that people very much depend on that form of transport. The truth is that average wages across my constituency are about a third of those in the rest of the country. Will the Minister give consideration to whether there can be some fairness for my constituents so that they pay less for travel, given their dependency on the network and the distances they travel?

**Andrew Jones:** If it is possible to deliver greater value, we will of course look at those opportunities. Part of the Williams review is about rail fares. I will make sure that my hon. Friend's comments are fed over to Mr Williams for his consideration.

### Heathrow Third Runway: Highway Vehicles

8. **Ruth Cadbury** (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): What steps he plans to take to reduce a potential increase in highway vehicle trips resulting from a third runway at Heathrow airport. [908479]

**The Secretary of State for Transport** (**Chris Grayling**): As the hon. Lady will be aware, the airports national policy statement requires 50% of passengers to use public transport by 2030, rising to 55% by 2040. It also requires 25% fewer staff car trips to work by 2030,

and 50% fewer by 2040. In addition, I expect Heathrow to meet its public pledge of no greater airport-related road traffic.

**Ruth Cadbury:** The terminal 5 inspector recommended that that expansion should be dependent on additional rail access, and we have seen the consequences locally of that not having happened. The Department for Transport's own figures say that a third runway will put an additional 54,000 vehicles a day on our local road system. Will the Secretary of State make any further expansion at Heathrow conditional on western and southern rail access?

**Chris Grayling:** I want to go further than that. Western rail access is currently in development and we are in the early stages of preparation for southern rail access. We are also making provision at Old Oak Common for a Chiltern connection into that station that will provide a link into Heathrow. High Speed 2, of course, will arrive at Old Oak Common and deliver an opportunity to connect into Heathrow from a different route. Finally, it is my hope that the Mayor of London will, notwithstanding the financial challenges at Transport for London, deliver the Piccadilly line upgrade, which is so important.

**Justine Greening (Putney) (Con):** The terminal 5 planning conditions, set as part of its go-ahead, were that there would be no third runway and that there would be a legal limit of 480,000 flights a year. Now, of course, we are getting a third runway, and last week Heathrow asked—and, I presume, will be granted—permission to go beyond its 480,000-flight cap. Is not the reality that any assurances—legal, ministerial or public pledges from Heathrow—are utterly meaningless?

**Chris Grayling:** My right hon. Friend has made her point succinctly. She will understand, though, that if an application comes forward from Heathrow to change the current rules, it would be wrong of me as Secretary of State to pass comment one way or the other at the moment.

**Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab):** The Secretary of State has mentioned the Piccadilly line upgrade, but he knows that that—and, indeed, Crossrail—is there to cope with existing and future passenger demand, and not Heathrow expansion. Given that we know that Heathrow, as always, will do nothing to cope with the problems that it causes, what will the Government do when there is this massive increase in passengers, a 50% increase in flights and no capacity on those lines to deal with those?

**Chris Grayling:** Even an expanded Heathrow is forecast to need only 6% of capacity on the Piccadilly line and, as I said a moment ago, we are already moving ahead with western access and starting the process of southern access. I am making provision for a Chiltern route into Old Oak Common, connecting to Heathrow by Crossrail, and HS2 will come to Old Oak Common as part of the first phase of that project. I think we are doing rather a lot to prepare for surface access to Heathrow.

#### Access for All

10. **Damien Moore (Southport) (Con):** What recent progress his Department has made on implementing the Access for All programme. [908481]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Ms Nusrat Ghani):** Access for All has delivered step-free, accessible routes at more than 200 stations since it was launched in 2006, and a further 19 stations are currently under construction. To build on that success we have made a further £300 million available to extend the programme, and 300 stations have been nominated for that funding. I expect to announce the successful stations in April.

**Damien Moore:** I thank my hon. Friend for that answer, and one station to be nominated is Hillside station in my constituency. My hon. Friend highlighted the criteria that will be used, but does she agree that stations such as Hillside, which play host to less frequent sporting events such as the Open at Royal Birkdale, which hosted 235,000 spectators, should be taken into account when these applications are decided upon?

**Ms Ghani:** My hon. Friend will be pleased to know that Hillside station has indeed been nominated. When preparing for nominations, the industry was asked to include any relevant factors, and Hillside's nomination included details of the Open. Every factor will be given due weight during the ongoing selection process, and all I can say for now is that I hope there will be good news for my hon. Friend and his constituents in April.

**David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab):** To get from the car park to the south side of Flint station in my constituency involves two footbridges, and that is one of the projects that was nominated in November last year. Will the Minister assure me that access to funds for those projects will be maintained in the current spending review?

**Ms Ghani:** We have £300 million available at the moment and we have received 300 nominations. All the issues that the right hon. Gentleman has raised will be taken into account. It is important to note that journeys with step-free access have increased from 50% in 2015 to 75% today.

**Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Con):** As the Minister knows, if someone wants to get from one platform at Beeston station to the other, the advice is to take a taxi all the way round, which is wholly unacceptable. I am grateful for her acceptance of that fact, and we also bid for funding. Last year she agreed to come to Beeston station to see it for herself. Can she now assure me that she will certainly come before Easter?

**Ms Ghani:** My right hon. Friend knows that we have spoken about Beeston on a number of occasions, and I apologise for having failed to visit the station already. I will do my very best to accompany her to Beeston station in the near future.

**Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab):** Will the Minister ensure that the Access for All project is delivered in Northwich station in my constituency, to allow people with mobility problems and disabilities to use it?

**Ms Ghani:** I cannot provide that assurance right here and now. We had 300 nominations and the decisions will be made in April. If the station was nominated—I do not have the list in front of me—I will ensure that it is considered as efficiently as possible.

### Rail Electrification

11. **Christian Matheson** (City of Chester) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with Network Rail and train operating companies on plans to extend the electrified rail network. [908482]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Andrew Jones):** This Government are investing at record levels in our rail network as part of the biggest rail modernisation programme for over a century to provide reliability and capacity. Passengers expect high-quality rail services, and we are committed to electrification where it delivers passenger benefits and value for money. We will also take advantage of state-of-the-art technology to improve services.

**Christian Matheson:** It strikes me that a lot of official capacity is currently being sucked out of the Department by preparations for a no-deal Brexit, and that is slowing up projects that should be pushing ahead. What progress is being made on plans for electrification of the Chester to Crewe and north Wales line or, if not electrification, on the procurement of the electro-diesel trains that are the next best option?

**Andrew Jones:** The work on Brexit is not in any way changing the delivery of service improvements across our rail network, and one has only to consider how much is happening across the network to prove that point. We are delivering a £50 million project to upgrade the north Wales railway, including a new signalling system, and rolling stock will be picked up as the franchise is renewed.

17. [908488] **Jeff Smith** (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): Passenger numbers on the transpennine route are set to double over the next 20 years, but still it appears that the upgrade is being downgraded. Given that one third of transport spending in England is in London, will the Transport Secretary help to redress the imbalance by matching Labour's commitment to Crossrail for the north?

**Andrew Jones:** I do not accept the premise of the hon. Gentleman's question. The transpennine route upgrade is a significant project and we are modernising the entire route. We will be investing £2.9 billion in the first phase of this ambitious upgrade, between Manchester, Leeds and York. The work will commence in the spring. It is the biggest single project of rail enhancement in this country during control period 6. It is complementary to the work on Northern Powerhouse Rail, which is also being developed.

**Mr Dennis Skinner** (Bolsover) (Lab): Would it not make a lot more sense to electrify the whole of the midland line, rather than stopping at Kettering in Northamptonshire? If that happened, we could save some of the £56 billion that HS2 will cost us, and save about 30 to 40 houses in Derbyshire that are due to be knocked down. All those things could happen if the Minister electrified the midland line, and passengers would get to London 30 minutes quicker—not that I want that—which is one of the promises the Government have made. For God's sake, make a big hole in that £56 billion and electrify the midland line.

**Andrew Jones:** Well, I can tell the hon. Gentleman that we will not be cancelling HS2, which is a positive project that will generate significant extra capacity right across our network. It is part of a modern, 21st-century rail network. With regard to the midland main line, we do not need to electrify the whole line in order to deliver the journey improvements, and we will see passenger benefits from a brand new fleet of trains from 2022.

**Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Labour's commitment to electrification has been unwavering, yet the Government have pulled electrification projects across the country. Last month we learned that the transpennine route will no longer support future freight, meet journey time ambitions or, without electrification, deliver on reliability either, depending instead on heavy and polluting diesel bi-mode trains—[*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The former Secretary of State is chuntering animatedly from a sedentary position about a period of time and a mileage—that is to say, about a length of track—but I can assume only that at this stage, albeit in a very amiable and jocular fashion, the right hon. Gentleman is talking to himself. There are some dangers in that.

**Sir Patrick McLoughlin** (Derbyshire Dales) (Con): What are they, Mr Speaker?

**Mr Speaker:** Only time will tell.

**Rachael Maskell:** As I was saying, it is a downgrade of a downgrade, so why will the Minister not listen to the advice of rail experts, which I know the Secretary of State has had, and fully electrify the route in control period 6?

**Andrew Jones:** That was absolute nonsense. Labour electrified 10 miles of existing network in all the 13 years it was in government. There has been more electrification in the north-west alone under this Government than in all those 13 years, so we will take no lessons from the Labour party on this. With regard to the transpennine upgrade, we are spending £2.9 billion. It is the biggest single project in control period 6, as I explained to the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith) only a moment ago. Rather than criticising, Labour Members should be supporting this project, and perhaps asking why they did not do it. We will take no lessons whatsoever from the Labour party, which did nothing at all for our rail network.

### Crossrail

12. **Andrew Rosindell** (Romford) (Con): What assessment he has made of the potential effect of the delay to Crossrail on the London economy. [908483]

**The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Jesse Norman):** My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise the important question of Crossrail. He will know that it is a wholly owned subsidiary of Transport for London, and it is for TfL in the first instance to evaluate the future. Notwithstanding recent hiccups, we feel excited about the potential for the project.



**Andrew Rosindell:** I thank the Minister for his reply, but he will understand the huge disappointment in Romford, where we were hoping that Crossrail would be coming into action much sooner. At least partly because of the Mayor's poor financial management of TfL, we have to wait a lot longer, so will the Minister assure the House that the new funding package will bring Crossrail to fruition much sooner?

**Jesse Norman:** As I said, Crossrail is a wholly owned subsidiary of TfL. It would be wrong for me to comment on the way the Mayor has handled TfL's finances—that is a matter for him—but I will say that it is a very important project. As my hon. Friend will be aware, there is a new chief executive, Mr Wild, and he is understandably taking time to review the project fully before he publishes his own views.

**Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab):** Last night, the *Evening Standard* reported that officials from the Department for Transport and TfL were first notified about the Crossrail delays in June 2016. Will the Minister confirm that that is correct?

**Jesse Norman:** I have not seen the report that the hon. Gentleman describes, but he will know that in July we published a written ministerial statement touching on the question of whether there might be delays. It is striking that the Secretary of State was not notified until the end of August, and there has been some suggestion that TfL was notified before that.

#### EU Motor Insurance Directive

13. **Mark Garnier (Wyre Forest) (Con):** What assessment he has made of the effect of the revised EU motor insurance directive on innovation in the UK motorsport industry. [908484]

**The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Jesse Norman):** The issue of Vnuk and insurance is very important and my hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise it. Our assessment is perfectly clear: if it is not amended, the proposal has the potential to shut down UK and European motorsport industries. We take it very seriously. Of course, there would be further impacts on innovation throughout the UK automotive industry, and potentially more widely.

**Mark Garnier:** I am grateful for the Minister's response. From my conversations with the Motorsport Industry Association, I know that it cannot sing the praises of the Department and officials more highly in respect of this incredibly important point. If the motor insurance directive comes into force, not only will it completely destroy the market for the most innovative part of our automotive sector, but during the transition period it may also destroy the UK domestic market. I know that the Minister is doing everything he can to try to sort this situation out, but I ask him to redouble his efforts and work as hard as he can to make sure that we do not lose the crown jewels of our motor industry.

**Jesse Norman:** I thank my hon. Friend very much for the recognition of the work that my officials and I have been doing on this issue, which we take extremely seriously. Lotus, Williams, McLaren—this country has

a £10 billion motorsport industry. These ill-judged arrangements might put it at risk, and we are determined to do everything we can to prevent that.

#### Public Transport: Sporting Events

14. **Dr Rosena Allin-Khan (Tooting) (Lab):** If he will hold discussions with the Rail Delivery Group and the Premier League on public transport for people travelling to sporting events. [908485]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Andrew Jones):** Officials from my Department have met the Premier League, most recently in November, to discuss collaboration between the railway industry and football bodies to improve travel to and from football matches. The Rail Delivery Group is a key partner in that ongoing collaboration.

**Dr Allin-Khan:** Football fans in this country are often stung when fixtures are rescheduled for TV, meaning that they regularly miss out on the cheapest train tickets. The Premier League, the English Football League and the Rail Delivery Group are all in favour of a fans' fare scheme, but the Department for Transport is dragging its feet. Will the Minister agree to meet me to discuss how we can address this important issue, which affects so many football fans in this country?

**Andrew Jones:** The joint project involving the Rail Delivery Group, train operators, football bodies, supporters' groups, British Transport police and the DFT has been set up to look into a range of issues around football-related train travel. That work includes the exploration of a flexible ticketing offer for supporters, including for when matches are rescheduled. I am happy to have a conversation with the hon. Lady. I would be interested to hear whether she will condemn the strikes throughout the north on Saturdays, which are affecting football fans' capacity to get to their matches. Let us hear Labour say something on behalf of football fans throughout the north, and not in support of strikers.

**Mr Speaker:** Having heard the right hon. Member for Derbyshire Dales (Sir Patrick McLoughlin) from his seat, we can now have the considerable joy of hearing him on his feet.

**Sir Patrick McLoughlin (Derbyshire Dales) (Con):** Will the Minister look at the responsibilities across his whole Department and other sectors covered by his Department as far as such situations are concerned? Last night, the M1 was closed for four hours, thus preventing all the supporters of Burton Albion from getting to the Etihad stadium. Will there be an inquiry into why it was necessary to close the M1 for four hours on both sides?

**Mr Speaker:** They missed a lot of goals.

**Andrew Jones:** My right hon. Friend makes a very valuable point with which I entirely agree. We will look at this matter across the Department.

### Topical Questions

T1. [908496] **Liz McInnes** (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

**The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling):** May I begin by extending the condolences of the whole House to the family of Lee Pomeroy, who was tragically murdered on a train in Surrey last week? I pay tribute to the three members of staff who dealt with the tragic situation and all the British Transport police who responded to it; they all acted with great bravery. While I am talking about bravery, let me also pay tribute to the British Transport police officer who was stabbed in Manchester during the terrorist incident a few days ago.

**Liz McInnes:** I thank the Secretary of State for that answer and share his sentiments about the terrible attacks on our trains recently.

On 2 January I was at Castleton station in my constituency, watching train cancellation after train cancellation as my constituents were trying to get back to work after the new year break. Does the Secretary of State think that it is fair to hit rail passengers with an above-inflation rise in fares, given the clear decline in punctuality and reliability, and worsening overcrowding on our trains?

**Chris Grayling:** We have set a limit in line with inflation for the increase in regulated fares. Transport for the North and the Rail North Partnership have additional financial resources from the compensation package provided last summer that they can use on lines that continue to be affected by underperformance if they choose to do so. I would be very happy to see them do that.

T3. [908500] **Andrew Rosindell** (Romford) (Con): The Minister will be aware that it is illegal for a taxi not to collect someone with a guide dog, yet 42% of taxis still refuse to do this. Will the Government please bring in strict new guidelines to raise awareness throughout the taxi and minicab industry?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Ms Nusrat Ghani):** My hon. Friend raises an important issue. For over a decade it has been illegal for taxi and private hire drivers to refuse assistance dogs, and I am clear that they must comply with the law. We cannot risk lowering people's confidence and ability to travel independently. Licensing authorities have the power to stop this happening by training drivers to understand their duties and by prosecuting them when they fail to comply. We are considering the recommendations mentioned by my hon. Friend and will publish a response in due course.

**Karl Turner** (Kingston upon Hull East) (Lab): Owing to undercutting caused by the exclusion of seafarers from equality and minimum wage legislation, UK seafarers only account for about 15% of all seafarer ratings in the UK shipping industry. That is shocking. But now that the Secretary of State has spent £103 million of UK taxpayers' money on these UK ferry contracts, will the

Minister tell us whether any UK seafarers will be employed, and will the crews be protected by UK employment legislation? Yes or no?

**Ms Ghani:** I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman is mistaken and has not heard what the Secretary of State mentioned earlier. No money has yet exchanged hands and it is up to the company how it crews its ships. It is important to note that we are working with the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to ensure that we can deliver the national minimum wage for our seafarers.

T8. [908505] **Craig Tracey** (North Warwickshire) (Con): I was alarmed to see the traffic chaos as a result of yet another incident on the A5 at Mancetter island this week caused by an overturned lorry. I have raised this issue before, so it is not an isolated incident. Will the Minister agree to meet me to discuss this precarious junction and look at what more can be done to protect local residents who live alongside it, as well as motorists using it?

**The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Jesse Norman):** My hon. Friend has been a very tireless campaigner for transport issues in his constituency and I would be delighted to meet him.

T2. [908499] **Wera Hobhouse** (Bath) (LD): In my constituency, it has been suggested that our regional Mayor—the West of England Combined Authority Mayor—has the power to adopt an underused bit of highway from Highways England to construct an east of Bath park-and-ride, and the council has failed for a long time to find a suitable site. Is it the Minister's understanding that the regional Mayor has these powers, and does he agree that such a use of existing land is an elegant solution?

**Jesse Norman:** I will resist the temptation to comment in advance on the elegance of the solution, but I think it is a very interesting idea in principle. As the hon. Lady may be aware, it would require the transfer of the road from Highways England and the agreement of the Secretary of State. We would also want to be sure that any changes were consistent with the combined authority's long-term transport plans. Subject to those constraints, we would be very interested to see it.

**Andrew Selous** (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): Neither the police nor the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency has records of foreign-registered vehicles that have been in the UK for more than six months, which means that our roads are more dangerous and there is not equality under the law for British nationals. What are the Government going to do about this issue?

**Jesse Norman:** As my hon. Friend will be aware, the problem concerns foreign-registered vehicles. For British nationals, there is an equality under the law. I recognise that there is concern about this issue. He knows that we seek vigorously to apply road traffic legislation where we can. This is for the police, in the first instance. In some cases, local authorities use international debt recovery agents. However, I recognise the problem that he describes.

T4. [908501] **Mr Virendra Sharma** (Ealing, Southall) (Lab): What was the total cost of Operation Brock, and will the Minister relay the lessons learned?

**Chris Grayling:** I do not have the costs immediately to hand. However, the point about Operation Brock is that it is designed to replace Operation Stack and provide a solution well into the early 2020s in the case of disruption at the channel ports, which I do not want to see. To do the work on the M20 and the work that has happened on the M26, the cost is in the low tens of millions of pounds, but I will be able to give the hon. Gentleman an exact number. It is really important that we do not see a repeat of the disruption of 2015 in Kent.

**Ms Esther McVey** (Tatton) (Con): Knutsford commuters have been repeatedly promised an upgrade to the Knutsford to Manchester line to two trains an hour. However, after excuses and procrastination, that is now not happening at the time it was meant to happen. It is unacceptable to have such an unreliable and irregular service for such a busy part of the country. Will the Secretary of State intervene, speak to Northern, speak to Network Rail, and get this promise fulfilled?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport** (**Andrew Jones**): I entirely agree with my right hon. Friend that we want to see reliable services offering high capacity. She speaks well on behalf of her constituency. I will of course look into the matter and get back to her.

T5. [908502] **Deidre Brock** (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): The *Financial Times* reports that the EU has warned the owner of British Airways, IAG, that its plans to allow flights to continue in and around Europe in the event of no deal are not acceptable. When asked how BA plans to ensure that its plans are acceptable, its chief executive replied, “Magic”. Given the Cabinet Secretary’s repeated assurances that these negotiations are in hand, what more serious assessment can the Secretary of State give us that this will be resolved?

**Chris Grayling:** This is really an issue for the Spanish and Irish Governments; it does not affect British Airways at all, as it will be covered by the transitional arrangements as well as by the international agreements we have in place. It is an issue for Iberia and for Aer Lingus, which will clearly want to carry on flying within the European Union.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): I declare my interest as a member of Kettering Borough Council. What further progress is being made by the roads Minister and his team towards tabling the statutory instrument to facilitate the decriminalisation of parking in Kettering?

**Jesse Norman:** As my hon. Friend will know, we have discussed this at some considerable length over a long period. The matter currently rests with discussions with Northamptonshire County Council, but we are pushing ahead as fast as we can on it.

T6. [908503] **Hannah Bardell** (Livingston) (SNP): Following December’s fiasco at Gatwick airport, the Secretary of State displayed his characteristic Midas touch when he said on Monday:

“The Government are taking action to ensure that passengers can have confidence that their journeys will not be disrupted in future”.—[*Official Report*, 7 January 2019; Vol. 652, c. 101.]

Twenty-four hours later, Heathrow passengers found themselves having their flights suspended following another drone sighting. When can passengers expect this promised action to have the desired effect?

**Chris Grayling:** First, let us be clear: there is no perfect, off-the-shelf system available to airports that will simply deal with this problem overnight. I pay tribute to those in the police and the military, and across government, who responded so quickly to the Heathrow problem, ensuring that the runway was closed for a very short length of time, and to the team at Heathrow who did the same.

**Maggie Throup** (Erewash) (Con): Now that the consultation on the High Speed 2 working draft environmental statement has closed, has the Minister had any indication of when HS2 Ltd will publish its response? Can she ensure that every submission will be given careful consideration?

**Ms Ghani:** I can indeed assure my hon. Friend that all submissions will be given appropriate consideration, and the report will be published in due course.

**Emma Dent Coad** (Kensington) (Lab): Currently just one out of 10 tube stations in Kensington is step-free. That is unacceptable. The council and London’s deputy mayor for transport tell us we must rely on developer funding to pay for it, which will never be enough, and in some instances they suggest funding just one platform in one direction, which is insulting. Just 50 stations out of 270 are step-free in the capital—the worst record in Europe. Will the Minister review Government funding to address the severe lack of inclusivity across our capital’s transport system, which is a national disgrace?

**Ms Ghani:** I believe that the hon. Lady is talking about the underground, which is the responsibility of the Mayor. Transport in London is devolved to the Mayor and delivered by Transport for London. It is for the Mayor to determine how to increase step-free access at underground stations. If the hon. Lady is embarrassed about the situation, I suggest she takes this case straight back to the Labour Mayor of London.

**Justine Greening** (Putney) (Con): Heathrow flight paths go over the most densely populated part of our country—London communities. Drones are a clear public safety risk, as things stand. Does the Secretary of State agree that we should review the decision to further expand Heathrow and have more flights over more communities, on public safety grounds?

**Chris Grayling:** I am afraid I do not agree with my right hon. Friend. Airports in this country and around the world are now working intensively to ensure they can deliver technology that will deal with this issue. That needs to be done long before we ever get to the point of expanding Heathrow airport.

**Kirsty Blackman** (Aberdeen North) (SNP): How much additional funding will the Department require in the 2019-20 financial year in the event of no deal, and has the Treasury approved that?



**Chris Grayling:** We have an allocation of funding for next year, but almost all our expenditure has taken place within the current year—it is in the region of £70 million. That is the prime amount we are spending. In the next financial year, if we require some of the contingency capacity to which I have committed, there will be a cost. As the House is aware, the maximum that we have contracted for is £103 million.

**Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Con):** Can the Secretary of State give us an update on the midland main line delayed franchise? As he knows, I am very grateful for the conversation we have had. Stagecoach has taken out £35 million of profit, and it appears to be running down an otherwise excellent system. Can he tell us when the franchise will be awarded?

**Chris Grayling:** The slight delay to the issuing of the new franchise is for complex reasons related to rail pensions. I have noted the issues that my right hon. Friend has raised. I am concerned about it. It would be unacceptable for any current franchisee to run down the franchise in the run-up to renewal, and a strong message is being sent to the company that, if that is happening, it has to stop right now.

**Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op):** It is not clear to me what the unforeseeable emergency was that allowed the Secretary of State to award the contract to Seaborne Freight outside the rules. Did he receive explicit legal advice about that, and if so, will he consider publishing it?

**Chris Grayling:** We are confident that this was a proper procurement process, handled by the procurement team in my Department in the normal way.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Finally—what a difficult choice. I call Huw Merriman.

**Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con):** Thank you, Mr Speaker. I'll buy my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers) a cup of tea in a minute.

Will the roads Minister meet me to discuss how we can transfer a section of the A21 through Hurst Green from the hopeless Highways England to East Sussex County Council, before more of my constituents end up in hospital?

**Mr Speaker:** I do wish the hon. Gentleman would wear his Arsenal tie a bit more often.

**Jesse Norman:** I will not comment on that sartorial choice. Of course I completely disagree with my hon. Friend's description of Highways England, but I would be delighted to meet him.

**Justine Greening** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Yes, I will take a point of order, which I think is of some salience.

**Justine Greening:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. In relation to the debate we are about to have, the Government have said that they have already accepted some amendments. That is a concern, because they seem to directly contradict the withdrawal agreement that this House is debating whether to approve. In itself, it is a legal document that has been negotiated and agreed with the European Union and 27 member states, but, again, the Government seem to have accepted amendments I am not sure you have yet selected for debate. Can you tell me whether that is in order?

**Mr Speaker:** I am extremely grateful to the right hon. Lady for her point of order. It is important that people, within this Chamber and outside, know the procedure and know the facts. No amendments have been accepted by anyone to date for one very simple and compelling reason: no amendments have yet been selected by the occupant of the Chair. Moreover, no amendments can be selected by the Speaker until the last day of the debate, which is to say next Tuesday, as required by the Order of the House of 4 December. Some people it seems—certainly not the right hon. Lady—really do need to keep up.

## Business of the House

10.40 am

**Valerie Vaz** (Walsall South) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House give us the forthcoming business?

**The Leader of the House of Commons (Andrea Leadsom):** The business for next week will be:

MONDAY 14 JANUARY—Continuation of debate on section 13(1)(B) of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018.

TUESDAY 15 JANUARY—Conclusion of debate on section 13(1)(B) of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018.

WEDNESDAY 16 JANUARY—Second Reading of the Immigration and Social Security Co-ordination (EU Withdrawal) Bill.

THURSDAY 17 JANUARY—Debate on a motion on mental health first aid in the workplace, followed by debate on a motion on children's social care in England. The subjects for these debates were determined by the Backbench Business Committee.

FRIDAY 18 JANUARY—The House will not be sitting.

I would like to follow the remarks made by a number of Members this week and offer my condolences following the sad passing of Lord Ashdown and Lord Foster, two much-loved and popular figures who gave so much to politics and to their parties. Their families are in our thoughts.

I know Members will have been as shocked and appalled as I was to witness the abuse levelled at our colleague, my right hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry). I hope we can start this new year in Parliament by setting a good example for others to follow.

Finally, I hope all hon. Members had a calm and restful break over Christmas. I would like to wish everyone a happy and productive new year.

**Valerie Vaz:** I thank the Leader of the House for the business, albeit just one week's. I join her in paying tribute to Lord Ashdown and Lord Foster, who were both very great servants of this House. I, too, want to express our solidarity with the right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry). She should never have been treated and abused in that way while going about her lawful business. Other hon. Members are also suffering these difficulties. They are doing so quietly because there are cases ongoing.

May we have a date for an Opposition day debate please? We have not had one since 13 November. The Leader of the House helpfully gave us the Easter recess dates. She knows what I am going to ask: when are the May dates? The House needs to plan.

This is a Government without a majority. They are in crisis and in denial about the crisis. The Government have faced two defeats in one week, breaking records. This is the first Government to be defeated on a Finance Bill since 1978. Our constituencies, businesses, the science community, the NHS, security and this House have made it clear that the Government should rule out a no-deal Brexit, yet the Government have refused to do so.

In fact, the Government are making plans for no deal. That is why this House, elected by our constituents, cannot rely on Government mantras or a Cabinet who discuss the fantasies of 50-year-old swingers and arrange a no-deal scenario with 89 lorries when 10,000 lorries use the channel ports, and when contracts are being given out for services that do not exist. A concerned House voted for an amendment to ensure the Government come back within three sitting days, because they cannot be trusted.

How many times over the years have we heard it said in this place, "No, this can't be done"—"No, women can't have the vote", "No, women can't be on the Floor of the Chamber. They have to be up in the Gallery", "No, the Fixed-term Parliaments Act can't be altered"? In fact, it can be done. A well-respected former Attorney General tabled an amendment and Parliament rose up, because the evidence was clear.

In December, the Government agreed and tabled a motion, and the vote was agreed for 11 December, but the Government pulled the vote. The Government said no to this House, no to a vote, and treated a democratically elected Parliament with contempt while themselves being in contempt. Will the Leader of the House categorically confirm today that the meaningful vote will take place on Tuesday 15 January?

There are no new amendments, legal or otherwise, to the agreement. It is the same old agreement. Nothing has changed, other than a written statement by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster yesterday announcing the publication of a policy paper on UK Government commitments to Northern Ireland—warm words and reassurances, but still the same old agreement. The right hon. Member for Belfast North (Nigel Dodds) has called this "cosmetic" and "meaningless". Can the Leader of the House say whether a new agreement will be tabled before Tuesday, or will the House be voting on the same old agreement?

On Monday, the House debated the fifth report of the Committee on Standards. My right hon. Friend the Member for Warley (John Spellar) intervened on the Leader of the House and asked what she meant when she said that the purpose of the review

"will be...to address outstanding areas, such as how to incorporate into the scheme visitors to constituency offices".—[*Official Report*, 7 January 2019; Vol. 652, c. 125.]

Several colleagues have approached me and said they are unclear what she meant. Will she explain, in a letter to all Members, what that means, and will she ensure that all Members are consulted?

Later that day, the right hon. Member for New Forest West (Sir Desmond Swayne) made a point of order to clarify another matter. He said that

"if there is no order of the House that a debate must end at a particular time, and if Members are standing at the moment of interruption, then that debate should continue at another time, when time becomes available".

Madam Deputy Speaker said:

"I took the decision that the Question ought to be put to the House".—[*Official Report*, 7 January 2019; Vol. 652, c. 135.]

I do not recall the Leader of the House challenging the Chair on the ruling. Can the Leader of the House respond to all the questions that I and other Members might have asked if the debate had continued and tell us when she will respond?

[Valerie Vaz]

On a slightly different matter, will the Leader of the House look at the delays in the personal independence payment appeals? A constituent of mine sent in an appeal in July 2018. My constituents are still waiting for an appeal date. It seems that the Department for Work and Pensions has missed all evidence submission deadlines, and my constituents have been told they will have to wait 27 weeks for an appeal. This is unacceptable and is affecting the most vulnerable.

On a happier note—well, I am not sure about that, but it was a significant day—yesterday saw the official launch of the MPs' guide to procedure. I was pleased to see that the Chair of the Procedure Committee was there, along with the hon. Member for Motherwell and Wishaw (Marion Fellows) and my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds North West (Alex Sobel). Four hundred copies have been given out. That shows what the House staff can do and their tremendous talent. Every single page, including the design, layout, words and review, was done in-house. We should nurture that talent in-house and thank everybody who took part—all their names are on the inside cover. In particular, I should mention those you mentioned in your foreword to the guide, Mr Speaker: John Benger, Mark Hutton and, of course, Joanna Dodd, who had the unenviable task of editing the whole thing. It is a very good tome.

May I add my congratulations to the right hon. Member for Wokingham (John Redwood) and the hon. Member for South West Devon (Sir Gary Streeter) on their knighthoods, and that great public servant, Roy Stone, who served this House so well? In particular, I should also congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth (Sir Alan Campbell). I have always called him Sir Alan!

Sadly, next week will be the last in which Fiona Channon will serve the House. She has been here since 1999 and has had roles in the Estates Team and the Committee Office. She has always undertaken her duties with efficiency and courtesy and has been incredibly professional serving this House so well. She will be missed. She is only down the corridor in the House of Lords, but I hope she will come back. Fiona, thank you very much for everything you have done to help us function.

**Andrea Leadsom:** I thank the hon. Lady for the warm gratitude that she showed to those who work so hard in this House. I absolutely share that, and I particularly point to Fiona Channon, who has done so much in this place, and to Sir Roy Stone, who has done so much in the Whips Office for a very long time.

The hon. Lady asks when there will be an Opposition day debate. As she will appreciate, there is a lot of important business at the moment, but the Government will, of course, abide by our obligations to provide Opposition days. I note her point about the May recess, but I am glad that she acknowledges that we have just announced an agreed Easter recess.

The hon. Lady asks if we will rule out a no-deal Brexit. As she will appreciate, that is the legal default position. Members of the House have the opportunity next Tuesday to vote for a deal that would rule out no Brexit, and I encourage them to take that opportunity. She asks me to confirm that, as I have just announced,

the meaningful vote will take place on Tuesday 15 January, and I refer her to the business of the House that I have just read out.

The hon. Lady asks about the point of order that was raised concerning visitors to constituency offices. She was on the working group on the complaints procedure, so she knows full well—I am surprised that she is asking me—what the group decided about the question of how to deal with complaints from people who come to our constituency offices, sometimes with very grave problems.

We, as Members of Parliament, always seek to help our constituents, but sometimes we cannot do so for various complex reasons, as all hon. and right hon. Members will know, and constituents sometimes take against the result. The working group, which the hon. Lady was a part of—and you, Mr Speaker; we had regular conversations about this—decided that in order for the complaints procedure to get up and running for six months, we would deal at a later point with the complexities of people with various mental health issues and grievances that might not be valid in a complaints procedure sense. We agreed in the House that the question of how, if at all, we could deal with the complaints of constituents in our constituency offices—either to our constituency staff, or to us, as Members—would be looked at in the six-month review of the complaints scheme, which kicks off on 21 January. I will, of course, be delighted to write to all hon. and right hon. Members on that point, for clarity.

On the hon. Lady's point about the talking out of a vote the other evening on the Standards Committee report, I can absolutely reassure her that both the Member who raised the point of order and the actions of the Deputy Speaker were entirely in order. You might want to confirm that, Mr Speaker, but that is a matter for you. The advice I have taken is that both were entirely in order.

With regard to PIP, if the hon. Lady wants to write to me, I will of course take up her serious constituency matter. I point out that this Government have ensured that there has been an £8 billion increase in real terms since 2010 in the amount of money that we spend on supporting people with disabilities.

**Craig Mackinlay (South Thanet) (Con):** As many people may have noticed, I have not been in this Chamber as much as I might have liked over the last three months. As the House will know, I was acquitted just yesterday in Southwark Crown court of all charges relating to the 2015 general election. I know that business questions are generally a call for debate, but in respect of election law we fundamentally need legislative change. In this area, it is surely unacceptable that innocent people are dragged through the courts, at enormous expense to the public purse, on the back of abstract law.

My case went through a variety of court processes prior to trial. In March, the Appeal Court, in front of the Lord Chief Justice, agreed with the long-held principle that election expenses can only be so if authorised by a candidate or agent. The Supreme Court, in July last year, overturned that view to one of mere use, whether authorised or not.

The opportunity for ne'er-do-wells to get involved in election processes and cause prosecutions is surely obvious. Everyone acknowledges that there are huge grey areas



between the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000—it deals with what is usually called the national spend—and the Representation of the People Act 1983, which covers local spend. Electoral Commission guidance is confused and sketchy. I would not want anybody in this House, from either side, to go through what I have been through over the last three years. Surely, it is in the interests of the House and all Members that we have clear and unambiguous law, and I hope that a campaign for clarity in this area will be supported across the House.

**Andrea Leadsom:** Can I say to my hon. Friend that I am delighted for him that he has been fully acquitted? I congratulate him on that. My heart goes out to him over the difficult time he has had in recent years in clearing his name. I think all hon. Members across the House would recognise, on a non-partisan basis, what a difficult time he has been through. It is fantastic that he has been found not guilty of any offence.

It has become apparent from broader legal proceedings that election law on spending in 2015 was fragmented and unclear, with even the courts divided on the interpretation of the law. The Government will take steps, working alongside the Electoral Commission, to ensure there is a clearer and more transparent framework in future elections. It is in everybody's interests that we get this right, and the Government are committed to protecting and strengthening electoral integrity.

**Pete Wishart** (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I thank the Leader of the House for announcing the business for next week. I join the tributes to Lord Ashdown and Lord Foster, congratulate Sir Roy Stone on his well-deserved honour and wish Fiona Channon all the best.

Yesterday was truly appalling and embarrassing. For the second business week in a row, Government Members were reduced to nothing more than a braying mob, finding conspiracy in car stickers. Once again, we found the Leader of the House centre stage as the principal cheerleader, egging her colleagues on in that unedifying spectacle. This has to stop, Mr Speaker, and the Conservatives must start to respect the authority of the House and the authority of your office.

This is utterly appalling hypocrisy. The Government have done their level best to curtail debate and withhold information from the House. They were even compelled by the courts to allow us to have a vote on leaving the European Union, and only successive votes of the House got them to reveal vital information about their Brexit deal. They have been found in contempt of Parliament. It is absolutely right that they are stopped.

Do you know what, Mr Speaker? This is called taking back control—a concept the Government might be a little familiar with. The House must have its collective view known, and you, Mr Speaker, are to be commended for ensuring that the view of the House will always come first. The Government had better get used to it, because Parliament is increasingly asserting itself. As this chaotic Government continue spectacularly to collapse, this House and its membership will pick up the slack. If the Government want Government versus Parliament, they will be on the losing side, because we are now in the majority.

There is no business scheduled for a week on Monday, the day the Government are now obliged to come back with an alternative to the Prime Minister's deal. Will the Leader of the House confirm that that is exactly what they will do? Will they come back and explain the options, and is she actively considering what those options are? This feels a little like the end of Tory days. It is unusual for a country to witness such a chaotic and spectacularly shambolic collapse of a Government. Perhaps we can have a debate—we might call it a vote of confidence—so that this country can be shot of this chaotic Government once and for all.

**Andrea Leadsom:** I genuinely value the hon. Gentleman's views. I listened to him very carefully, and I agree with him that taking back control is absolutely essential. The fatal flaw with his assertion is that what happened yesterday was not Parliament taking back control. What happened yesterday and in the days running up to it was that a number of hon. Members tried to table amendments to yesterday's business of the House motion. [*Interruption.*] A number of them, on both sides of the House, tried to put forward amendments to the business motion. The Table Office said the motion was unamendable and undebatable. [*Interruption.*] An hon. Gentleman shouts from a sedentary position, "How do you know?" I know that the Table Office turned Members away, saying that the motion was unamendable and undebatable.

If the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire looks carefully at "Erskine May", he will see that "forthwith" means unamendable and undebatable. As for his point about Parliament taking back control, the issue is that the role of the Chair is to uphold the rules that Parliament has made for itself, not to change those rules arbitrarily. So yesterday was not an example of Parliament taking back control, but an example of a differentiation between the Members who were told that the motion was unamendable and undebatable, and those who were told differently.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether the Government would accept the Grieve amendment; of course the Government will do so. The Prime Minister has shown her willingness always to return to the House at the first possible opportunity if there is anything to report in relation to our Brexit deal, and we will continue to do so.

Let me finally deal with the hon. Gentleman's point about "no confidence". As I have said time and again, should this House have no confidence and should the official Opposition put an issue of no confidence to the House under the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011, the Government will provide time for it to be debated, as is the convention. The official Opposition have not chosen to do so, and therefore this House has confidence in Her Majesty's Government.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I have looked forward to hearing from colleagues who have a chance to participate in the business question—as, of course, the Leader of the House has not merely the opportunity but the obligation to do—so I will content myself simply with saying this.

There was nothing arbitrary about the conduct of the Chair yesterday. This Speaker is well aware of how to go about the business of chairing the proceedings of the

[Mr Speaker]

House, because he has been doing so for nine and a half years. I hope that colleagues will understand when I say that I require no lessons or lectures from others about how to discharge my obligations to Parliament and in support of the right of Back-Bench parliamentarians. I have been doing it and continuing to do it, and I will go on doing it, no matter how much abuse I get from whatever quarter. It is water off a duck's back as far as I am concerned.

**Richard Benyon** (Newbury) (Con): Last night in Westminster Hall, during a debate about the armed forces, a Minister put the case very eloquently for more spending on defence, not just because of the threat that this country faces, but because of the wider benefits to society of our armed forces. Would it be possible for us to have such a debate in Government time, so that we could really make the case for investment in our armed forces?

**Andrea Leadsom**: I am very sympathetic to my hon. Friend. He will be aware that in the Budget the Chancellor pledged an extra £1 billion for the Ministry of Defence over the next two years. Defence questions will take place on Monday, and I encourage him to raise the matter then.

**Ian Mearns** (Gateshead) (Lab): I thank the Leader of the House for announcing the two Backbench Business Committee debates next Thursday. That is very welcome, given that both debates have been pulled on previous days because of the overrunning of other business.

My I give notice that the Committee has received an application for a debate on Holocaust Memorial Day? If any time could be found during the week beginning 21 January so that we could mark that day, the Committee would be most grateful.

Finally, let me issue a little advertisement. The Backbench Business Committee—in collaboration, of course, with the Liaison Committee—is inviting applications for a departmental estimates day debate. The date is yet to be determined, but it will have to be prior to 18 March.

**Andrea Leadsom**: As ever, I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving a heads-up of his Backbench Business Committee requests. I will certainly take them away and look at them carefully.

**Sir John Hayes** (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): The present is formed by what we know, and the future is shaped by what we learn. In that spirit the Workers' Educational Association reaches 50,000 people a year through a network of branches and an army of volunteers. It teaches everything from architecture to arithmetic and from computer skills to competence in English, and yet, alarmingly, it now faces a 28% cut in its core funding. You, Mr Speaker, will doubtless be familiar with the words of the Commission on Adult Education from 1919:

“Adult education is a permanent national necessity, an inseparable aspect of citizenship, and therefore should be both universal and lifelong”.

Is this generation to forget what its forefathers knew: whatever disadvantage people face, they deserve the chance to bask in the light of learning?

**Andrea Leadsom**: I certainly agree with my right hon. Friend about the importance of learning. I am not aware of the organisation he mentions, but I am sure he will, in his usual way, seek an Adjournment debate so that he can raise the issue directly with Ministers.

**Mr Chris Leslie** (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): Can we share some understanding for the Leader of the House, who is obviously struggling a little bit at having been defeated in yesterday's vote? It is sometimes very difficult when one loses a vote, and we really should show some appreciation for how she is struggling to reconcile herself with being in that losing position.

Perhaps the Leader of the House, however, can confirm that she is keeping space free on Monday 21 January, for after the Prime Minister's proposals have been defeated, so that the House will be able to debate what comes next. She would not want to fail to comply with the instructions of the House, albeit she is a bit sore at having lost on that particular point. Finally, can she confirm, excellently, that she will also be publishing the advice her officials are giving her about Monday 21 January since she was entreating the House and the Speaker to publish all the advice that is given to him?

**Andrea Leadsom**: I am slightly disappointed at the hon. Gentleman for helpfully mansplaining my job to me. I am perfectly able to carry out my job, and I have already answered the question put by the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) by saying that the Prime Minister will, of course, abide by the terms of the Grieve amendment.

**Antoinette Sandbach** (Eddisbury) (Con): May I ask the Leader of the House to consider giving legislative time for the introduction of a housing ombudsman? I and a number of other Members are having problems with cowboy builders, particularly a building firm called Southworth Construction in my constituency, which is building substandard homes. A number of companies headed up by similar directorships have folded, and the situation is causing great concern to not only my constituents, but those of other Members.

**Andrea Leadsom**: My hon. Friend is a great champion for her constituency, and I am aware that many Members are concerned about the quality of house building. She will be aware that the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government is looking carefully at this issue and what more can be done, but I absolutely applaud her for raising the matter in the Chamber. I encourage her to perhaps seek a Westminster Hall debate so that other hon. Members can join in with the conversation about what more needs to be done.

**Stella Creasy** (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): Jayden Moodie was a 14-year-old little boy who was mown down by thugs in my constituency on Tuesday night and then stabbed to death. He is the sixth child that my community has had to bury in the last 18 months; many more have been stabbed or attacked with guns in my constituency. I know that the Leader of the House will understand the concern that I and my hon. Friends the

Members for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) and for Leyton and Wanstead (John Cryer) share about policing and the importance of police resources, but we also want to prevent these instances, and too many of the histories of these young people involve exclusion from mainstream schooling. Too many of our young people are being written off. The Government announced last March that they were doing a review into exclusion, so may we have an urgent update on that review and on what is being done to put proper support into helping these young people to save their potential, rather than seeing more families having to bury children because of youth violence?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I absolutely agree with the hon. Lady that we have to do everything that we possibly can to stop young people getting into this life of danger to themselves and to others around them. She will be aware that I have already given two days of full debate on what more we can do in the area of prevention. We also have Home Office questions on 21 January, and I encourage her to raise this matter then. She will be aware that the Government have introduced our serious violence taskforce and that we are committing hundreds of millions of pounds to community projects that seek specifically to get young people out of those directions that lead to a life of knife crime, and potential death to themselves or their colleagues. We need to do everything we possibly can, and the Government are absolutely committed to this.

**John Lamont** (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): World Cancer Day is on 4 February, and I am delighted that you, Mr Speaker, and the Lord Speaker have kindly agreed to the request to illuminate the Palace of Westminster in pink to mark that day. Will the Leader of the House join me in congratulating Elaine Monro from Selkirk in my constituency, the Cancer Research UK volunteer who suggested that proposal? Can we also find time for a debate to look into the causes of cancer and how we can address them?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am delighted to join my hon. Friend in commending Elaine for her excellent idea. Fighting cancer is a top priority for the Government, and survival rates are at a record high. There are around 7,000 people alive today who would not have been if mortality rates had stayed the same as they were in 2010, but there is much more we can do. Our 10-year plan for the NHS will radically overhaul early detection and boost research and innovation, so I think we are in a good place. There is more to do, but we are committed to eradicating the terrible problem of cancer.

**Vernon Coaker** (Gedling) (Lab): Further to the comments from my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy), and previously from my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (John Cryer), Jayden Moodie's murder has shocked us all. Notwithstanding the other important issues we are discussing at the moment, I think the country would expect us to reflect on what we are going to do about the fact that a 14-year-old boy has been brutally murdered on our streets. He had just moved from my constituency to Walthamstow. We can be outraged and shocked, as we all are, but what are we going to do about this? What is this Parliament going to do about it? We can all say that this or that should happen, and I know that the Leader

of the House shares this concern—she has mentioned the serious violence taskforce and the Government's strategy—but surely the Home Secretary should be coming to the House on a regular basis to update us on what is happening, and on what is and is not working. Nobody wants to see this happen again. We cannot rewind the clock, but we owe it to Jayden Moodie and to all the other victims, and their families and communities, to show that we know what is going on, that we care, and that we are going to work with them to do as much as we can to stop this.

**Andrea Leadsom:** Again, I totally agree. We owe it to Jayden's family to do everything we possibly can. I can outline some of the specific actions that the Government are taking. There is a £200 million youth endowment fund to provide support to children and young people who are at risk from a life in the world of knife crime, gangs and drugs, to try to stop that. There will be £22 million over the next two years for a new early intervention youth fund to support youth groups and communities in their attempts at early intervention and prevention. There will be more than £1 million for the anti-knife crime community fund to help communities themselves to tackle knife crime. There are youth violence intervention programmes such as Red Thread in London—it is expanding to include Birmingham and Nottingham—and some of those projects go into hospitals after young people have been attacked with knives to try to persuade them at the bedside to choose a different path. We have also been carrying out the #knifefree campaign, and the police have Operation Sceptre, which is looking at a proposal for knife amnesties. So the Government are doing a lot, but I totally agree with the hon. Gentleman that we owe this to Jayden's family, and to all the families of the many people who are suffering from this appalling spike in knife crime, which is absolutely unacceptable.

**Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger** (Bridgwater and West Somerset) (Con): May we have a debate in Government time on borrowing by local councils? One only has to read *The Times* today—I am sure that the Leader of the House has—to see that it is getting out of control. Taunton Deane Borough Council has borrowed £16 million to build a spec hotel on a derelict site, which is a potential disaster for the taxpayers of my constituency and neighbouring constituencies, and the council leader is far too close to the developers. We need a proper instruction from central Government about the borrowing that councils can use to buy spec developments, so may we have time in this place to discuss the matter?

**Andrea Leadsom:** My hon. Friend raises an issue that is clearly of great concern to him. I recommend that he raises the matter in a written parliamentary question to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to ask about the specifics of the legitimacy of that project.

**John Cryer** (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): Following the questions from my hon. Friends the Members for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy) and for Gedling (Vernon Coaker), the murder of Jayden Moody two nights ago in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow, although close to the boundary with my constituency, marks a new low in the wave of violent crime, and knife crime in particular, that has swept



[John Cryer]

across London and other parts of Britain. The problem is wide and deep. It seems to be getting worse, and the resources are simply not there to deal with it—that view is shared across the House, not just by Opposition Members. Under these circumstances, as my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling said, the Home Secretary and junior Home Office Ministers should be regularly asking the Speaker whether they can make statements to update the House on what is happening and to allow us to question the Executive.

**Andrea Leadsom:** I pay tribute to all the hon. Members who are raising, as they often do, this appalling problem of the rise in knife crime, which is incredibly concerning. I will not repeat the answer that I gave to the hon. Gentleman's colleagues, but we also have the Offensive Weapons Bill, which seeks to make it more difficult for young people to obtain knives online and so on. I encourage hon. Members to seek a Backbench Business debate or a Westminster Hall debate before such time as I can offer more parliamentary time. I have given two days of debate to the matter, and we have Home Office questions on Monday 21 January, so the hon. Gentleman may want to raise the matter directly with Ministers then.

**Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con):** May we have a debate on the importance of academic freedom? Universities are about the free and frank exchange of ideas, even if they are unfashionable and unpopular. Is it not wholly unacceptable to suggest that a respected academic such as John Finnis, emeritus professor of law and legal philosophy, who has taught at the University of Oxford for some 40 years, should be removed from office simply for holding traditional Catholic views? Is that not the opposite of diversity and open, robust debate?

**Andrea Leadsom:** My hon. Friend raises an important point. It is essential that young people at university learn how to engage in robust debate and to challenge views with which they may not agree. The solution is not to silence those who make them. The Government said in our response to the Joint Committee on Human Rights' report that we have concerns about the culture in universities in relation to free speech, and we made it clear that all

“education is a place where students should be exposed to a range of ideas, including those that may be controversial and unpopular—and where they learn to think critically and challenge those who they disagree with, not shut them down.”

**Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC):** I congratulate Sir Roy Stone on his knighthood.

Could time be found for a debate on the urgent matter of the incarcerated Kurdish MP and former mayor, Leyla Güven, who today entered her 64th day of hunger strike in protest at the continued isolated imprisonment of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan? Members of the Kurdish community in Wales, including Ilhan Sis of Newport, are among 200 Kurds worldwide undertaking hunger strikes in solidarity. Ilhan is currently in his 25th day of fasting. We should send a clear message of support to fellow democratically elected representatives who have been arrested and imprisoned for the very act of representing their people.

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Lady is absolutely right to raise that issue here. It is vital that all those who seek to represent their communities in a legitimate and law-abiding way should be free to do so. She will be aware that we have Foreign Office questions on Tuesday 22 January, so I encourage her to raise the matter then.

**Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con):** Can we have a debate about traditional events such as the burning of the clavier? This Friday I will be joining thousands of others in Burghead to watch clavier king Dan Ralph and his crew carry a barrel of burning wood and tar through the village up to Doorie hill, where it will then burn out, to celebrate new year. Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating Dan Ralph on his 31st year as clavier king, and in congratulating everyone involved in keeping this ancient tradition alive?

**Andrea Leadsom:** Fantastic. My hon. Friend, as ever, raises what sounds like a superb event in his constituency. I certainly hope that clavier king Dan Ralph continues to attend for many years to come.

The Government fully recognise the contribution that the UK's oral traditions, social practices and festive events make to the country's cultural fabric, and we continue to encourage communities to celebrate these practices and continue them for future generations.

**Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op):** I listened very closely to the Leader of the House when she said that the Prime Minister will abide by the result of yesterday's vote. The Leader of the House did not categorically guarantee that that means her Government will schedule the next motion for Monday 21 January after the Government lose the meaningful vote next Tuesday, as we anticipate. Could she do that? Will she also confirm where and when she will lodge copies of the advice she receives from officials on these matters, as she also indicated in a previous answer?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I absolutely reassure the hon. Lady that my advice was that the amendment selected yesterday would not be in order and would not be selectable. That is the advice I received, and I hope that is very clear. With regard to whether the Government will abide by the Grieve amendment, the Government will abide by the Grieve amendment, and I hope that is now entirely clear.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The responsibility for the selection of amendments—I say this not just for Members of the House but for those attending to our proceedings—is, of course, a matter for the Chair. It is a matter for the representative and champion of Parliament; it is not a matter for a representative of the Executive branch, who is the Executive's representative in the Chamber of the House of Commons. I will do my job, and other people can seek to do theirs.

**Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con):** Before Christmas I raised the serious concern about the escalation of aggravated burglaries in my constituency. These are organised gangs of thugs who break into people's houses when they are home, beat them up and steal their goods, and they steal their address books so that they can move on to the next house. Unfortunately, this has escalated over Christmas and new year, and I understand

from colleagues on both sides of the House that it is happening in other constituencies, too. Can we have a debate in Government time on how we challenge aggravated burglaries and on how we support the police in taking action so that we bring these criminals to justice and imprison them, as they deserve?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I share every one of my hon. Friend's concerns about this matter. It is horrendous for anybody who has been burgled. I have a constituent who was burgled recently and found it absolutely traumatising, so he is right to raise this serious issue. We have Home Office questions on 21 January, or he might want to seek an Adjournment debate to discuss the particular problem for his constituents.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): May I surprise the Leader of the House by telling her that in May 2019 I hope to celebrate 40 years in the House? In all those years I do not remember a worse atmosphere in the House. There is something deeply wrong with how we are talking and communicating with each other, and stress at work is not a good thing wherever we work.

I would like an early debate, and I would like the Leader of the House to take the lead. I look at her and realise that she has a really tough job. I have known Leaders of the House for whom the job has been a doddle—their Government had a majority and they got their legislation with no problem, and they often had a very easy Speaker who did everything the Executive told him or her to do.

The fact is that the Leader of the House has a tough job. She has no majority and she is losing votes, which is very stressful. I do care about her, and I worry about her. Sometimes people lash out when they are under stress, but she has a responsibility to do something about how we treat each other in this House. Let us take the initiative and have a debate, which she could lead, to start giving an example to people out there that we can treat each other decently and positively. Will she please take a lead on that?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am really grateful to the hon. Gentleman for what he said and the way he said it. He is absolutely right that in this place we do need to treat one another with courtesy and respect. Every Member who comes here is elected by their constituents to represent them, so it cannot be right that any of us should seek to control any other one of us, but at the same time we do have a shared desire for Parliament to be a good role model. I will think carefully about the hon. Gentleman's words and I will absolutely never flounce again; he has my undertaking.

**Jeremy Lefroy** (Stafford) (Con): Later this year, there is the triennial replenishment of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. That is an incredibly important fund, which has contributed to the reduction of deaths on a wide scale across the world. May we have a debate on the importance of the fund, especially as some of the progress is stalling, not because of lack of work, but because of resistance to drugs, for instance in the case of malaria?

**Andrea Leadsom:** My hon. Friend raises an incredibly important point and I am extremely sympathetic to it. Eradicating TB, malaria and the problem of HIV/AIDS

is absolutely vital for the sake of our world. I would encourage him to seek a debate, perhaps in Westminster Hall, and I will consider whether we can give Government time to such a debate.

**Douglas Chapman** (Dunfermline and West Fife) (SNP): The Leader of the House is no doubt aware that Josep Costa attended Parliament this week as the Deputy Speaker of the Catalan Parliament, and met the Deputy Speaker of this House, the right hon. Member for Chorley (Sir Lindsay Hoyle). Catalan politicians, and indeed the former Speaker of the Catalan Parliament, are facing trial in Spain imminently for supporting the manifesto of their properly elected Government and respecting the will of their own Parliament. I am sure that no one in this House would want our Speaker placed in a similar position for any potential misdemeanours, but will the Leader of the House provide Government time to allow us to debate the situation in Catalonia, and for other Members to express their anger at some of the situations that properly elected politicians have to face in their own country?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Gentleman raises a very important point. Spain is a key ally. They are a very strong democracy and it is right that they, as they do, abide by their own laws at all times. Nevertheless, the hon. Gentleman raises an important point. He may well wish to seek an Adjournment debate, or to ask a question at Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs questions on 22 January.

**James Morris** (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con): May we have a statement from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government about ongoing issues to do with conduct by some members of Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council? Following my Adjournment debate on Sandwell last year, many issues are still outstanding in respect of the standards and conduct of some councillors within that authority. Only last weekend, *The Times* reported an email exchange between the leader of the council and West Midlands police, where Councillor Steve Eling called for the immediate arrest of a blogger who had criticised him and the council and stated that, if that individual was not arrested, the police would be in contempt and it would be a matter for the Home Secretary. Will the Leader of the House find time for a Minister from the Department to come to the House to explain what the Government will do to help my constituents in Rowley Regis understand what is going on within Sandwell Council?

**Andrea Leadsom:** My hon. Friend raises what sounds like a very concerning situation. I would strongly encourage him to seek a further Adjournment debate, so that he can debate it directly with Ministers, or perhaps seek to see one of the Ministers in the Department to raise these very specific issues directly.

**Paula Sherriff** (Dewsbury) (Lab): As temperatures drop, we need more than ever to tackle the growing epidemic of homelessness, which is frankly killing people. I will be joining the Big Sleep Out at Huddersfield Town stadium in March, raising funds locally. If any Members want to join me for a night under the stars, they will be very welcome, but we need to do much more. Government efforts are clearly not working. They are not enough;

[Paula Sherriff]

they are inadequate. So may we have a debate on how we may reach a cross-party consensus on how we move forward and end the cancer that is homelessness?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Lady is right to raise the issue, and I commend her for taking part in the Big Sleep Out; it sounds slightly romantic, but I am sure it will not be. Obviously, homelessness is a scourge on our society—it is incredibly difficult, as we have seen ourselves just outside Parliament. I have certainly worked with the House authorities to look at what more can be done to support those who are homeless outside this place.

Right across the country, as the hon. Lady will be aware, there are complex reasons why people become homeless. I am aware, for example, that Westminster City Council says that there are places for homeless people, but getting them to use them is difficult for a number of reasons. There is a lot more that we are doing. We have committed more than £1.2 billion to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping, and we have clear targets to reduce the problem of homelessness and rough sleeping over a very short period.

**Chris Green** (Bolton West) (Con): The original version of the Greater Manchester spatial framework that the Labour leadership in my region drew up was so bad that it was criticised by 27,000 residents, as well as Conservative colleagues across Greater Manchester—it was rightly torn up and started again. The new version of the GMSF is better, especially as it has more of a focus on the redevelopment of Bolton town centre. Can we have a debate on the importance of listening to local residents, who emphasise the importance of redeveloping our town centres and brownfield sites, rather than Labour's focus on using the green belt first?

**Andrea Leadsom:** My hon. Friend raises an incredibly important issue. All of us share a desire for more homes to be built and for our high streets to thrive more while ensuring protection for the green belt. He is absolutely right to raise the issue. I encourage him to seek an Adjournment debate so that he can discuss it directly with Ministers.

**Kirsty Blackman** (Aberdeen North) (SNP): I hope that the Leader of the House can advise me on how to get the Government to take action on this. People fleeing domestic violence face the most uncertain time in their lives. If they have come from a country outside the European economic area, they can apply for a destitution domestic violence concession. If they are fleeing domestic violence but are originally from inside the EEA, the response that I have had from the Government suggests that they should go to their home country: they cannot apply through the domestic violence concession route. How can I get the Home Office to take the issue seriously? I have had reports of women returning to abusers because they have no recourse to public funds on fleeing their abusive homes. Please will the Leader of the House advise me on how to get the Government to take the matter seriously?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am very concerned to hear what the hon. Lady has said. As she will be aware, the Government have committed £100 million of funding

into projects that support organisations helping women who have suffered violence. If she writes to me with the specifics of the case she is talking about, I will be very happy to take it up on her behalf.

**Henry Smith** (Crawley) (Con): The Labour leadership of Crawley Borough Council has recently wasted about half a million pounds on a delayed IT project at great expense to local taxpayers. When constituents have made freedom of information requests of the local authority, they have been obstructed. May we have a statement from the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government about the importance of the efficiency and probity of local councils such as Crawley's?

**Andrea Leadsom:** My hon. Friend raises a concerning case. Too often, there are examples of projects going wrong and wasting taxpayers' money, which can never be right. He will be aware that there are clear rules about the use of taxpayers' money in such examples. I encourage him to table a parliamentary question to the Department to seek a ruling on this specific issue.

**Chris Elmore** (Ogmore) (Lab): I have been contacted by a constituent who lives part of the year in Portugal. They are concerned about being able to drive and hold car insurance in both countries if they have to exchange their UK licence for a Portuguese one: they need to continue to drive in the EU if we leave the EU. I cannot be the only Member with a constituent who has that concern. I am aware that Transport questions took place earlier; I tried to catch Mr Speaker's eye, but I was out of luck. Will the Leader of the House ask the Transport Secretary to come to the Floor of the House to make a statement about these licensing issues and issues of car insurance for those who live part-time in the European Union?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman did not get to ask his question directly to Transport Ministers, but I will do my best. There is now a Government communications plan to try to provide specific answers to such questions. I did not have prior notice of this question, so I do not know whether this issue is included in that plan, but through national radio and so on the Government are directing consumers and householders to the gov.uk website to seek specific answers to questions about what will happen when we leave the EU. If the hon. Gentleman would like to write to me, I would also be willing to take up the issue with the Department on his behalf.

**Mark Pawsey** (Rugby) (Con): To the great relief of children and parents in Rugby, Yum Yum World, our Willy Wonka-style high street attraction, has been saved because its unfair business rates bill was finally slashed by £59,000. The Valuation Office Agency has two years to respond to a challenge on business rates, which is far too long for a small business that is overpaying by such a huge amount. May we have a debate to consider the priority of institutions such as Yum Yum World keeping our town centres alive?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I congratulate Yum Yum World on its survival. Plenty of children and some adults will be delighted by that, but go easy on the sugar everybody!



My hon. Friend raises an important point about business rates and how we can keep our high streets thriving. He will know that the Government have made changes worth more than £13 billion in aggregate to businesses, including taking more than 600,000 small businesses out of paying any business rates at all. Our dedicated Retail Sector Council brings the Government and retail sector organisations together to consider what more we can do to ensure thriving high streets.

**Anna Turley (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op):** My constituency staff and I have challenged a large number of unfair private parking penalty charges. We have won back more than £700 for local constituents who were wrongly charged, including a constituent who was charged outside a doctor's surgery for dropping off his wife who has a serious long-term health condition. The Parking (Code of Practice) Bill, promoted by the right hon. Member for East Yorkshire (Sir Greg Knight), was accepted by this House. Will the Leader of the House say when we can expect that Bill to return to this place, and whether it will get Government support? I am sure there will be a lot of interest from across the Chamber.

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am very sympathetic to what the hon. Lady says, and by coincidence, my office has also been dealing with a number of complaints about unfair parking tickets. It is a real problem, and MPs often successfully challenge such matters on behalf of our constituents—I share the hon. Lady's success levels. She raises an important point about the private Member's Bill and, as she knows, I attempted to schedule six additional days for the consideration of private Members' Bills. Unfortunately that motion was subject to an Opposition amendment and was therefore not put to the House. However, I intend to work through the usual channels to provide further information on days to consider private Members' Bills.

**Paul Masterton (East Renfrewshire) (Con):** May we have a debate in Government time on cyber-bullying? The Leader of the House will know that before Christmas I raised the case of a 13-year-old boy in my constituency who took his own life, and it is an issue on which Members across the House would like to come together and discuss. Will she welcome the new campaign on this issue, headed by Dame Esther Rantzen, which was launched on the Channel 5 show "Do The Right Thing" on Sunday evening?

**Andrea Leadsom:** My hon. Friend raises an issue that matters a great deal to all families, parents and young people across the country, and I know that many right hon. and hon. Members are also concerned about it. The Government have sent a clear message to schools that bullying—including cyber-bullying—for whatever reason, is totally unacceptable. We are providing nearly £3 million in support for anti-bullying projects and, as part of this, the Diana Award has developed a number of resources to help students and staff deal with cyber-bullying and understand reporting together with social media providers, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Snapchat.

**Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op):** There is mounting public concern in Glasgow about the impact of continued council cuts on vital community

services. On Tuesday night, Dennistoun Community Council organised a meeting, which was filled to capacity, in protest at the proposed closure of the Whitehill pool, and further cuts are proposed for Haghill sports centre and for golf courses and libraries in my constituency. Glasgow City Council has had a 10% cut since 2011, and the proposed cut for the coming year is 3.6%. Local government cuts in Scotland are five times the cut that the Scottish Government have had, which is a huge amplification. Will the Leader of the House therefore consider holding a debate in Government time on the huge impact that austerity is having on all levels of government and on vital community services across our country?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am sorry to hear that the hon. Gentleman's constituents are concerned about potential cuts, which of course are decisions for local councils to make. What I can say is that councils have access to over £200 billion to deliver local services up to 2020. In areas such as social care, which we know are under pressure, the Government have provided more money. I encourage him to seek an Adjournment debate so that he can raise his particular concerns directly with Ministers.

**Craig Tracey (North Warwickshire) (Con):** Last week, eight-year-old Penelope Jones from Bedworth visited my regular surgery, having written me a letter about improving her local play area. I appreciate that it is not in the gift of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House to provide the zip-line and extra swings that Penelope asked for, but it served as a timely reminder that we represent all our constituents, not just those who are old enough to vote. May we therefore have a debate on how we can better engage with young people and encourage constituents of all ages and backgrounds to engage more positively with their local representatives?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I think that is a really good idea. I congratulate Penelope on getting involved and trying to improve her local community—hopefully she will keep up her interest for many years to come, and perhaps even stand for Parliament one day. As part of last year's suffrage centenary, the Cabinet Office has developed various resources for use with young people by teachers, or indeed by representatives, which are designed to educate and encourage them to participate in our democratic society.

**Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab):** In 1944, eight-year-old Tony Foulds was playing football in Endcliffe Park when a US B-17 bomber flew over and, after swerving to avoid hitting him and the other children, crashed in the woods, killing 10 soldiers. Every single day since then, Tony has maintained the memorial to that B-17, for 75 years. Will the Leader of the House consider meeting Tony and me to discuss how we can honour him, and will she raise with her Ministry of Defence colleagues the prospect of a flypast to mark the 75th anniversary on 22 February?

**Andrea Leadsom:** That is a heart-warming story, although obviously one that started in tragedy. I congratulate Tony on his absolute commitment to the memorial, and the hon. Lady on raising it today. I would be delighted to meet them both and to raise the matter further with MOD colleagues.

**Hannah Bardell** (Livingston) (SNP): Just a few days before Christmas, the manufacturing firm Kaiam in my constituency closed its doors, telling staff that there would be no pay before Christmas and that they might not have a job in the new year. The West Lothian and Livingston community rallied around and the women of West Lothian set up a hub to ensure that toys, food, money and vouchers were available, so that no one would go without at Christmas. May we have a debate on how quickly the Redundancy Payments Service moneys can be disbursed, and on what can be done to ensure that these companies maintain their pension liabilities, that cowboy chief executive officers, such as the one who runs Kaiam, who flew out of the country as staff were being told their fate, are brought to justice, and that we do everything we can to support the workers during this difficult time?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I think that we are all incredibly sympathetic to the hon. Lady's constituents who were given such terrible news in the run-up to Christmas, and we join her in congratulating and thanking all those who made sure that they could still celebrate Christmas. She raises some important points about how businesses behave if they are failing. She will be aware that the Matthew Taylor review has raised some serious issues relating to pensions management and so on, which the Government are looking at closely. I encourage her to apply for an Adjournment debate so that the matter can be raised directly with Ministers.

**Chris Bryant** (Rhondda) (Lab): I say to the Leader of the House that I do not think there is anything wrong with a good flounce—sometimes in life it can be useful—but I do not think that we should flounce out of the European Union. I am concerned that the Solicitor General said that we would manage to have Second Reading of the European Union withdrawal agreement and implementation Bill before Christmas. That cannot now happen until at least 28 January, if at all, and only if next Tuesday we proceed as the Government intend. Therefore, what will the Government do to ensure that we have proper legislation in place before 29 March, and will the Leader of the House seriously consider—do not rule it out now—that we might have to delay leaving beyond that date?

**Andrea Leadsom:** First, I simply concede to the hon. Gentleman that I am quite sure he would be a better flouncer than me in all circumstances.

**Chris Bryant:** Division!

**Andrea Leadsom:** I think it would be agreed unanimously.

**Chris Bryant:** It's an outrage!

**Andrea Leadsom:** Not in the slightest—we love the hon. Gentleman dearly.

It is absolutely not the Government's intention or policy to do anything like flounce out of the EU. We are looking at our meaningful vote on Tuesday and it is absolutely our intention that we win that meaningful vote, introduce the withdrawal agreement Bill and have a smooth transition out of the European Union. As the hon. Gentleman will know, my job is to make sure that the legislation passes through both Houses, and it will

not surprise him that I look at that issue closely on a daily basis. I am confident that we have enough time to get the withdrawal agreement Bill through both Houses.

**Christine Jardine** (Edinburgh West) (LD): Like many in the House, I was delighted with the Home Secretary's decision last year to make cannabis available for medicinal use. Unfortunately, for many people like my constituent Murray Gray, a little boy, this has not helped to ease their pain. We have heard stories of over-rigid regulations and the difficulty of getting what is now a legal medicine. Will the Leader of the House consider holding a debate in the House to tackle the thorny and grown-up question of whether we should decriminalise and regulate the cannabis market to overcome this problem?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Lady will be aware that the decision was taken that cannabis oil can be used for medical purposes and it is not the Government's policy to consider the broader deregulation of the use of cannabis.

**Liam Byrne** (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab): Jaguar Land Rover is today set to announce 5,000 job losses in what will be the biggest hammer blow to manufacturing in this country since the closure of Longbridge. When Longbridge closed, it was all hands on deck: we had taskforces and visits from Cabinet Ministers. When will we get an action plan of that kind of force from this Government? Will the Leader of the House tell us when she expects Cabinet Ministers to come forward and explain how we are going to ensure that every single one of those people who lose their jobs today is back in employment as soon as possible?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The right hon. Gentleman is right to raise this very concerning report. Jaguar Land Rover will make its statement at 3 o'clock today. The Government will of course respond in full at the appropriate time, but we need to wait until the company has let us know its specific intentions.

**Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): Just to reinforce what my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne) just said about Jaguar Land Rover, it is very important that we get a statement from the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy about what discussions he has had with Jaguar Land Rover. It is very important for Coventry and the west midlands. As I have said before, once a company has announced 5,000 job losses, there is a knock-on effect on the supply chain, so we may well need to use a multiplier of two or three. It is important that people in Coventry know what the situation is. Lots of constituents have written to me about this issue over the past few weeks, so it is important that we get that statement.

**Andrea Leadsom:** I say again that we were all very concerned to hear this report, but we need to wait and see what Jaguar Land Rover itself has to say. The hon. Gentleman may have noticed that the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy is standing by the Chair and will have heard his remarks. I am sure that the Secretary of State intends to respond fully as soon as we know exactly what the details are.

**Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): On new year's eve, 40 people were arrested at a flat in Fulham in my constituency, following a serious knife attack nearby. The police told me that the flat had been rented out on an Airbnb-style let and then used for a party that attracted people from a wide area. The Government deregulated Airbnb lets in London; may we have a debate on re-regulating them to stop properties in residential areas being turned into hotels and hostels and, increasingly, becoming the focus of antisocial and violent behaviour?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I was not aware of the incident raised by the hon. Gentleman, but it sounds extremely concerning. I encourage him, perhaps in the first instance, to seek an Adjournment debate so that he can describe the exact incident that took place and hear Ministers' direct response.

**Susan Elan Jones** (Clwyd South) (Lab): Around the time of the centenary of the Armistice, many of us had the privilege to attend events in this place and in our constituencies. After that, there were many programmes involving schoolchildren, and I hope that the Leader of the House can give us some time in which to debate the matter. I refer to a wonderful programme of Cefn Community Council, where research was undertaken by primary schoolchildren from Ysgol Cefn Mawr, Ysgol Rhosymedre and Ysgol Min y Ddol in order to provide information about each of the 130 fallen from their community. It is an extraordinary programme that is a credit to the community of Cefn and is something that we should mark in this House.

**Andrea Leadsom:** I join the hon. Lady in congratulating all those who were involved in this fantastic initiative. Bridging the gap between the generations so that young people understand the sacrifice of those who came before them is vital. All of us have enjoyed the amazing tributes paid by young people to those who fought and died during the great war.

**Dr David Drew** (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Leader of the House organise an urgent debate on incineration contracts? Gloucestershire County Council has just had literally pulled out of it the news that it has spent an extra £100 million on a half a billion pound contract at the Javelin Park project in the Stroud constituency. It cannot be the only local authority that is watching council taxpayers' money just being burned on bad value for money. Will the Leader of the House order an urgent inquiry and a debate on the issue?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Gentleman raises an important point. There are Environment, Food and Rural Affairs questions next Thursday, so I encourage him to raise the matter then.

**Ian Murray** (Edinburgh South) (Lab): Is it not about time that the Government started to be straight and honest with the British public? The Prime Minister has continued to repeat that there is a Brexit dividend, despite the fact that we all know there is not a Brexit dividend and, indeed, the Government's own figures show that there is not a Brexit dividend. May I unusually ask the Leader of the House for us not to have a statement and not to have a debate on the Brexit dividend, because it does not exist?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Gentleman makes a really important point about the issue of economic forecasting that presupposes different alternatives. In my view, economic forecasting is only as good as the inputs into the forecasting model. Although he says that there is not a Brexit dividend, the fact that I would rely on is that once we have left the European Union, we will no longer be paying the billions of pounds in net terms that we were previously paying to the European Union.

**Ellie Reeves** (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab): In the week before Christmas, my local food bank in Penge gave out 300 parcels to some of the most vulnerable. It is an outrage that at a time of year when most people are out celebrating, Tory austerity has meant that far too many rely on food banks for essential supplies. Can we please have a debate on the impact of Tory austerity on food bank usage and food poverty across the country?

**Andrea Leadsom:** Let me first pay tribute to all those who help out with food banks, either by donating to them or by running them; they do an amazing job in all our constituencies. The hon. Lady is right to point out that we absolutely do not want people to have to rely on food banks. However, there are now 630,000 fewer children living in workless households, and the numbers both of people and of children in absolute poverty are at record lows, with 1 million fewer people and 300,000 fewer children in absolute poverty at a time when income inequality is also down and lower than at any time under the last Labour Government. We are building a fairer society, jobs are growing and wages are rising faster than inflation. These are all very good things and are to be welcomed.

**Clive Efford** (Eltham) (Lab): How is it in the interests of our constituents that this House is prevented from expressing its views on an issue as important as Brexit? Does the right hon. Lady see her role as Leader of the House as ensuring that the Government can prevent this House from expressing its view in that way?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I think it is absolutely vital that the House gets the opportunity to express its view, which is why we have five days of debate prior to the meaningful vote.

**Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): One of my constituents who has worked all her life had to take a part-time job, leading her to access benefits for the first time. Imagine her surprise when she was paid a week early before Christmas so that the company's head office could close for Christmas, but then lost £250 of universal credit. This goes against the grain of the Government's mantra of making work pay. Can we have a statement saying what the Government are going to do about this anomaly in universal credit, and will they look at these individual cases?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Gentleman often raises constituency cases, and he is absolutely right to do so. If he wants to write to me about that case, I can take it up with the Department for Work and Pensions on his behalf. I am certainly aware that that is not the intention. The point about universal credit is that it allows for flexibility in benefit payments to people whose job circumstances change. But if he will write to me on the individual circumstances, I can take it up for him.



**Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): I know that the Leader of the House will be as concerned as I was this morning about some of the findings of the Environmental Audit Committee report showing that there were higher levels of hunger among our children than in most other countries in Europe. In Hull, we are pioneering the 50p school meal, jointly subsidised by Hull City Council and schools, but it is now under threat because of the cuts to school budgets and is having to go up to £1. May we please have a debate on whether austerity really has ended in some of the most disadvantaged parts of this country?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Lady is quite right that I share her concern about any child going hungry. I know that this is a long-standing and intractable issue, particularly during school holidays. I pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field), who has long tried to seek the opportunity for school lunches to continue even during the holidays. It is a very important issue. However, I would draw the hon. Lady's attention to the fact that with the increase in our economy—the real rises in wages, the growing number of jobs, and universal credit, which makes sure that benefits are not withdrawn as people increase their working hours—the opportunities for people to increase their earnings are now there more than ever before. We are seeing that the result of that is a decrease in absolute poverty and a decrease in the number of workless households, and therefore a decrease in the number of children being raised in workless households, all of which are very good things in our society.

**Carolyn Harris** (Swansea East) (Lab): The all-party parliamentary group on home electrical safety will shortly publish the results of a consultation on the need for better regulation of online sales. Websites such as Amazon, Wish.com and eBay are not doing enough to prevent the sale of illegal and unsafe goods to UK customers. Shockingly, Wish.com is openly selling zombie knives and knuckledusters without any checks on the age of the buyer. Will the Leader of the House consider a debate in Government time on better regulation of online sales?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Lady raises a very important point. I know that Members right across the House would wish to see more done to stop online sales being a free-for-all. She raised a particular point about zombie knives being sold online. She will be aware that that will be made illegal under the Offensive Weapons Bill, and I encourage her to raise that point specifically with Ministers during its remaining stages in this House.

**Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab): Before Christmas, I asked the Leader of the House for a debate on Yemen, and told her about my constituent, Jackie Morgan, whose daughter had been kidnapped in 1986 and was now trying to flee from Yemen. I am grateful for the help that the Government have given so far, particularly the Middle East Minister, who has been very helpful indeed. However, now that she has got out of Yemen, there is also the issue of her husband, who is with her and who wants to travel to the UK with the family, understandably. Will the Leader of the House encourage her Home Office colleagues to step up to the plate as her Foreign Office colleagues have done to help this family?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am very glad to hear that there has been progress for the hon. Gentleman's constituent. I say again that Yemen is the world's worst humanitarian catastrophe, and the UK is fully committed to doing everything it can to support resolution there. I would encourage him to raise this directly at Home Office questions on 21 January, or if he wants to write to me, I can take it up on his behalf.

**Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): The Irn-Bru carnival at the Scottish Event Campus in Glasgow has been running autism-friendly sessions, which encouraged people with autism to enjoy all the fun of the fair over the festive period. There are good initiatives elsewhere in Glasgow to help people with autism and their families, such as a dedicated space within the St Enoch Centre. Will the Leader of the House join me in congratulating those involved? Can we have a debate to encourage other businesses right across these islands to put in place similar measures?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I certainly join the hon. Lady in congratulating all those involved. It is vital that we all get a better understanding of the challenges for people with autism, so that we can fully appreciate their strengths as well as the problems they face in dealing with everyday life. I would absolutely encourage other businesses to take up similar initiatives.

**Martin Whitfield** (East Lothian) (Lab): Could we have a statement to clarify the position with regard to WASPI women who are submitting maladministration claims? The recent referral to the High Court has led to my constituents receiving letters saying that their cases have been closed, yet the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman has confirmed that those cases that relate to communication have merely been put on hold. That is causing massive confusion for a group of women who have already suffered from communication problems.

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Gentleman raises a very important point that clearly needs to be raised directly with Ministers. If he writes to me, I can take it up with them, or he might like to seek an Adjournment debate, so that he can talk directly to them.

**Justin Madders** (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): Over the Christmas period, I was contacted by many constituents who shared with me horrific and disgusting images of foxes being slaughtered in hunts. I do not know whether there is a loophole in the legislation or just a flagrant disregard for it, but we urgently need a debate on how the Hunting Act 2004 is working and whether it needs reviewing.

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Gentleman is right to raise that point. The Hunting Act is clear that hunting should be restricted to trail hunting, and it is vital that the police uphold the law. He might like to seek a Back-Bench business debate, so that Members can share their concerns.

**Drew Hendry** (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): New research from the Scottish Parliament Information Centre has shown that my constituents in Inverness and Nairn alone are paying

£1 million a year more due to unfair delivery surcharges. Can we have a statement on when the Government will finally act to end that scandalous rip-off?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Gentleman has raised that in the Chamber before, and he is quite right to do so. That is completely unfair, and I encourage him to seek the opportunity to raise it directly with Ministers, so that they can respond to his request.

**David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab):** The Prime Minister is today meeting the Japanese Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe. Could the Leader of the House confirm that the Prime Minister will raise the concerns already raised by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs about the resumption of Japanese whaling? Will the Leader of the House ensure that there is a statement in the House as soon as possible, to give feedback as to the Japanese Government's response to those concerns?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I cannot confirm exactly what the Prime Minister will be raising, but I am confident that she will raise that serious and concerning issue. We have DEFRA oral questions next week, so perhaps the right hon. Gentleman can find out then from Ministers what was specifically discussed.

**Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op):** In the event that the deal is voted down next Tuesday and there is a vote of no confidence, with the Opposition parties joined by those on the Government Benches who want a no-deal Brexit, what provisions do the Government have to avoid a no-deal Brexit by default—something the great majority of people in this place and certainly the great majority outside it do not want—during the period of the election, in terms of deferring or revoking article 50?

**Andrea Leadsom:** As I said earlier, this House has confidence in Her Majesty's Government, and if the official Opposition believe that not to be the case, it is for them to put forward a motion of no confidence under the terms of the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011. The convention is that the Government will then give time for that to be debated. It is not for the Government to try to second-guess what the official Opposition would choose to do.

**Jeff Smith (Manchester, Withington) (Lab):** Like the hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Christine Jardine), I was delighted when the Government legalised medical cannabis at the start of November. What has become clear, however, is that there are significant financial, bureaucratic and cultural barriers preventing consultants from prescribing. The system is not working. May we have a statement or a debate in Government time on how we can make it easier for people to access the medicine they need?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I think all right hon. and hon. Members were delighted when the decision was taken swiftly to make cannabis oil available to those who need it for medical purposes. Obviously, we need to have a

period for this recent decision to bed down, but I encourage the hon. Gentleman perhaps to raise the issue at Home Office questions on 21 January to see when Ministers intend to review how the system is working.

**Alex Norris (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op):** Advice Nottingham's new report on housing in my city has revealed that there are only 23 properties available with rents under local housing allowance rates, including only three three-bedroom houses. The local housing allowance is supposed to be supporting low-income families to rent, but it is not. May we please have a debate in Government time on the impact of the housing crisis on Nottingham?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am genuinely sorry to hear that. The hon. Gentleman will obviously be concerned about the lack of housing available in his constituency. He will be aware that since 2010 the Government have brought social housing waiting lists down by over half a million and delivered many more council houses than was the case under the Labour Government. Nevertheless, we have huge ambitions to do more. We are putting in place measures to enable the delivery of more social and affordable housing, but he might want to seek an Adjournment debate to raise the specific issues for Nottingham.

**Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP):** On Sunday 6 January, President Sisi inaugurated Egypt's largest Christian church a day after a deadly bomb blast near a Coptic church that killed a policeman and wounded two others. Efforts to promote tolerance are to be welcomed, but we must acknowledge that the situation on the ground for Christians in Egypt remains very, very dangerous. Christians were attacked multiple times in the past year, including the November 2018 terrorist attack where three buses carrying Christian pilgrims were ambushed, killing seven and wounding 19. Will the Leader of the House agree to a statement or a debate on this issue?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Gentleman reports horrific occurrences. It is absolutely unacceptable that anybody anywhere is hounded, tortured, punished or bombed for the sake of their faith, race or gender. He is right to raise this issue, as he often does in this place. Foreign and Commonwealth Office questions are on 22 January. I encourage him to raise it then.

## BILL PRESENTED

### ASYLUM SEEKERS (PERMISSION TO WORK) BILL

*Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Christine Jardine, supported by Catherine West, Dame Caroline Spelman, Tim Farron and Sir Edward Davey, presented a Bill to make provision for certain asylum seekers to be granted permission to work; and for connected purposes.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 1 March, and to be printed (Bill 313).*

## European Union (Withdrawal) Act

[6TH ALLOTTED DAY]

*Debate resumed (Orders 5, 4 December and 9 January).*

*Question again proposed,*

That this House approves for the purposes of section 13(1)(b) of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, the negotiated withdrawal agreement laid before the House on Monday 26 November 2018 with the title ‘Agreement on the withdrawal of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland from the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community’ and the framework for the future relationship laid before the House on Monday 26 November 2018 with the title ‘Political Declaration setting out the framework for the future relationship between the European Union and the United Kingdom’.

12.8 pm

**The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Michael Gove):** May I begin on a personal note, Mr Speaker? I am very, very grateful to Members on both sides of the House, from all parties, who very kindly contacted me or sent messages over the course of the Christmas holidays following my son’s accident. I am very grateful for the kind words that many sent. My son is recovering well and I just wanted to register my appreciation.

A second brief point I want to make is that I want to ensure that as many colleagues as possible have the opportunity to intervene during my remarks. I recognise that we will be addressing a number of important issues today, not least the vital importance of maintaining environmental protection and the protection of workers’ rights, but I also recognise that many colleagues wish to speak, so I will try to keep my answers as brief as possible.

It is perhaps appropriate, Mr Speaker, given that this is a debate on European matters, that we should be emulating what happens in European football competitions by having a second leg of this debate following the first one. In hotly contested European matches, strong views are sometimes held, not just about the merits of each side, but about the referee, but all I want to say is that I am personally grateful to you, Mr Speaker. You sat through the whole of the first leg of this debate and intend to sit through the second, which is an indication of how important this debate is and how seriously you take your responsibilities. Across the House, we all owe you thanks for how you have facilitated this debate.

I also want to thank the many civil servants in my Department and elsewhere who have worked hard to secure the withdrawal agreement with the European Union. Officials, negotiators and others sometimes find themselves in the firing line but unable to speak for themselves, so let me speak for them: the dedicated public servants in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Department for Exiting the European Union and other Departments have worked hard to honour the referendum result and to secure the best possible deal for the British people. I place on record my thanks and those of my Government colleagues for their wonderful work.

As everyone acknowledges, the deal that we have concluded is a compromise. Those who are critical of it recognise that there are flaws, and those of us who support it also recognise that it has its imperfections, but how could it be otherwise? There are more than

600 Members, all with different and overlapping views on Brexit and its merits, and on how it should be executed. Some 17.4 million people voted to leave—a clear majority—and we must honour that, but we must also respect the fact that 48% of our fellow citizens voted to remain, and their concerns, fears and hopes also have to be taken into consideration.

We are dealing in this negotiation with 27 other EU nations, each with legitimate interests, with which we trade and many of whose citizens live in this country. We consider them our friends and partners in the great enterprise of making sure that a rules-based international order can safeguard the interests of everyone. Inevitably, then, we have to compromise. I recognise that during this debate many principled cases for alternatives will be advanced. I will respect, and have respected, the passion and integrity with which those cases are made, but it is also important to recognise that those who support this compromise, including me, are passionate about delivering on the verdict of the British people in the referendum in a way that also honours the interests of every British citizen. That is what this agreement does. It honours the referendum result while also respecting the vital interests of every part of the United Kingdom and every citizen within it.

**Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con):** The difficulty is that we do not know the extent of the compromise because negotiations on the future agreement have yet to begin, and because we will have paid the money upfront and will be unable to walk away from these negotiations, so we will be in a weak position. Can my right hon. Friend reassure me about the level of compromise that is likely to be made?

**Michael Gove:** I very much take on board my right hon. Friend’s point. As I will explain in greater detail in my remarks, I think we are in a far stronger position than many allow. The £39 billion that we will be giving to the EU is in part settlement of our obligations and in part a way of ensuring we have a transition period so that we can adjust to life outside the EU. The backstop that has been negotiated—let us all remember that originally the EU wanted a Northern Ireland-only backstop, but we now have a UK-wide backstop—allows us, as a sovereign nation, freedom in critical areas. These are freedoms that honour the referendum result and create real difficulties for European countries, which I will explore in greater detail in a moment.

It is critical that we recognise that the agreement the Prime Minister has negotiated will mean that we will be outside the direct jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice, outside the common fisheries policy, outside the common agricultural policy, outside the common foreign and security policy and outside the principle of ever closer union, and that we will have control of our borders and our money. The days of automatic direct debits from this country, at whatever level people might think appropriate, will end, and as a result the referendum verdict will be honoured.

**Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op):** Earlier, the Secretary of State said that the deal laid out by the Prime Minister was a good deal for everybody in the UK. Can he seriously stand at that Dispatch Box and say that our friends in Northern Ireland are getting a good deal out of this deal?



**Michael Gove:** I absolutely can. One of the opportunities that the citizens of Northern Ireland would have as a result of the deal is unimpeded access not just to the rest of the UK market, which is essential for the maintenance of our Union, but to the rest of the EU. That is why the Ulster Farmers' Union, Ulster business and so many in Northern Ireland's civil society have said that, with all its imperfections, the deal protects not only the integrity of the UK, but their livelihoods, jobs and futures.

**Richard Benyon (Newbury) (Con):** My right hon. Friend mentioned the Ulster Farmers' Union. Has he had time today to see the letter written by the presidents of all four farmers unions to every Member setting out quite clearly why no deal would be so damaging to the interests of rural communities?

**Michael Gove:** I have read that letter. It has been sent to every Member, and I would ask every Member to give it close attention. Our farming communities, like our country, were split over whether to leave. A majority of farmers voted to leave, recognising the opportunities that being outside the CAP would present, but I have yet to meet a single farmer who believes that a no-deal Brexit would be the right option for this country when the withdrawal agreement in front of us provides the opportunity for tariff-free and quota-free access for agricultural products to the EU.

I will say a bit more about the specific challenges of a no-deal Brexit. It is an intellectually consistent position, but it is important, even as we apprise it and pay respect to its advocates, that we also recognise the real turbulence that would be caused, at least in the short and medium term, to many of our farmers and food producers.

**Emma Reynolds (Wolverhampton North East) (Lab):** I find myself in agreement with the Secretary of State about the risks and dangers of a no-deal Brexit, but his claim that people will be better off flies in the face of the Government's own economic analysis, which suggests that people will be poorer, the economy smaller and economic growth slower. How can he stand at the Dispatch Box and say something the Government have found to be otherwise?

**Michael Gove:** The report emphatically does not say that people will be poorer. It is important to pay proper respect to projections while also applying the appropriate analytical tools. Some of the economic projections for no deal and Brexit have proved to be unfounded. Projections have been wrong in the past and may well be wrong in the future, but it is the case—here I do agree with the hon. Lady—that, irrespective of projections for different paths, there are certain brute and unalterable facts about no deal, including the imposition of tariffs by the EU, that would create friction and costs, and that would mean, at least in the short term, economic turbulence for parts of the UK economy.

**John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con):** Will my right hon. Friend welcome the great news from the port of Calais that it will not create any barriers and that our trade will flow perfectly smoothly if we just leave the EU on 29 March, and the news that there will be aviation agreements so that planes will of course fly quite normally? Does this not show that “Project Fear”

is just a caricature of itself and a disgrace in seeking to sell us short and to lock us into something we have agreed to leave?

**Michael Gove:** My right hon. Friend makes two very important points. It is absolutely right that there have been some lurid and exaggerated stories, both during the referendum and subsequently, about the impact of certain Brexit scenarios, and he is absolutely right that in aviation and the commitments of some of our partners who manage ports there have been welcome signs. It is also important to recognise, however, that the European Commission has made it clear that, in the event of a no-deal Brexit, there will be 100% checks on products of animal origin and live animal exports, which will add significantly to friction.

Tariffs would also be imposed, and while overall tariffs on agricultural produce in the EU are around 11%, which can be discounted by changes in the valuation of sterling, it is also the case that the import duties on some products, such as sheep meat, are more than 40%, and in some cases considerably more. That would certainly impose costs on our farmers and food producers. They are resilient, imaginative, energetic and dynamic, and in the long term, of course, they will flourish, but these are undeniable short-term costs.

**Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con):** Does the Secretary of State agree that it is important to listen to the likes of GE Aviation, which employs a lot of people in my constituency and says that a

“disorderly ‘no deal’ exit...would prevent...challenges for our operations, supply chains and customers”,

and exhorts me and others to ratify the withdrawal agreement, which would

“provide business with the certainty it needs”?

**Michael Gove:** My hon. Friend makes a very good point. Again, across business there was a range of voices—for remain and leave—during the Brexit referendum, but what is striking is that many prominent voices among those who argued that we should leave have also made it clear that they believe that a no-deal Brexit would be the wrong outcome. They see significant opportunities for Britain outside the EU. Lord Wolfson, one of our most talented entrepreneurs in charge of one of our biggest retail chains, and Richard Walker, the chief executive of Iceland, one of our most dynamic and environmentally friendly supermarkets, both voted to leave the EU. They believe that to be the right choice for Britain and they both—employing thousands of our fellow citizens—also say that a no deal would pose significant challenges.

**Sir Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD):** The right hon. Gentleman is a real optimist on Brexit. How long does he expect it will take to negotiate the political agreement and finalise all its details?

**Michael Gove:** I expect that that will be concluded by the end of the transition period.

**George Freeman (Mid Norfolk) (Con):** Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is not “Project Fear” when the National Farmers Union and all the agricultural unions warn of an embargo on animal product exports, which

[George Freeman]

are currently worth £3.15 billion, in the event of no deal? In the case of the lamb industry, 94% of its exports go to the EU. This is not “Project Fear”; this is serious “Project Business”.

**Michael Gove:** My hon. Friend makes a good point. There have been some exaggerated claims about the impact of a no-deal Brexit, and the British economy is resilient. He is absolutely right, however, that farmers in some of our most vulnerable sectors, in constituencies that Members across this House represent, would be significantly adversely affected in the short term.

**Antoinette Sandbach** (Eddisbury) (Con): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for quoting my constituent Richard Walker, who has highlighted the fact that the jobs of 24,000 employees at Iceland depend on frictionless trade and that it is really important to support a deal, because no deal would be catastrophic for not only Iceland, but Arla Foods and several other food producers in this country.

**Michael Gove:** My hon. Friend makes an important point. It is always important to get things in proportion, but across the business spectrum—from those who argued for remain and for leave—there is a strong consensus that no deal would, in the short to medium term, cause significant harm.

**Mr Philip Dunne** (Ludlow) (Con): My right hon. Friend is being generous in giving way. I want to pursue his argument about the sheep meat implications of a WTO-terms Brexit. He referred to the introduction of tariffs of more than 40%. Will he confirm that that would apply on day one of moving to WTO terms?

**Michael Gove:** Yes, I am afraid that it absolutely would, and a tariff of 40%—it is just above 40%—is one of the lower ones. For example, there are tariffs on some meat exports of more than 140%, and in one case there is a tariff of more than 200%.

**Vicky Ford** (Chelmsford) (Con): Some people suggest that we could reject this deal and go back and get a better deal from Europe. Does my right hon. Friend share my concerns about the great uncertainty in that, not least because the European Parliament shuts down in mid-April for the European elections, leaving many months in which no negotiation will be possible?

**Michael Gove:** Yes. As DEFRA Secretary, I suppose that I should say that a bird in the hand is worth more than however many we might find in the bush. My hon. Friend makes an important point. We have negotiated hard and effectively. We have not secured everything that we wanted, but we have secured a great deal of what we wanted. Now is the chance—I think the country wants us to do this—to unite behind this deal across the House and to deliver on Brexit in a way that delivers for every citizen.

**Henry Smith** (Crawley) (Con): A few moments ago, my right hon. Friend mentioned live animal exports. Is it the case that if this agreement were to be approved,

many of our constituents who want an end to live animal exports would find that that was not allowed?

**Michael Gove:** Not quite. Live animal exports on the island of Ireland would have to continue, but we could further restrict—and, if we wished to, even ban—live animal exports from GB to the rest of the EU.

**James Cartledge** (South Suffolk) (Con): My right hon. Friend is being very generous in giving way. To continue the point about tariffs and sheep meat, the fact is that the situation that has been outlined could happen, so what specific preparations have been made? What contingencies, compatible with WTO rules, can be undertaken in the event that those tariffs come in so that we support our hill farmers and so on?

**Michael Gove:** That is a very fair point. One thing that occupies most of my time as Secretary of State for DEFRA is planning for various contingencies. In exceptional circumstances, there are market interventions that we can take to help this particular sector. The broader point is that whether we are in the EU or out, WTO rules on the level of state aid that we can give to farmers will bind our hands in any case.

**Lloyd Russell-Moyle** (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State has just mentioned state aid, particularly in agriculture. Is he not concerned that the deal allows the Commission oversight of state aid for four years post the transition period, and that with the Northern Ireland protocol, the Commission may have an overview of state aid in agriculture for ever? That would mean that if we wanted to diverge from the common agricultural policy, the Commission could prevent us from doing that. Is that not a reason to throw out this deal?

**Michael Gove:** I have great respect for the hon. Gentleman, but that is a misunderstanding of the agreement. The entire United Kingdom could diverge from the common agricultural policy and introduce new methods of support—

**Lloyd Russell-Moyle** *indicated dissent.*

**Michael Gove:** We absolutely could, including in Northern Ireland. Of course, there are restrictions on the amount of state aid that we can give, but those restrictions operate as a result of our membership of the WTO as well.

**Kerry McCarthy** (Bristol East) (Lab): The Secretary of State and I were both in Oxford last week for the farming conference, and indeed we had lunch together—[*Interruption.*] It was a very nice lunch.

**Chris Bryant** (Rhondda) (Lab): Vegan?

**Kerry McCarthy:** Well, it was vegan, but the Secretary of State had cheese.

There is definitely a consensus that no deal would be absolutely disastrous for the farming community. The Secretary of State is totally focusing on the risks of no deal, and to me that is something of a red herring. We could easily avoid no deal—it is entirely in the Prime Minister’s power to avoid no deal either by extending or

revoking article 50 if we get to that cliff edge. Can the Secretary of State now talk about the deal that is being put before us for the meaningful vote and try to persuade us of the merits of that deal, rather than talking about no deal?

**Mr Speaker:** The Secretary of State might wish to describe to us his cheese selection and his salvation over it.

**Michael Gove:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. I was happy to embrace my inner vegan with the hon. Lady earlier this month. We had some delicious vegan parsnip soup, and also some cheese that was produced by the Sustainable Food Trust.

I have sought to respond to questions from several colleagues about the impact of no deal, and I will say more about the merits of the deal in just a second. I will say, however, that it is not just within the power of the Government, but within the power of us all to ensure that we secure a deal. The hon. Lady is a constructive and pragmatic member of this House, and I know that she has concerns about the deal, but one of the best ways of avoiding no deal would be for her to join many other colleagues across the House in supporting the deal.

**John Mann (Bassetlaw) (Lab):** I have a small point for the Secretary of State before he explains the benefits of the deal, in his view. My savvy constituents like to participate in the biggest horse race event of the year, the Grand National, which this year is on 6 April, and being savvy, large numbers of them tend to bet on Irish horses. With no deal, can they be certain that Irish horses will get to the Grand National?

**Michael Gove:** The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. In the event of no deal, the tripartite agreement, which is part of EU law, falls. Of course, the bloodstock industry, the horse racing industry and others can take mitigating steps, but the current free movement of equines would be harmed, although it would be protected by this deal.

**Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP) *rose***—

**Michael Gove:** I will give way to the hon. Gentleman, and then I will try to make a little bit of progress. I am sure that there will be further interventions in due course.

**Alan Brown:** In the Secretary of State's post-Brexit nirvana, there will be a different customs and trading arrangement with the EU from the one that exists just now, and that will be managed with no hard border between Ireland and Northern Ireland. The Government have consistently said that that will be done with the use of new technology. What is the timeframe for the invention, trial and deployment of that technology, which will mean that there are no cameras and no infrastructure—no anything—on the border between Ireland and Northern Ireland?

**Michael Gove:** A lot of work has already been done—including by Members of this House, such as my hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr Fysh)—to point out how we can have a frictionless border and avoid checks

at the border, so that we can move out of the backstop and into a new trade agreement with the European Union.

Today the focus of this debate is principally, although not exclusively, on the environment and on workers' protection. It is important to put on record the work that has been done across this House while we have been in the European Union to protect our environment and ensure that workers have a brighter future. However, it is also important to stress that this country has had ambitions higher than those required by our membership of the European Union—ambitions that have been fulfilled in a number of areas.

The right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband), when he was Secretary of State in the Department of Energy and Climate Change, introduced climate change legislation that was significantly more progressive and ambitious than what was required by our membership of the European Union. On plastic and waste, this Government are going further than we are required to do by the European Union, to ensure that we pay our debts to this planet. Look at workers' rights, holiday rights, maternity leave, maternity pay and the national living wage. In every single one of those areas, our ambitions have been higher than required by the European Union.

It is not the case that membership of the European Union is necessary to safeguard our environment or to guarantee high-quality rights for workers. This agreement makes it clear that we will apply a non-regression principle when it comes to workers' rights, to health and safety and to employment rights. That principle, which will be very similar to the one that occurs in many other trade deals, will ensure that there is no race to the bottom. The Government will also—this is in the withdrawal agreement—create an office of environmental protection to ensure that our environment is safeguarded and that appropriate principles that were developed during our time in the European Union, such as the precautionary principle, are applied in an appropriate way.

However, there is a critical distinction between what the withdrawal agreement allows us to do and what the EU insists that we do. The withdrawal agreement allows us to take back control. The office of environmental protection will scrutinise this Government's or a future Government's application of environmental principles, but the House will decide how those principles are interpreted. For example, if we want to put the emphasis on innovation in certain areas in a different way from the European Union but still strive towards high environmental goals, we can. We can have both higher levels of protection and, critically—this was the message of the referendum—democratic accountability, with power flowing back to this place and all its Members.

**Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab):** Can the Secretary of State confirm that the forthcoming environment Bill will establish a legal right for citizens of this country to take the Government to court if they fail on environmental standards?

**Michael Gove:** Yes, absolutely. It is important that citizens have the right to access not just the courts but other means to ensure that environmental rights are protected. The creation of that new watchdog, which of course will be democratically accountable, will ensure



[Michael Gove]

that citizens do not have to go to court, but the Government and other public bodies will be held to account for their actions in safeguarding the environment.

**Sir Edward Davey:** Will that new body be statutorily independent?

**Michael Gove:** Yes, it absolutely will be independent. There will be an opportunity for the House to engage in pre-legislative scrutiny of the Bill that will give effect to that body.

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): Is the Secretary of State not concerned that, if the deal delivers such a glorious future for the United Kingdom, all the other member states of the European Union will look enviously on it and the integrity of the European Union itself will be challenged? Everybody will want a better deal than membership, which we currently have and, by definition, has to be the best possible relationship with the EU.

**Michael Gove:** It will be for other countries to decide, but yes, I think other countries will be envious of our position. For the sake of argument, I think some Italian politicians will look at our ability to have quota-free and tariff-free access to their markets and yet to be outside the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice, have full control of our borders and pay no money, and ask themselves, “Why is it that the UK has a better deal?” It will be for them to make their own judgments, but people under-appreciate the strength of the position that this deal puts Britain in for the future.

**Geraint Davies** (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State mentions that we will move out of the orbit of the ECJ. Instead, for trade deals, particularly on fracking, we will be in the orbit of international investment tribunals. He may know that in the case of Lone Pine Resources, the Canadian Government were fined hundreds of millions of dollars for their moratorium on fracking in Quebec. Is he not concerned that, if we leave the defence of the European Court of Justice and try to restrict fracking, we will be open to attack by frackers? That would not be good.

**Michael Gove:** I entirely understand the hon. Gentleman’s concerns, but robust legal protections, including licensing and permitting, will continue to ensure that hydraulic fracturing, if we have it, is governed by a set of rules that safeguard and balance the interests of the environment and the interests of property owners and those who wish to generate economic growth.

**Patricia Gibson** (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): I want to go back to the Secretary of State’s point about Britain being the envy of other European states because of the position it will be in post Brexit. Is it his contention that the Brexit scenario we are currently going through has enhanced Britain’s international reputation?

**Michael Gove:** It is certainly the case that, if we look at the flow of individuals who want to come to Britain—[*Interruption.*] This is an important point. One of the critical questions about the attractiveness of our nation is how many people want to come here. The fact that so

many people want to make a life in Britain is an indication of the strength of our position, and the significant investments by tech giants, Toyota and a number of others indicate that Britain continues to be an attractive destination not just for individuals but for investment.

**Bill Grant** (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Con): As a Scot who believes in the United Kingdom’s ability to take things forward, I am very much behind our moving from the EU, as voters requested in the referendum. In noting the good work on the environment that my right hon. Friend has championed, may I ask him to specify what opportunities this Brexit deal will create for us to leave a better environment for the generation that follows us?

**Michael Gove:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We have already said that we wish to embrace higher standards for plastic, waste and resources, but there is another big opportunity, which I know he is very keen on us taking as we leave the European Union—the opportunity to take back control of our exclusive economic zone and our fisheries, and to ensure that the environmentally damaging and economically wasteful common fisheries policy ends.

The Scottish National party, which has many talented Members, some of whom are in the Chamber, is committed—[*Interruption.*] I will not blight their electoral prospects by naming them and explaining how much I admire them. The SNP is committed to staying in the European Union and the common fisheries policy, in direct defiance of the Scottish Government’s own analysis, which points out that there could be billions of extra pounds and 5,000 extra jobs in the Scottish economy if we left the common fisheries policy. The leader of the Scottish Fishermen’s Federation told the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs yesterday that he was suffering “foot-stamping frustration” at the Scottish Government’s inability to seize that opportunity.

Why do the Scottish Government want to stand in the way of 5,000 new jobs being created? Is it ideology? Are they placing separatism above the true interests of Scotland? [HON. MEMBERS: “Always!”] I hear cries of, “Always” from Scottish Conservative colleagues. I fear that, despite my respect for our Scottish Government colleagues in so many ways, my Scottish Conservative colleagues are absolutely right. Those jobs will be created only if we embrace the opportunities of being outside the common fisheries policy.

It is not just in fisheries that jobs can be created. Outside the common agricultural policy, we will be able to embrace methods of productivity that improve our food and drink sector—our biggest manufacturing sector—and provide new jobs, new investment and new technology. It is also the case that, with environmental services and our energy, dynamism and innovation—including ultra low emission vehicles, which my right hon. Friend the Business Secretary has championed consistently—we can turn post-Brexit Britain into an environmental and economic superpower.

**Mr Nigel Evans** (Ribble Valley) (Con): As my right hon. Friend knows, I cannot wait to leave the European Union on 29 March, but I have deep concerns about the backstop in the withdrawal agreement. If we do not

want to use the backstop and if, in the event that we do use it, it will be only temporary, why does he believe the European Union is reluctant to give the legal clarity that we and the Democratic Unionist party are looking for?

**Michael Gove:** I think the European Union and its institutions will provide more clarity, but let me try to provide an additional element of clarity. The backstop is uncomfortable. It is uncomfortable for me individually as a unionist, and it is uncomfortable for my friends in the House who represent Northern Ireland. However, it is important to recognise that the European Union originally wanted a Northern Ireland-only backstop. The Prime Minister pushed back against that. We now have a UK-wide backstop. Critically, as I mentioned, that creates difficulties for other European nations.

Immediately after the conclusion of the withdrawal agreement, we heard from President Macron. It was clear from his comments that he recognised how unhappy French fishermen and citizens in Brittany and Normandy would be if the backstop came into operation and they lost all—100%—of their access to UK waters as we took back control. We shall be able to say to France, to the Netherlands, to Denmark and to other nations, “I am afraid you are locked out of our waters” and at the same time, “but we have access to your markets without tariffs or quotas.” We shall be able to say, “Your citizens cannot come here except under our rules” and, at the same time, “We are not paying a penny for these privileges”—and, at the same time, “We are outside the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice.”

European nations will say to the European institutions, “We thought that you were not going to allow cherry-picking. Why does Britain have this bowl of glistening cherries? We thought you would say that the Brits could not have their cake and eat it, but they are enjoying an array of privileges, access routes and opportunities, while at the same time not paying for them, not accepting our citizens and not allowing our boats into their waters.”

It will be the case—it is already the case—that entering the backstop will be seen by European nations and European politicians as a consummation devoutly not to be wished. That is why I am so confident that we will be able to secure an agreement, pursuing the principles of the withdrawal agreement, that will ensure that we have the free trade that we want and the control that the British ask of us.

**Alan Brown:** The Secretary of State spoke of cherry-picking, but he cherry-picks his own statistics when he talks about 5,000 possible new fishing jobs. The SNP was always opposed to the common fisheries policy and argued against it for many years. When it comes to cherry-picking, what does the Secretary of State say about the 80,000 post-Brexit job losses predicted by the Fraser of Allander Institute? What is he doing to address that?

**Michael Gove:** It is the case that, if the Scottish National party votes for the deal, we shall be able to secure jobs in Scotland and across the United Kingdom, and also to secure those 5,000 additional jobs. The hon. Gentleman is right: the Scottish National party has said that it is against the common fisheries policy. However, while it has willed the end, it has not willed the means,

which is leaving the European Union. The Scottish National party’s position is—how can one put this? To say that you want to leave the CFP but not to do anything about it, and to seek to frustrate the legislation that will allow us to leave the CFP, is inconsistent at best and a simulacrum of hypocrisy at worst.

**John Redwood:** I am grateful to the Secretary of State for making it clear that in certain circumstances we would ban all continental European fishing vessels from our waters, but will he confirm that, when we take back control, the fish will be for our fishermen to land and process here?

**Michael Gove:** My right hon. Friend has made a very good point. In the event of leaving the European Union and in the event of the operation of the backstop, which neither of us wants to enter but we recognise of course is a possibility, we would have sovereign control over our waters. We could decide who came here and on which terms, and we could negotiate with other countries knowing that we were in a position of strength.

**Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP):** I thank the Secretary of State for what he has said so far. He will understand very well the position of the Democratic Unionist party in relation to the backstop, and he will know that my constituents clearly voted to leave. There are two matters about which we are concerned: the backstop and that control of fisheries will remain in our hands. There has been a question mark over that, too. The Secretary of State has been to Northern Ireland and met the MPs and the Unionist people, and he understands their opinion. May I suggest that what he needs to do now is remove the backstop? That is only way in which he will gain our support.

**Michael Gove:** I quite understand, and I have enormous respect not only for the hon. Gentleman, but for the sincerity and clarity with which he and his parliamentary colleagues have put their views. I hope that over the next few days we can help to ensure that all the interests of Northern Ireland are safeguarded more effectively than ever within the United Kingdom. As I have pointed out, the backstop is uncomfortable for many of us, but it is also uniquely uncomfortable for the European Union, which is one of the many reasons why I think we will conclude a deal before that.

**Angela Smith:** I thank the Secretary of State for being so generous in giving way. He talked about the sovereignty of British waters and about taking back control, but will he guarantee that in any negotiation for a trade deal with the European Union there will be no retaliation, and that the interests of the processing side of the fishing industry will not be sacrificed in return for sovereignty over British waters? The processing side is much bigger than the catching side, and it must not be sacrificed.

**Michael Gove:** That is a very fair point. Mr Scatterty, who represents seafood producers in Scotland, has been very clear about some of the opportunities presented by Brexit, but also about some of the other important points to be borne in mind.

**Mhairi Black** (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (SNP): When I was in the Library doing my research for the debate, I came across a 2014 Government leaflet, produced of course by a Conservative Government, which states, under the heading “An influential voice in important places”—that was why Scotland should vote no—

“As one of the EU’s ‘big four’ nations, the UK is more able to protect Scottish interests in areas like agriculture and fisheries.”

May I ask the Secretary of State what has changed?

**Michael Gove:** Several things have changed since 2014. First, of course, there was a coalition Government then. Secondly, we have had a referendum in which the people of Scotland voted to stay in the United Kingdom, and another referendum in which the people of the United Kingdom voted to leave the European Union. But one thing has not changed: the interests of Scotland’s farmers and fishermen are better protected by maintenance of the Union than by the separation that the Scottish National party and the Scottish Government want to see. We remain influential, not just in respect of our relationship with the EU27 but globally. We have a stronger voice in trade negotiations, a stronger voice in environmental protection, and a stronger capacity to protect and enhance the interests of Scottish citizens as one United Kingdom. That is why the people of Scotland voted to stay in that United Kingdom, and that is why our Union will endure.

**Anne-Marie Trevelyan** (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con): For how much money is the Secretary of State applying to the Treasury fund for fisheries protection in case the backstop has to come into force, or, indeed, we have to leave on a no-deal basis? My local fishermen who fish out of Berwick and Amble are concerned that there is already not enough fisheries protection in those waters, and there would need to be a great deal more to ensure that we did not end up with something like the cod wars all over again.

**Michael Gove:** My hon. Friend has made an important point. The Ministry of Defence, in which she served with such distinction, has a suite of new offshore patrol vessels—state-of-the-art fisheries protection vessels—and we are negotiating with both the Treasury and the MOD to ensure that the work of those vessels will be complemented by the aviation and technological capacity that will guarantee that our fishermen are properly protected.

**Robert Neill** (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): My right hon. Friend is making his case most powerfully. In relation to the backstop, I can confirm to him that those of us who speak to European politicians and diplomats know that they have no desire to see something that gives us a competitive advantage endure in perpetuity. Moreover, European law makes it very clear that the provisions of the treaties do not permit a backstop to be permanent.

Does my right hon. Friend agree that it would be perfectly reasonable for us, with the assistance of the Attorney General, to seek further and better clarification of the definition of “temporary” in the protocol, which could be sensibly done, to reassure Members such as those from Northern Ireland who have legitimate but answerable concerns?

**Michael Gove:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is the case not only that the legal position is that the backstop must be temporary, but that European politicians do not want it to endure, for the reasons that he has outlined, explored and explained, and on which I touched earlier.

There are, of course, a number of alternatives to embracing the withdrawal agreement. Indeed, the Opposition have put forward not just one alternative but 16 in the lifetime of this Parliament. They believe, Tommy Cooper-style, that—just like that!—they can negotiate a new deal with the European Union in the next 70 days which would give us freedom to diverge in relation to state aid in a way that would give the UK a competitive advantage that the EU allows no other nation on earth, and which would at the same time allow the UK to be in a customs union. That would mean that the EU could not negotiate trade deals with other countries—this is Labour policy—without the UK’s agreeing to those trade deals, and therefore exercising a veto. No other country on earth has the ability to veto the EU’s own trade deals, but that is what the Labour party wants.

There are also a number of different depictions of some of the fantasy alternatives that have been suggested. They have been described as unicorns. I have to say that the official Labour party position is to chase a whole carnival of unicorns across the European plain, none of which are capable of being delivered. In a broadcast earlier today, the shadow Justice Secretary was asked 23 times what Labour’s position on Brexit was, and 23 times he was incapable of answering.

The Labour party has had 16 different positions, and they cannot ask a question that is put 23 times. They do have six tests, but what do those six tests mean? Well, let’s listen to the words of the shadow International Trade Secretary, the hon. Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner), when he was asked about those six tests. He summed them up pithily in a word which in Spanish translates as “cojones” and in English rhymes with “rollocks.” I know, Mr Speaker, that there are some distinguished citizens in this country who have put on their cars a poster or sticker saying “Bollocks to Brexit”, but we now know from Labour’s own Front Bench that its official Brexit position is “bollocks.” *[Interruption.]* I am quoting directly from the hon. Member for Brent North, and I am sorry that he is not in his usual position, because it is not the role of the Government to intervene in how the Opposition dispose of their positions but I have to say that the shadow International Trade Secretary is a jewel and an ornament to the Labour Front Bench: he speaks the truth with perfect clarity, and in his description of Labour’s own policy may I say that across the House we are grateful to him—grateful to the constant Gardiner for the way in which he has cast light on the testicular nature of Labour’s position?

**Sir Edward Davey:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Have you made a new ruling on parliamentary language that I am not aware of?

**Mr Speaker:** I have made no new ruling on parliamentary language. I was listening, as colleagues would expect, with my customary rapt attention to the observations of the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural



Affairs. I richly enjoyed those observations and particularly his exceptionally eloquent delivery of them, which I feel sure he must have been practising in front of the mirror for some significant number of hours, but on the subject of that which is orderly—because a number of Members were chuntering from a sedentary position about whether the use of the word beginning with b and ending in s which the Secretary of State delighted in regaling the House with was orderly—the answer is that there was nothing disorderly about the use of the word; I think it is a matter of taste.

**Michael Gove:** Thank you very much, Mr Speaker.

**Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab):** I always enjoy the Secretary of State's contributions from the Dispatch Box; he speaks with so much enthusiasm that I almost fall into the trap of thinking he actually believes what he is saying. On people saying things that are accurate, may I remind him of the things his campaign, Vote Leave, said during the leave campaign? It talked about state subsidy for steel; does he really believe in that? It talked about reversing changes to tax credits, expanding regional airports, more roads, new hospitals, hundreds of new schools and more places in them, raising pay for junior doctors, new submarines, maintaining all current EU spending—and that was alongside the £350 million per week for the NHS. When it comes to making promises that are questionable, the right hon. Gentleman has got an A-level.

**Michael Gove:** It is interesting that the hon. Gentleman talks about A-levels, because if the hon. Member for Brent North is my favourite Labour Member, he must be my second favourite as he has just run through a list of many of the policies that this Government have delivered. We have delivered more outstanding school places—more than 1.8 million children are in good and outstanding schools compared with 2010. We have delivered a pay rise for junior doctors and others in the NHS. We have created new hospital places. We have created hundreds of thousands of new jobs. I will be very happy to see the hon. Gentleman feature in the next Conservative party election broadcast as he runs through the achievements that this Conservative Government have delivered in the national interest.

**John Mann:** We can all manage a rhetorical flourish, the right hon. Gentleman better than most, but does he not agree that part of the problem we have had since the referendum is that his side and this side are spending the vast majority of their time on the rhetoric and repeating the arguments, rather than focusing on the critical issue of what we are going to be doing next? May I put it to him that this is probably not the time for rhetorical flourish, but that instead it is the time for serious discussion?

**Michael Gove:** That is a great question from the hon. Gentleman, for whom I have an enormous amount of respect, and who has taken a brave and principled position on Brexit as on every issue he has faced as a Member of this House. It is right that we hold up to scrutiny some of the alternatives that are put forward, in order to say that they are not realistic and not deliverable so that we can focus on what is realistic and deliverable. He also makes the important point that

Brexit creates opportunities for this House to reshape policy in a number of areas. Many people outside this place, whatever their view of the original referendum result, now want us to focus on dealing with the challenges but also on exploiting those opportunities.

I want to say one thing briefly, however, about an attempt by some Members of this House, in all sincerity, to put forward a case that would mean that instead of focusing on the opportunities and dealing with the challenges we would simply be rerunning the arguments of the past, and that is the case for a so-called people's vote—a second referendum in other words. There are people I really like and respect who put forward this case so I hesitate to put the contrary case, but I have to, because if we were to embark on a second referendum, we would spend months in this House debating how to construct that second referendum, and there is no consensus about what the question should be.

Every single Member of this House who argues for a second referendum had previously argued to remain, so if this House supported a second referendum it would be seen by many people as an attempt by those who lost to rerun the contest, and the inference that many would draw is that we did not have faith in their judgment and in our democracy—that we thought they were somehow too foolish, too stupid, too prejudiced to make an appropriate decision. That would do real damage to our democracy, and far from allowing us in this House to concentrate on the NHS, education, the environment and jobs, I am afraid people would see this as not just an exercise in protracted navel-gazing but a thumbing of our nose at the British people. That is why I believe that this is profoundly dangerous and playing with fire in our democracy. I have enormous respect for many of those who make the case and I understand their motivation, but I ask them to use their considerable energy and intellect to focus on making sure that Brexit can work in the interests of their constituents, rather than on attempting to say to their constituents, “You got it wrong.”

**Chris Bryant:** Every single Minister I have spoken to privately outside the Chamber has said to me that the vote is going to go down on Tuesday. Every single Minister has then said to me, “And then we'll bring it back a second time.” Will the right hon. Gentleman guarantee that if the Government lose on Tuesday they will not bring it back to this House a second time? Otherwise everything he has just said would be a pile of nonsense, wouldn't it?

**Michael Gove:** The hon. Gentleman is one of those people who is a supporter of a people's vote and for whom I have enormous respect, and he is a keen student of this House and its procedures. We all have an opportunity and a responsibility to think hard about the decision we will take next Tuesday. If we do vote to support the withdrawal agreement, imperfect as it is—it has flaws in my eyes and in his—we will nevertheless then be able to secure a Brexit that works in everyone's interests. That is why between now and next Tuesday evening all I am focusing on doing is talking to the hon. Gentleman and other Members of this House to convince them of the merits of this agreement. That seems to me to be, following on from the point made by the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann), the single most important thing I can do.

**Emma Reynolds** (Wolverhampton North East) (Lab): The Secretary of State has been speaking for 50 minutes now and has just said he wants to talk to people to convince them to vote for the Government's withdrawal agreement. Can we hear a little bit about that, please?

**Michael Gove:** I have in response to questions from a number of colleagues pointed out the many advantages that the withdrawal agreement secures.

**Sir Edward Davey** *rose*—

**Michael Gove:** I have given way to the right hon. Gentleman twice; I may do so again, but the hon. Member for Wolverhampton North East (Emma Reynolds) has made an important point.

We are out of free movement. One of the principal concerns the British public had long before the referendum was that unrestricted free movement meant we could not control who came here on terms that the British people could determine. If we vote for the withdrawal agreement we take back control of our migration policy and can exercise it in the interests of the British people in a way that both safeguards—

**Pete Wishart** (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Michael Gove:** Not at the moment.

We can do that in a way that both safeguards our economy and ensures we can have a humane policy on asylum. It is also the case that we will have tariff and quota-free access—as near frictionless as possible access—to the European market for goods and agri-food, and that will mean jobs will be protected and preserved across the country, and the competitive advantage that so many of our companies have will be enhanced.

The European Court of Justice's jurisdiction in this country will end, and that means that we can choose to diverge in a huge number of areas. Services account for 80% of our economy and that figure will increase, so a growing part of our economy will be completely outside the control of the EU and its new laws. We can choose to diverge in ways that will increase our competitiveness as well as supporting people in work. We talk about workers' rights, and they are critically important, but the most important workers' right is the right to a job. This withdrawal agreement not only safeguards existing jobs in manufacturing but ensures that new jobs in our economy can be created in a way that reflects the dynamism of the British people.

With respect to Northern Ireland, if the EU wishes to impose new rules on it, we will have the opportunity to say no to those rules. It is critical that people appreciate that we have that power within the backstop. We will be outside the common agricultural policy, with an opportunity to have a new system of agricultural support that makes farming more productive and at the same time safeguards the environment. We will also be outside the common fisheries policy, with the opportunity to create thousands of new jobs and embed higher environmental standards.

**Liz Kendall** (Leicester West) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Michael Gove:** No, I will not.

I respect the views of many Members of this House, and I know that I will have to stand down—sorry, sit down—in just a second to ensure that everyone has their say in this debate. I know that there will be speeches, as there have been throughout the debates, that will be compelling and heartfelt and that reflect the honest grappling with difficult issues that all of us have had to face.

**Mr George Howarth** (Knowsley) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Michael Gove:** No, I will not.

However, 17.4 million people were told in that referendum campaign that their vote would be honoured. They were told unambiguously, "What you vote for, the Government will deliver." We have an obligation to honour that mandate. Our other obligation is to do that in a way that safeguards the interests of the British people. All of us might have a perfect version of Brexit—a change here, an alteration there—but we all have to accept our responsibility next Tuesday to decide whether we are going to honour that verdict. Are we going to make the perfect the enemy of the good? Are we going to put our own interpretation of what Brexit should be ahead of the votes of 17.4 million people, ahead of the interests of everyone in this country who has a job, and ahead of the clearly expressed democratic will of the British people? Are we going to endanger their future by either seeking to overturn that mandate or rejecting this agreement and entering what the Prime Minister has suggested would be uncharted waters?

As I pointed out earlier, if we reject this agreement—the current course on which Parliament is set—and have no deal, Britain will of course prosper eventually but it is undeniably the case, because the facts on the ground demonstrate it, that our citizens and constituents will face economic turbulence and damage. That is why, after long reflection, I have decided that we must back this agreement. We must ensure that the British people's vote is honoured, that their futures are safeguarded and that Britain can embrace the opportunities that our people deserve. That is why I commend this agreement to the House.

1.3 pm

**Sue Hayman** (Workington) (Lab): I was relieved to hear that the Secretary of State's son is making an excellent recovery. I am sure that many Members were shocked when they heard about the accident.

We are here today to debate environmental protections following Brexit. We are at a critical time for the future of Britain's environment and the Government must be ambitious when it comes to protecting our environmental standards; otherwise, we could sleepwalk into an environmental crisis. Unfortunately, the withdrawal agreement does not contain a whole lot of action or ambition. The Government should commit today to strong, enforceable and measurable targets that go even further on environmental standards. We want to see no backsliding, only progress. The onus is on the Secretary of State to get to work immediately to make good on his many promises and to deliver a better environment, post-Brexit.

Thanks to the Labour amendment to the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill, Ministers have had to publish their draft Environment (Principles and Governance) Bill.

While I welcome its publication, it falls far short of what we were led to expect. Again we have warm words with no substance to underpin them. The withdrawal agreement requires us to establish effective oversight and enforcement of environmental law. Enforcement therefore relies on having an independent and adequately resourced body or bodies to hold public authorities to account. There have been warnings that we are facing a “governance gap” for environmental protection, post Brexit. Nothing can replace the full powers now held by the EU and the European Court of Justice, but a powerful watchdog would make a real difference, so it is disappointing that the proposed office for environmental protection will lack teeth and will not be directly accountable to Parliament. It must be able to enforce the law and it must be properly resourced. We need an environmental watchdog with real power, independence and scope. The office must hold Ministers to account, not do their bidding.

The Government’s track record on the environment has been woeful. They have repeatedly failed to tackle toxic air, they have given the green light to fracking and they have pushed ahead with Heathrow expansion regardless of the environmental impacts. Labour has pressed the Government repeatedly on the need to enshrine crucial environmental principles, such as the precautionary principle and the polluter pays principle, into domestic law. I am pleased that these are in the draft Bill, and I am glad that Ministers have recognised their importance, but will the Secretary of State tell us whether the principles, as drafted, are legally enforceable, and what will need to be included in the national policy statement to interpret their application? He often repeats the mantra that the Government intend to leave our environment in a better state than they found it, but we need to know how the draft Bill will deliver this, with legally binding, ambitious and measurable goals and plans.

There are serious questions as to how effective the proposed office for environmental protection will be if we accept imports with lower environmental standards. The Secretary of State is well aware that some of his colleagues are pushing ahead with plans to open us up to lower-quality imported produce. Brexit cannot be used as an excuse to allow deregulation and the undercutting of our high standards. Will he give concrete guarantees that this cannot happen? Unlike the International Trade Secretary, who has dismissed concerns about chlorinated chicken, I do not see the prospect of importing food produced to lower standards as any kind of prize. The Secretary of State needs to stand up for Britain.

**Kerry McCarthy:** On that point about ensuring that there is no lowering of standards in any post-Brexit trade deals, will my hon. Friend be supporting my new clause 1 to the Agriculture Bill and a similar amendment that the Chair of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee has tabled, to make absolutely sure that we do not see a lowering of standards for food coming into this country? As we saw at the Oxford farming conference last week, farmers certainly do not want that to happen either.

**Sue Hayman:** I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention. A number of amendments have been tabled to the Agriculture Bill and we are looking at them closely.

Her new clause is important, and we are taking a close look at it. It would be useful to have a conversation with her about it at a later date.

**Chris Green (Bolton West) (Con):** The suggestion at the heart of what the hon. Lady is saying is that she has no confidence in the Labour party to champion the cause of the British people on workers’ rights or environmental standards. There should surely be a post-Brexit competition between Labour and the Conservatives on championing those causes, and any political party wanting to slash standards would be condemned by the British people. She should have more confidence in the Labour party.

**Sue Hayman:** I have absolutely no idea what the hon. Gentleman is talking about.

**Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con):** This is a crucial time. This is not about what Parliament votes against, but what Parliament actually stands for to make the decision happen. What will the Labour party do to enact the decision that was made two years ago?

**Sue Hayman:** I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is aware that my party does not believe that the agreement on the table is good enough. If it is voted down next week, as many in this House believe it will be, we should go back to the country and have a general election, so that my party can actually look forward to working for a better deal.

**Several hon. Members rose—**

**Sue Hayman:** I will make some progress, because many Members want to speak and the Secretary of State was generous with his time.

The Prime Minister said that the environment Bill will be world leading, so where is the duty and obligation within the agreement to reduce the UK’s global environmental footprint? Labour wants to see good-quality, affordable food available to all but that must not come at the expense of environmental and animal welfare standards, workers’ rights or societal protections.

**Antoinette Sandbach:** The managing director of Arlo Foods warned that a no-deal Brexit would see shortages of products and a sharp rise in prices, turning everyday staples like butter, yoghurt, cheese and infant formula into occasional luxuries. Does the hon. Lady therefore agree that, by voting against this deal, the Labour party risks that outcome?

**Sue Hayman:** Labour does not want no deal. We understand the risks that that would bring, which is why we are saying that if the Prime Minister’s deal is voted down next week, we should go for a general election. However, we also think that the Prime Minister has had nearly two years to negotiate this deal. She could have had something much better. It is unacceptable that we have so little after two years.

**Patricia Gibson:** On a point of clarification, if we get to the point where we have the general election that the hon. Lady and her party are seeking, would Labour’s position be to support or oppose Brexit?



**Sue Hayman:** Our position at the moment is to go for a general election so that we can negotiate an improved deal.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Sue Hayman:** I will make some progress because many people want to speak.

The Government have failed to put in place any measures in the Trade or Agriculture Bills to ensure that all food and agricultural products imported into the UK will be produced to standards equivalent to our domestic ones. We want British food production to go from strength to strength while protecting our precious natural environment, but that will not happen if Ministers insist on kowtowing to Donald Trump.

On our future relationship with the EU, what mechanisms do the Government intend to put in place to enable continued co-operation on all environmental issues, from biodiversity to collaboration on tackling climate change? Will we continue to participate in the European Environment Agency and the European Chemicals Agency?

**Geraint Davies:** On standards, is my hon. Friend as concerned as I am that, if we do Brexit, rather than negotiating with the US as part of team EU, which is a big conglomerate, we will be in a much weaker position on food standards, chlorinated chicken and so on? Indeed, I made the point to the Secretary of State about frackers being able to sue us because we will be outside the orbit of the European Court of Justice.

**Sue Hayman:** My hon. Friend makes an important point. It is critical that we do not allow our standards to fall.

**Vicky Ford:** Like me, the hon. Lady wants to maintain environmental standards, to have high animal welfare standards and to continue co-operation with Europe on chemicals, for example. However, unless there is a withdrawal agreement, the EU has made it clear that we cannot make progress on the future relationship to agree to such things. Will she please confirm why Labour will not support the withdrawal agreement? We cannot get on with other negotiations without it.

**Sue Hayman:** I think we have made it pretty clear why we are not supporting the withdrawal agreement. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) made that quite clear in the debate yesterday and I do not want to get into all those arguments again when they have already been clearly expressed on the Floor of the House.

**Chris Bryant:** The point is that this is about not just the withdrawal agreement, but the withdrawal agreement and the political declaration. The political declaration is so imprecise that it could mean absolutely anything to anybody. There is no security treaty, which is what the Prime Minister was demanding, and there is no surety as to what we will have on the European arrest warrant. That is why we cannot support what is frankly a pig in a poke.

**Sue Hayman:** Absolutely. My hon. Friend puts the argument in a nutshell. The political declaration contains only one paragraph referring to protecting rights and

standards, which just shows how low down the list of priorities they are for the Government.

What do the Government have planned to replace current EU funding for nature conservation, low-carbon infrastructure, and environmental research and innovation? We also await the return of the Fisheries Bill on Report, so how do the Government intend to safeguard and manage our marine environment, protecting our healthy seas and sustainable fish stocks? British wildlife is also in freefall, so we need the Government to set ambitious and measurable goals to provide certainty for the future of our natural world. We need an action plan and an ambitious timescale in which to deliver the environmental protections that we so desperately need. We need legally binding targets to guarantee that Britain's high environmental standards cannot be threatened.

It is also essential to keep in step with the EU on environmental standards post Brexit and we need to use the status quo as the starting point. We must not pick and choose which standards to apply—we need all of them. We cannot have divergence on standards or weaker arrangements than those that we currently uphold. We must ensure that the rights enshrined in law are not just principles. The work of the European Union and its institutions has enhanced Britain's environment for decades and experts are saying that the Government's proposals are, unfortunately, riddled with loopholes and undermined by vague aspirations that simply do not go far enough in tackling the challenges we face. Environmental organisations do not believe that the withdrawal agreement or the draft environment Bill, as they currently stand, will even scratch the surface when it comes to leaving the environment in a better state. The end result has been watered down and fails to match the powers held by the EU and the European Court of Justice. How does the Secretary of State intend to rectify that?

We also need future environmental policies that go together with a comprehensive future food policy, protecting and enhancing our environment while improving farm productivity and ensuring that we have a stable supply of high-quality British food. Brexit risks setting the UK back, despite all the progress made on environmental protections through our membership of the EU, and the environment Bill presents an opportunity to mitigate those risks. However, that will happen only if the Government go back to the drawing board to ensure that the Bill is stronger and more ambitious and that it fulfils the aspirations previously set out by the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister.

The state of Britain's environment is at a historic crossroads and Brexit cannot be used as an excuse to veer off towards a future of lowered standards that would put our environment at risk. We need to build on the progress we have made so far, which means the Government must set out a robust action plan detailing exactly how they will leave the environment in a better state than they found it. What has been laid before us so far does not do that, and it is therefore not acceptable to the Opposition. It is time for the Secretary of State to fulfil his warm words before Britain's environment pays the price for his Government's failure.

1.20 pm

**Mr John Whittingdale** (Maldon) (Con): It is a privilege to be called to speak immediately after two important speeches from each of the Front Benches.

I campaigned in favour of Britain remaining a member in 1975. I was too young to vote, but I put leaflets through doors that clearly said we would remain a member of a common market of independent trading states and that nothing about our membership would in any way affect the sovereignty of this Parliament, of which I am proud to be a Member. Unfortunately, in the 40 years since that referendum, we have moved steadily away from that vision, with more and more power given over to Brussels. It is essentially for that reason that I voted against the Maastricht treaty when I was first elected to this place and that I campaigned to leave in the last referendum, in which I was proud to serve on the campaign committee under the chairmanship of the Secretary of State.

I welcome the Prime Minister's subsequent commitments in her Florence and Lancaster House speeches on the red lines that the Government cannot breach in our negotiations, and I fought the election on a manifesto making it clear that we are leaving the European Union and that that includes leaving the single market and the customs union.

The many benefits of leaving the European Union are summed up—as we were reminded by the Channel 4 drama on Monday, which had an interesting portrayal of the Secretary of State—by those three words: “Take back control.” There is no doubt that one of the referendum issues that featured in my constituency is immigration, as summed up in the “Taking back control of our borders” White Paper, but I am not opposed to immigration, which has brought great value to this country.

The farmers and horticulturalists I represent in Essex rely on immigrant labour, particularly seasonal labour, and I understand their concern that that should continue. Equally, like most farmers, as the Secretary of State said, the majority of them voted to leave because they embrace the idea of competing in world markets, being outside the CAP and, instead of being subsidised, receiving payment on the basis of their contribution to the public good, which is a far better system.

The ability for my right hon. Friend to set our policy in this area, as there will be such an ability for every other Secretary of State, is one of the great benefits of our gaining our freedom. That is one reason why I am not attracted to the Norway option that some have suggested, and that I understand my right hon. Friend has occasionally thought about. We on the Exiting the European Union Committee discovered in taking evidence from Norwegian parliamentarians that Norway is still bound by European regulations, and of course freedom of movement is one of those requirements.

The vote was essentially about sovereignty. It was a vote to remove the overall jurisdiction of the ECJ. My Select Committee colleagues and I have been to see Michel Barnier several times, and he is very clear that the Prime Minister's red lines rule out the UK having membership of the European economic area or an agreement similar to those of Norway and Turkey. He told us that the only way in which the UK would not breach its red lines in continuing to have a relationship with the European Union is on the basis of an agreement like the one signed with Canada. He showed us a proposal that not only had a Canada-style trade agreement but had parallel agreements covering security, law and order co-operation and data transfer. Indeed, he set out

a scenario almost identical to the one I would have described had I been asked what kind of relationship I wanted with the European Union.

The only problem was that of Northern Ireland and what would happen at the Northern Ireland border. The Prime Minister accepted that that was an insuperable obstacle, and she therefore made the Chequers proposal. I could not support that proposal principally because it maintained the common rulebook, which would mean still having to abide by EU regulations. The Government have shown a willingness to accept further lock-ins, and under amendment (p), tabled by the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann), we would have to continue to accept EU regulations in employment law.

**Caroline Flint** (Don Valley) (Lab): Amendment (p), which I support, does not say that we should automatically harmonise with the EU as it strengthens protections in these areas. What it says is that, when protections are strengthened, it will come back for this House to debate and vote on those issues. That means Parliament is still taking back control.

**Mr Whittingdale:** As I understand it, amendment (p) would require us to accept that all existing EU regulations in this area will be maintained. I do not necessarily say that I am in favour of removing any of those regulations, although it is ironic that, when we debated the Maastricht treaty back in 1992, one of the arguments made by the then Conservative Government under John Major was that we had obtained an opt-out from the social chapter and that we would not be bound by the European employment and social regulations. We were told that we had achieved a great prize. Interestingly, of course, it was accepted that we could be part of what then became the European Union without being part of the social chapter. The indivisibility of freedoms is applicable only when it suits the European Union, and not when it does not.

There are many things about the withdrawal agreement and the political declaration that I do not like. I do not like the fact that we appear to be signing up to paying out £39 billion without any guarantee on what the future arrangement will look like. I do not like the fact that the ECJ will continue to have a say for a considerable period—some 20 years. I do not like the trading relationship described in the political declaration, which seems to be based on Chequers and its continuing adherence to the common rulebook. However, all those aspects could be dealt with in the subsequent negotiations during the transition period, with the exception of money, which is in the withdrawal agreement. The future arrangements can be discussed during the transition period because they are part of the political declaration, which is not legally binding.

**John Redwood:** Does my right hon. Friend agree that the money is not £39 billion? There is no cash limit, no agreed amount, in the agreement, and there are huge powers for the EU to keep sending us bills of an undescribed amount for decades. It will be a lot more than £39 billion.

**Mr Whittingdale:** I fear my right hon. Friend may well be right. He highlights the risk we run in making that commitment.

[Mr Whittingdale]

I am willing to accept an ongoing payment, so long as an eventual exit date is set out. I am willing to accept some continuing role for the ECJ on things like citizens' rights. However, the problem is in the withdrawal agreement, which is legally binding and cannot be changed. I am afraid that, as the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) said, it is the backstop. It is the fact that we would be locked into a customs union without any ability to leave it unless we obtain the agreement of the European Union. That makes trade agreements essentially impossible. One of the great opportunities of leaving the European Union is the opportunity to sign trade agreements with those countries that the European Union has been trying to sign trade agreements with for decades but has still not succeeded—China, Brazil, India, the United States of America, Indonesia—the countries that will be the biggest economies in the world over the course of the next 10 or 20 years.

**Sir Edward Davey:** Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the EU signed a trade deal with South Korea, with Japan and with Canada, before many other nations in the world? The EU has actually led progress on these bilateral trade deals.

**Mr Whittingdale:** I was aware of that, which is why I did not include them, but the countries whose names I just read out are likely to be the five biggest economies in the world. We know that the EU has been trying to sign a deal with China and a deal with America, and has failed so far to do so, principally because it requires the agreement of every single member state, and we have seen how difficult that can be.

Also, of course, the provision of the backstop creates the one thing that the Prime Minister said she could never accept under any circumstances—a border down the Irish sea. If the Northern Ireland protocol and the backstop could be taken out of the withdrawal agreement and put into that basket of issues that we shall settle in the course of the transitional period, as part of the arrangement covering our future agreement for trade with the European Union, that would remove the problem. It is where it ought to be. It was always daft that the Northern Ireland border issue could be determined before we knew what was going to be in the future trade agreement. The Prime Minister herself has now accepted that, actually, over the course of the two years, it should be possible to find a solution that will allow free movement back and forth across that border, on the basis of technology, so the Government think that can be done in the next two years. If we could only get it out of the withdrawal agreement, we would then have the time in which we could demonstrate that it would never be necessary.

**Bob Stewart** (Beckenham) (Con): I operated a hard border in Northern Ireland for two years. We stopped every car, we searched every car, we checked every person. I absolutely believe it is perfectly possible for there to be free movement across that border, given willingness on both sides and the use of new techniques, particularly things like pre-registration and number-plate recognition. I think that border does not need to be hard.

**Mr Whittingdale:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend. Of course, when he was serving his country in Northern Ireland, we had to have controls on the movement of people because we were facing a serious terrorist threat. Nobody is suggesting controls on the movement of people now. There is no suggestion that we are going to need any measures of that kind. We are talking about the movement of goods.

I do not want to detain the House any longer because a lot of Members want to speak. As I said, the problem is that the backstop is in the agreement and the agreement cannot be changed once it is passed, because it is a legally binding undertaking. If only the Government could find a way of taking the backstop out and putting it into those issues that we will try to resolve over the course of the next two years, I would be happy—well, not happy, but willing perhaps—to support the motion on Tuesday. But unless that can be done, I am afraid that I cannot.

1.33 pm

**Pete Wishart** (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): May I start by saying to the Secretary of State that we were all distressed when we heard the news of his son's accident over Christmas, and we wish him all the best for his recovery? We do, of course, enjoy the right hon. Gentleman at the Dispatch Box. That was a bravura performance—such a comedy turn. He referenced Tommy Cooper. I think of him more as a Frank Carson, because it's the way he tells 'em, Mr Deputy Speaker.

The line that I enjoyed best—it was the way he told it—was the one where he said that the EU “will look on enviously at the UK with this Brexit.” That was the best killer line in that speech, because we can almost hear the shrieks of laughter coming across the North sea and the English channel as they observe the plight of this pitiful nation. They are not envious of us; they are feeling sorry for us because we have ended in this pitiful state. If any of them were even thinking of following the United Kingdom's example, they will look at this chaotic Government and decide, “Never in a million years will we do that.” It is the best lesson to any other nation never, ever to engage in such an action.

I loathe the Government's Brexit—I loathe it totally and utterly, from the self-defeating, isolating ugliness of the project to the all-consuming, chaotic humourlessness, to the disgusting way that they are treating the 3.6 million EU nationals who are among our friends, our colleagues and our family members. I despair at what we are doing. I will observe and look at their Brexit deal, but I see no redeeming qualities or features to what this Government are doing with this absurd Brexit. The fact that my country so overwhelmingly rejected this Brexit makes me despair even more of what this Government are doing.

The only reason, the Government tell us, that we should be supporting this paltry document is that it is better than a no deal. My big toe is better than a no deal; my broken finger is better than a no deal, but I am not asking the House to support either of these personal artefacts. What vision! What ambition! Vote for the Prime Minister's deal because it is better than no deal! That is the only reason that we seem to be given, in successive speeches by Government supporters and Ministers, for why we should be doing this.



**Huw Merriman:** That is a gross generalisation. The reality is that 52% of this country voted to leave, and that is what this deal does. But also, importantly, 48% did not, and this deal will actually see us continue with our relationship with the EU, and in fact deepen it in many regards. [*Interruption.*] Security.

**Pete Wishart:** It does not even start to—[*Interruption.*] The hon. Gentleman does not need to address his points to me. I am beyond redemption. He should turn his attention to some of his hon. Friends and colleagues on his own Benches, and I invite him to do that. I think they are all thoroughly looking forward to his speech. His efforts may be more fruitful with them than they are likely to be with me, because I shall go on to explain why this deal is totally, absolutely and utterly unacceptable to me, to my constituents and to the vast majority of the Scottish people.

I have never seen another example where it has been the main policy intention of a Government to intentionally impoverish, with such chaotic abandon, the people they are notionally there to serve. When the history books judge this little period of British history, in the late teens in this century, they will only ever conclude that this is the greatest example of political, cultural and economic self-harm that has ever been committed by a nation unto a nation.

The fact that we have got to this point will be forever remembered as the greatest single failure of any modern Government in post-war history. And you remember why we are doing this—remember why all this started? [*Laughter.*] They laugh. A referendum. It was supposed to heal the divisions within the Conservative party on the issue of the European Union. Ten out of ten for that, Mr Speaker. What an absolute and resounding success. Not only have they further divided their rotten party, but they have gone and divided a nation and then taken that nation to the very brink. And now, of course, we observe the abyss on the other side of that brink, in all its grotesque horror.

If we look at the Brexit clock—

**Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con):** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Pete Wishart:** I was going to move on, but yes, I will give way to the hon. Lady because I quite like her.

**Victoria Prentis:** I am slightly confused. Does the hon. Gentleman object to referendums, or just the results of referendums?

**Pete Wishart:** This is where we are with the Conservatives, when they ask banal, stupid questions such as that. The hon. Lady asks me about the referendum. Let me tell her about referendums. We have had two referendums in Scotland. In the first referendum, the people of Scotland voted to remain in the United Kingdom. [HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear.”] They like that. Scotland is still part of the United Kingdom. We then had a referendum on EU membership, where the nation—the nation—of Scotland voted overwhelmingly to remain. We have not got what we wanted in this referendum, and that means that we have a nation completely and utterly alienated from what the Brexit Tories are doing to us. That is a difficult issue that, at some point, they

will have to confront, just as, at some point, the Scottish people will have to make some sort of constitutional assessment of it, because this cannot stand. We cannot have a nation being taken out of a Union that it values and cherishes, against the national collective will of the people of that nation.

**John Redwood** *rose*—

**Vicky Ford** *rose*—

**Paul Masterton (East Renfrewshire) (Con)** *rose*—

**Pete Wishart:** I give way to the chief Brexiteer, the newly sirred John Redwood.

**John Redwood:** Can the hon. Gentleman explain why a decision to withdraw from the European Union is nasty and inward looking, yet a decision to withdraw Scotland from the United Kingdom is the opposite?

**Pete Wishart:** I say candidly to the right hon. Gentleman that the EU referendum had at its very core—at its cold, beating heart—the case of isolationism and immigration. It was about stopping people coming to this country. That defined every single case for rotten Brexit—every reference was about ending freedom of movement, which is presented as the great prize of this deal and this Brexit. What Scotland wants to do is reach out to the world and be part of an international community, to demonstrate our internationalism and what our sense of community is about. There is the right hon. Gentleman's type of nationalism and then there is my type of all-encompassing international solidarity.

**Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con):** My area, the west midlands, is massively diverse. I have spent 10 years knocking on doors all over the midlands and all across Birmingham. The issue has nothing to do with immigration—it is to do with sovereignty. That is why people voted to leave. Come with me to the Black Country, Coventry or Birmingham, and speak to voters on the doorsteps. That is what they will tell you.

**Pete Wishart:** I almost wish that was true—that the debate had been about sovereignty and the great things this country could do. All I ever saw was the disgusting and nauseating posters about immigration; all I saw in the right-wing press was about that issue. Every time I went on a hustings with a Conservative Member of Parliament, it was all about ending freedom of movement and controlling immigration. That was all I heard. That was the repeated message, again, again and again.

**Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP):** Like me, and I presume everyone else in the Chamber, my hon. Friend got a begging email from the Prime Minister shortly before the first attempt to push this through. It listed the benefits of her deal and No. 1—top of the list of the Prime Minister's reasons for supporting the deal—was, was it not, ending freedom of movement. Did my hon. Friend get a different set of priorities? Is it possible that the Prime Minister gave us a priority that we could not support at the top of the list and gave something different to those who now deny that the referendum was about ending freedom of movement?

**Pete Wishart:** Absolutely; I did get that correspondence from the Prime Minister. I do not know why we are even trying to debate and contest the fact as it has been said by the Prime Minister and everybody on their feet, including the Secretary of State: the great prize of this deal, of this Brexit, is ending freedom of movement. I will briefly come to the consequences of that; they are dire for my nation and for the businesses that depend on freedom of movement. This is absolutely appalling for the young people who will have their rights restricted.

I want to talk about the Brexit clock, which is interesting. Not only are we now at the cliff edge—the front wheels are actually starting to dangle over, yet the clown shoes are still pressing on the accelerator—but a no-deal Brexit is now a real possibility and the consequences are becoming reality as the Government try to run the clock down.

We know about the food shortages, the running out of medicines, the turning of the south-east of England into a giant lorry park and all the real possibilities of leaving without a deal, yet the Government casually prepare for it. They apply millions of pounds to try to deal with it. They talk about it as if it were a realistic prospect—“Don’t worry your little British heads about it. You’ll be absolutely fine if we leave without a deal.” A no deal may be the life’s work and ambition of some of the extreme Brexiters in this Chamber, but there are dire consequences for the constituents we serve. Those Brexiters may be indulging in their European Union departure fantasies, but our constituents will have to pay.

The House is absolutely right not to allow that. The vote on Monday evening was very important. It indicates to the Government, lest they did not know, that no deal is unacceptable to the vast majority of this House. I am looking at some of the Scottish Conservatives—not one of them voted for stopping a no deal and against exposing their own constituents to the prospect of the appalling things that would follow. For that, they will pay a heavy price.

**Colin Clark (Gordon) (Con) rose—**

**Pete Wishart:** I give way to the hon. Gentleman. Perhaps he will tell me why he is prepared to expose the constituents of Gordon to the prospect and possibility of no deal.

**Colin Clark:** Companies in Gordon are actually making preparations for Brexit. If the hon. Gentleman really wants to avoid no deal, he should get behind the Prime Minister and support her deal. That would be in the national interest. Let me ask him: what preparations are the Scottish Government, as a responsible Government of Scotland, making for the possibility of no deal? Are they doing anything?

**Pete Wishart:** I share an office with the Deputy First Minister; I have seen some of the things he has had to deal with and some of the consequences there would be for Scotland. I do not think the hon. Gentleman fully understands what is at stake. Does he understand the idea of food shortages or civil unrest? Police forces have been activated in this country to ensure that that will be contained and dealt with. Those are the prospects for his constituents, yet he is prepared to expose them to that.

I want to talk a bit about my nation; it is great that some Scottish Conservatives are here and so engaged in this conversation. My country wanted absolutely nothing to do with this.

**David Duguid (Banff and Buchan) (Con) rose—**

**Pete Wishart:** I will make a bit of progress, then give way to the hon. Gentleman because I quite like him too.

We returned one Member of Parliament with a mandate to fulfil an EU referendum. Nearly every single one of Scotland’s Members of Parliament voted against the EU (Referendum) Bill; nearly every single one of Scotland’s Members of Parliament voted to ensure that we would not trigger article 50. When we were eventually obliged to have that referendum in Scotland, Scotland voted emphatically and overwhelmingly to remain in the European Union—62% to 38%, which is the most emphatic result in any of the nations of the United Kingdom.

**David Duguid:** I was waiting for the famous 62% figure, which is often repeated, to come up. Does the hon. Gentleman also recognise that in the 2017 general election, 56% of Scottish voters voted for either the Conservatives or Labour, which, at the time at least, was committed to delivering on Brexit?

**Pete Wishart:** I have heard Conservatives do this before: they include the Labour party in the figures. If the hon. Gentleman knows what the Labour party’s intentions are with Brexit, he is a lot further down the road than I am. It is a bit disingenuous to include a clueless Labour party in those numbers.

We had the most emphatic vote in the United Kingdom, so we might think—as part of the family of nations and being asked to lead, not leave, the United Kingdom—that that vote would have been taken into account and acknowledged. In fact, the exact opposite has happened. Our remain vote has been contemptuously ignored and every effort to soften the blow to a remain nation has been dismissed, with every proposal binned before the ink was even dry. In the process, we are witnessing the undermining of our political institution with a power grab and the binning of conventions designed to protect the integrity of our Parliament. Then the Government had the gall to tell us four years ago that the only way Scotland could stay in the European Union was to vote no in our independence referendum. We now see the consequences of that.

We look at the example of independent Ireland where the weight of the EU has stood in solidarity and support of one of its members and backed it to the hilt. Compare and contrast that to dependent Scotland within the UK, whose views and interests have been ignored and whose institutions have been systematically diminished as a junior partner in this chaotic Union.

This is an exclusively Tory deal. This Brexit crisis was designed, administered and delivered by the Conservatives. Even with all the last-minute overtures they have made, they have taken no interest in working with others or properly consulting and considering the views of other parties or Governments across the United Kingdom. This chaos is theirs to own, and it will define the Conservatives for a generation. It is a Tory Brexit—forever and a day, they are now the Brexit Tories.

As for Labour, I am not even yet sure whether it is a party of Brexit or against Brexit. I know it has a new position today. [*Interruption.*] The Secretary of State has actually scarpers off, as he usually does when the third party is on its feet. That is a massive disrespect, isn't it? The third party is on its feet, and the Secretary of State scampers out of the House. That is so consistent with this Government.

Let me return to my friends in the Labour party, because I think this is the 17th position they have taken on Brexit. They have tried to create a policy of constructive ambiguity, and I am constructively ambiguous about their position. I presume that their view is still to respect the result, and that it is still their intention to take the UK out of the EU. I know I often refer to my Scottish Conservative friends, but if that is the case, it will be dire for Scottish Labour, which has been shown that if Labour supports Brexit, its support in Scotland will fall to 15%.

I have already mentioned immigration, and we know that ending freedom of movement is the big prize in this country. The sheer dishonesty of the immigration question means that the Government cannot even bring themselves to acknowledge that what we do to EU nationals with restricted freedom of movement, the EU will do to the UK. I have tried to get the Prime Minister to accept that that is the case, because it means that the rights that we across the House have all enjoyed to live, to work, and to love across a continent of 27 nations, freely and without any restriction, will be denied to our young people, our children and future generations. The Government cannot bring themselves to acknowledge that, and to look the young people of this country in the eye and tell them that this change will apply equally to them. If any Conservative Member wishes to say that they acknowledge that, I will happily take an intervention—they were rushing to intervene earlier on.

**James Cartlidge** *rose*—

**Pete Wishart:** There we go.

**James Cartlidge:** That is an important point, and I genuinely grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way as I share some of those concerns. Does he accept, however, that parts of England had extremely high levels of EU immigration, and although I always welcomed EU immigration—particularly from eastern Europe and so on—it is legitimate for any community faced with such high numbers to express concern about that, and we as politicians should never be deaf to those concerns?

**Pete Wishart:** I do not think I heard the hon. Gentleman say that this change will apply to young people in his constituency as they try possibly to make their lives in Europe. That was all I wanted to hear. I know that he has concerns about immigration, but our population growth in Scotland depends on immigration, and if we end freedom of movement, every single business in our economy will take a massive hit. Things are different in the hon. Gentleman's constituency and in my nation of Scotland—we require different things. That is why we have called, repeatedly and consistently, for the devolution of immigration so that we can look after those interests, just as he looks after the interests of his constituency.

**James Cartlidge** *rose*—

**Pete Wishart:** I have already given way to the hon. Gentleman. I am conscious that I am taking up a lot of time, so I will make a bit of progress.

What happens next? That is the really intriguing question. Like a trapped beast, the Government might lash out and try to take the whole House down with them in an attempt to punish the country for its insubordination. Compromised by contradictory tensions within their own ranks, it is rare that we get a glimpse of a Government and party collapsing so spectacularly as we have seen over the past few weeks. They have lost all right and authority, and their ability to govern is almost gone. They have lost successive debates on important issues.

The Government will lose the vote next week—it seems there is nothing they can do to avoid that. As a result of the vote yesterday, they will have to come to the House with alternative options for how to deal with the situation, but there are two things that they could do to immediately respond to that defeat. First, they could revoke article 50, which they can now do unilaterally because of the work done by some of my hon. Friends and colleagues. The second thing is a bit harder: ask the European Union for an extension to article 50 so that something can be cobbled together to try to keep the issue alive and open for debate. The Government have to do one of those two things, and the important point is how they deal strategically with their position.

I have considered all the different outcomes possible for the Government, and none of them is good—none of them works for this Government because each ensures that some massive constituency will emerge in opposition—but one thing that we have in Scotland is our own particular solution. We have a way out of this Brexit crisis. We do not have to go down with this Tory ship. We can make our own decisions and relationships with Europe. Increasingly, as this Government continue to collapse, as the Brexit options continue to fall in on them and as we see the disaster that is emerging, the choice of independence for our nation becomes more and more appealing. As we go forward into this year, it will soon become the majority option in our country, and soon we will have the opportunity to foster our own sustainable relationship with the European Union.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I advise the House that on account of the number of Members wishing to contribute to the debate, it will be necessary to begin with an eight-minute time limit on Back-Bench speeches.

1.55 pm

**George Freeman** (Mid Norfolk) (Con): I will speak about public trust in Parliament as a backdrop to this debate. I hope you will indulge me, Mr Speaker, if I start by paying tribute to our former colleague, the late, great Mark Wolfson, who served Sevenoaks with great distinction between 1979 and 1997. He was a great friend and parliamentary mentor to me.

I approach the debate with the clear principle—a principle that long ago inspired me as the great, great, great, great nephew of the “Grand Old Man” Gladstone—that because of a great and glorious truth, this Parliament is sovereign. I still believe that elected MPs, as the sovereign representatives of our constituencies, serve in the highest office, and that to be elected to this House



[George Freeman]

is one of the great privileges and responsibilities that our citizens can bestow. This is a moment to remember that.

Parliament is the institution that, more than any other, defends the liberties and order that we enjoy. Parliament historically defied the tyranny of the King, and in the 19th century, it was Parliament that granted rights to so many who had been denied them. Parliament said that all of us are entitled to equal human rights. In moments of crisis, Parliament has always come together, with parties coming together to put country before party. It is now Parliament that confronts this crisis and the biggest decision facing our generation. It is a decision that will redefine Britain's place in the world and, almost more importantly, the trust of a whole generation in our democratic Parliament and politics.

Parliament—yes, a majority of us in this House—decided to ask the people, and in June 2016, they gave us their answer. For that reason, I remain deeply opposed to a second referendum. The people have spoken and it is our job to implement their instruction. However, that instruction was not clear. People voted to leave by a narrow margin. In my constituency, 58% wished to leave, but nationally the result was 52% to 48%. That is not an overwhelming, thumping majority—it was a narrow margin. Many of my constituents who voted to leave said to me, “George, I voted to join a common market; I did not want to be in a political union.” Those people who voted to leave wanted to be in a common market. I put it to the House that there is no majority in the country for taking the result as an instruction unilaterally to pull ourselves out of all European institutions, including by cutting ourselves off from the single market. That is not our mandate, although we do have a duty to implement the will of the people we serve.

Public trust in our politics and parliamentary democracy is at a dangerous low. As well as getting the outcome right, we must ensure that we conduct ourselves in the spirit required of the day—a spirit of repairing the damage done by that appalling referendum campaign, reuniting a divided nation, and restoring trust in Parliament and parliamentary democracy, not least for those who did not get to vote in that referendum and the people whose futures and interests we will shape.

I voted remain in 2016, and as a Minister responsible for a £60 billion industry employing 250,000 people, in which not one man or woman I could find supported leaving, I felt that was my duty. As the MP for Mid Norfolk, I was—and remain—deeply worried about the impact of this decision on our economy and on the economic prospects of my citizens and constituents. However, I always vowed to respect the result, and I have done so ever since the referendum.

I may have voted remain, but in the previous Parliament and the coalition I was one of the leading champions of European reform. Colleagues may remember that I led the Fresh Start Group report, warning of the dangers of Europe's precautionary principle on holding back UK leadership in science and innovation, which threatened to risk a European dark age at a time when the world is embracing extraordinary technologies in agricultural genetics, accelerated access for new medicines and genomics. Such technologies can transform the life chances of our global citizens. It is a time when we in the UK, through

Europe, could lead on taking those technologies around the world. I fought this battle as a Back Bencher and then as a Minister, but the plea for a more innovative and enterprising Europe fell largely on deaf ears.

Yes, I was a remainer, but one who understood all too well the flaws of the European Union. Let no one accuse me of being a lily-livered, root-and-branch pro-European—I am not. [Interruption.] And neither am I a snowflake, as someone chunters from my side of the Chamber. I wanted Britain to lead the reform of Europe so that we, together with Europe, could embrace the extraordinary opportunities for UK science and innovation around the world in agri-tech, health-tech and clean-tech; in food, medicine and energy; to feed, heal and fuel; and to take around the world the technologies that this country leads in, and that, with our European scientific partners, could help to accelerate global development.

The people have spoken and now we have to deliver. The truth is that all parties are split. It is a truth that Opposition Front Benchers would do well to confront. I know that it suits them to position themselves as remainers in London and the south-east, and as Brexiteers up north, but the truth is that all parties are split. I believe that we ought to be pursuing this in the spirit of cross-party co-operation. In my view, we always needed a cross-party council of Brexit, and I was appalled to hear the other day that the shadow Brexit Secretary has apparently received no contact from Ministers about the possible basis of an agreement. It seems to me that unless we reach out across the House, listen to the electorate and signal that we will put party behind country, we are unlikely to find a solution. We have less than 100 days. We are running out of time. There is an angry mob outside Parliament, and they speak for an angriness in the nation. We need an orderly withdrawal.

Despite our differences, it seems to me that we are all agreed on one thing: this deal is not perfect. I have said so myself and I have many reservations. I had hoped that the Prime Minister would come back from Europe before Christmas with a concession on the backstop. She has come back with a concession, and I hope that there will be more before the vote next week. Let me be clear that I have supported no deal as an option for two and a half years in order to get the best deal. The negotiation is over. In my view, it would be woefully irresponsible of the Government to pursue no deal. I will do everything to ensure, yes, that we leave the European Union with an orderly deal, but not with no deal. When I hear Lord Wolfson, an ardent Brexiteer, warn as the chief executive of Next that the cost of food and clothes—basics that our constituents rely on—would go up dramatically with a no-deal Brexit, when I hear the Royal Society warn that a no-deal Brexit would be catastrophic for our science and when I hear the National Farmers Union warn that British agricultural would be hit without a deal, with a potential trade embargo affecting our £3 billion food export industry, please do not accuse me of “Project Fear”; this is serious “Project Business” for the people we serve.

If the Prime Minister's deal does not pass next week, it seems to me that we need a plan B, and I have made it very clear that I personally support colleagues on both sides of the House pushing for the European Free Trade Association model. It would give us access to the single market, but we would be out of the customs union and we would have freedom to do trade deals and to take

back control of farming and fishing. Yes, it has a problem, which is free movement, but remember that it is the free movement of workers, not citizens, and I believe that it would require—I relish this—a bold package of welfare eligibility reforms, along with skills and training reforms, here in the UK.

I will, with a heavy heart, vote for this deal on Tuesday, because we are now in the dying stages and leaving with no deal is unconscionable, but I beg colleagues to ask their Front Benchers to work together across the House in pursuit of something we can all be proud of.

2.3 pm

**Mr George Howarth** (Knowsley) (Lab): I want to say at the outset that the Government are now in such a position that we need a general election. They no longer have any authority, they no longer have a majority and, it seems to me, they no longer serve any useful purpose.

Before making my main points, I want to take issue with something the Secretary of State said in his opening speech—the right hon. Gentleman has unfortunately had to leave the Chamber. Essentially, he argued that a second referendum would be undemocratic. The premise of the whole argument was that the deal people voted for in 2016, or that they thought they were voting for, will be delivered by the Prime Minister's deal, but it will not. The right hon. Gentleman knows that, as indeed does every Member of the House who campaigned in the referendum. We all know that the deal has no bearing on the reasons people voted to leave the European Union, and we should be clear about that. I do not think that it would be undemocratic to go back to the people almost three years later and ask, “Is this exactly what you voted for? Is this what you want to happen?” My first priority, because of what I have said about the Government, is to have a general election. If that is not going to happen, the next best thing, almost certainly, has to be a referendum.

I want to talk about two things. First, I want us to consider Britain's place in the world. Winston Churchill, in his speech to the Tory party conference in 1948—it has been quoted repeatedly, but I think it is worth revisiting—described “three majestic circles” in the following terms:

“The first circle for us is naturally the British Commonwealth and Empire, with all that that comprises. Then there is also the English-speaking world in which we, Canada, and the other British Dominions and the United States play so important a part. And finally there is United Europe.”

Obviously, so much has changed since then that we cannot stick to that as a rigid formula, and I would not argue that we should do so, but let us quickly take each one of those circles in turn. The United States and Canada are both much more complicated places and have new networks of connections between them and with South America. Of course, in the current circumstances, as others have said, the idea that we can have a truly constructive relationship with the present US Administration beggars belief.

The English-speaking world has changed considerably. Our trade and relationship with the Commonwealth, for example with Australia, New Zealand and Canada, are now dramatically different. The idea that we could suddenly revive all those old relationships and everything will be fine is purely fanciful.

We still have, while we are a member of it, a relationship with the European Union. That does give us a bigger say in what happens around the world, because it is not just plucky little Britain as an island state saying something; it is often something we can say in concert with the rest of the European Union. My first point is therefore that we will be a diminished country in the world after we leave the European Union.

Secondly, I want to address some of the concerns that constituents raised with me on the doorstep during the referendum campaign. Yes, the main issue was immigration. It was not just about free movement of labour, although some people did mention that; it was about immigration in general. Another issue was the lack of opportunity for young people, which is a serious problem for many young people in my constituency. Another issue was the need to revive our towns and town centres, and not just in economic terms but with regard to the built environment. Concerns were raised about workers' rights, particularly by those active in trade unions, and of course I agree on that. Concerns were also raised about the environment, which is the subject of today's debate.

I firmly believe that we can get immigration right and better, and that the time is now propitious for us to do so, with Europe. We could implement cross-Europe policies to deal with migrant labour and those who seek asylum through other ports in Europe. The time is right for us to get a good agreement on that with Europe. In recent weeks, my party and the Government have started to publish new immigration policies. Let me be clear: I am not anti-immigration, but I accept that we have to have some kind of rational policy on it.

On education, health and all these other issues, the country is crying out for change and for new opportunities for young people. Why do we have to leave the European Union to get that? We do not have to. If we put forward to the British people a positive programme that still involves our being part of the European Union, they would probably want to go for it. They should certainly be given the opportunity to do so. Our future lies in our hands, but it does not necessarily lie outside the European Union.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Just before I call the right hon. Member for Witham (Priti Patel) to make the next contribution, I am sorry to remind Opposition Members of what they will have already seen for themselves: namely, that the speech-time facility is not functioning. I am advised that it will not be repaired until the House is not sitting. Opposition Members, who will doubtless be very aggrieved, cannot go on for as long as they want, as the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) chunters hopefully from a sedentary position. They are disadvantaged, but they will have to be assisted by the Whip on duty, who can gesticulate as and when he or she thinks fit. That is a practice not entirely unknown or uncongenial, in my experience, to a Whip.

2.11 pm

**Priti Patel** (Witham) (Con): I approach this debate very much conscious of the wide range of views held in the House. As we are on the second leg of this debate, following December's discussions, this is a pertinent moment to go back to what it is we are here to focus on vis-à-vis the withdrawal agreement and how we got

[Priti Patel]

here. Of course, I approach this debate very much with the referendum result in mind. Nearly three years ago, this country quite remarkably put on the greatest show of democracy that we have seen, resulting in the majority—more than 17 million people—voting yes to take back control of our country. They made that choice against a range of forecasts and, to be quite crude, some pessimistic propaganda. They took a bold and brave decision to instruct us Members of Parliament, in this House and throughout the country, to take a new and different path. It was a message to us to reset the political system.

**Alberto Costa** (South Leicestershire) (Con): I am so grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way so early in her speech. Does she agree that, whether people voted leave or remain, at no point during the referendum campaign was there a suggestion that the rights of EU nationals who had been resident in this country, lawfully exercising their treaty rights prior to any prospective Brexit day, should be affected if the referendum resulted in a vote to leave?

**Priti Patel:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right on that point. That was never a feature of the campaign at all. Of course, what did figure in the minds of the British public, irrespective of how they voted, was that the political system—us—had for far too long siphoned power away from voters and almost denuded political decision making in this country. That is where they wanted to see us come together. At the core of the vote was a desire to see our democratic, economic and political freedoms returned to our institutions and, of course, for them to see sovereignty returned, too.

The vote to leave was an endorsement not of a political individual, party or platform, but of our country. It was an expression of self-confidence in where we could go in terms of our place in the world. Amid the debates that we are currently having, the rhetoric now, the wider discussions of a second referendum or even, as some may say, attempts to block Brexit, and amid the stories in the media and a continuation of fear and scare-stories, the essence of choice—the choice that people wanted to see—is being lost. Of course, there are a wide range of views in the House, and I respect all right hon. and hon. colleagues who want their voices to be heard, but we should also remember that Parliament gave the people a choice, and Parliament voted to trigger article 50 and to leave the European Union. We are now focused on fulfilling those commitments.

That brings me to the deal that has been put forward. Of course, many of us want to see Brexit delivered, and we were impressed by the sensible and pragmatic vision for our future outside the EU that the Prime Minister outlined in her Lancaster House speech and in other speeches two years ago. That was a plan that would have restored control of our country, kept a positive partnership with our friends and allies in the EU and, of course, freed Britain to be globally focused and to form close ties with countries and friends around the world. I have no doubt that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister approached the EU in good faith but, as negotiations have progressed, the vision in Lancaster House and other speeches has been diluted, and ultimately ditched. We have seen the EU exercising control in the negotiation at the expense of our national interest.

The deal before us does not deliver the Brexit and the vision that the Prime Minister originally outlined. It allows the EU to continue to make our laws and to impose its Court's judgment on us, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Maldon (Mr Whittingdale) said earlier. It gives the EU powers to veto our foreign policy and sabotages our international trade negotiations. Ultimately, as the House has heard repeatedly, it threatens the integrity of the United Kingdom. On top of that, we are expected to pay £39 billion of taxpayers' money, as other right hon. Members have highlighted, without guarantees of a comprehensive free trade arrangement and no prospect of departing from the horrors of the backstop without the EU's permission. The equal partnership with the EU that the Prime Minister promised has not materialised; instead, we have a deal that gives the EU licence to dominate us for years to come.

I am conscious that earlier in the debate we heard my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs speak about the environment, fisheries and farming. As a Member of Parliament who represents a coastal community and a farming community, I have said in the House, as have colleagues, that there are so many freedoms that we want to secure outside the European Union when it comes to the common agricultural policy and the common fisheries policy, yet the deal does not secure them. Brussels will still pose ongoing threats to our fisheries, which will obviously have ramifications for us. The same is true when it comes to agricultural policy. Farmers in my constituency have raised that issue with me.

Of course, the great prize of being free from the EU to negotiate and secure trade deals with growing global markets has been lost in this deal. I do not need to remind the House that by the middle of the century the EU's share of trade in the global economy will be less than 10%. We need to focus much more strongly on our trading relationships outside the EU. Why would we want to remain shackled to the EU and to be dependent on it to set our trade policy when we can be trading further afield? We need to work sooner rather than later to secure those relationships.

I have touched on what the deal means for our precious Union and for Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom. The protocol severely damages democracy in Northern Ireland and imposes laws and rules on the people there without any representation. That goes further than the controls on the rest of the United Kingdom and is simply not acceptable. In the provisions on Northern Ireland we have seen for the first time in modern history a UK Government negotiate to cede part of our country to a foreign power. That is simply not acceptable.

The British people are tired of subservience to the EU and astonished by the one-sided negotiation process that has put the integrity of our precious Union in real danger. We will be trapped in the backstop and trapped in EU institutions; Northern Ireland will be left under the control of a foreign power, which is not acceptable; and under this deal our destiny will no longer be in our own hands. The British people want national leadership that is ambitious for our country—the type of leadership that is clear as to who governs our country and where elected power and accountability lies, and they want decision making that is free from the unnecessary constraints of the EU and EU control, and with that a restoration



of trust in the democratic process that does not see our political establishment renege on the referendum result or our manifesto commitments.

I believe that Parliament should deliver on these democratic, political and economic freedoms by rejecting the withdrawal agreement. We must ensure that we can go further by trying to secure the type of trading arrangements that we originally said we would, but we can do so only once we reject the withdrawal agreement and ensure that the EU is no longer in control of our country.

2.20 pm

**Caroline Flint** (Don Valley) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Witham (Priti Patel).

Unfortunately, as is so often the case in this House, we have polarised views on both the leave side and the remain side, for which no deal is ever going to be good enough. I rise to speak because my approach to the nation's decision to leave European Union is to look forward rather than debate the past, to work cross-party where possible, to be constructive rather than destructive, and to seek to unite the country, not divide it further. That is why I support amendment (p), which I have co-sponsored with my hon. Friends the Members for Bassetlaw (John Mann), for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Gareth Snell) and for Wigan (Lisa Nandy).

As we debate the conditions under which the UK leaves the European Union, there are legitimate concerns not only about what form the final agreement takes, but about UK Government intentions and the UK's future direction. I am sure that this amendment is not perfect—we know that all amendments in this debate are not legally binding, and there is much discussion about that—but it does speak to the concerns of many in this House about how we can build on the political declaration and get more assurances, and maybe more certainty, from the Government on how we can protect the rights and standards that affect employment, health and safety and the environment, many of which we have taken for granted during UK membership of the European Union. We want to ensure that they do not decline after the UK leaves. Also, in keeping with the desire for the UK Parliament to regain control, amendment (p) wishes this House to be able to debate and decide on any future improvements to protections or rights implemented by the European Union. The choice would be in our hands; we would debate and vote on those issues.

As this amendment proposes, the UK's goal post Brexit should be to ensure that workers' rights do not slip back—that the rights enjoyed by many British employees are protected. Likewise, UK standards on water pollution, pesticides, emissions, energy conservation and carbon reduction must all be protected, with a UK commitment not to walk backwards. Amendment (p) reflects some of the key demands expressed by Labour over the future direction.

For too long the debate in this House has been polarised, with the rhetoric too sharp and many Members on both sides of the House too quick to condemn and too slow to listen. I campaigned for remain. A majority of my voters voted leave, although many voted remain as well. I have always been honest with my leave voters that there will have to be compromise in the final deal that allows us to chart our own future and have more independence over many policy areas—the ability to

move beyond the EU and deal with many of the concerns that led to their voting leave. But I have also been up front about recognising that we need a strong partnership with the European Union as we leave, and much of that strength is through co-operation.

I am also honest that life in the EU was never perfect, despite the relationship being close for good reason and despite the fact that it must remain so. We need to talk less about what we are against and more about what we are for, and I believe that our deliberations on the next steps should reflect that. The British people deserve sincere endeavour from this Parliament. The withdrawal agreement is the headline deal—the divorce. It is not the final deal. Trade-related, customs union-related talks will have to be agreed only once the UK leaves.

I welcomed Labour's support for a transition period, which we demanded back in August 2017. We recognised that the 20-month period to which the Prime Minister signed up would be as important as the past two years have been because there are a wide range of trade and security matters to resolve. We should approach this period positively. It is unreasonable to expect all these matters to have been resolved by this point in the process, but a deal has to be agreed to get to that discussion, and there is still time for talks across this House in order to reach that outcome.

Despite the good work of the EU, I am very proud of the UK having a long history of being at the forefront of high standards when it comes to employment rights and environmental protections. It would be wrong to suggest that the rights that UK citizens take for granted—holidays, maternity leave, minimum pay and our welfare system—exist only because of the European Union. They do not. As a Labour MP, I fundamentally believe they exist because of 100 years of the Labour party and the trade union movement. Despite relatively few periods in office, Labour has made great advances in social change that have become mainstream and to which all parties now lay claim and adopt. These are achievements of this House over many decades, not imports from Brussels or Strasbourg, and not every country in the EU can claim what the UK rightly can.

**Chris Bryant:** I sympathise with some of that, but the truth is that LGBT rights were quite often forced on Britain by European Court of Justice decisions and European Court of Human Rights decisions, and were not adopted even by a Labour Government. Sometimes we have had to resort to elsewhere.

**Caroline Flint:** I do not disagree with my—right hon. Friend?

**Chris Bryant:** No.

**Caroline Flint:** Shame. I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend, who should be a right hon. Friend, but we must not polarise this debate by saying either that the EU is all bad or that the UK does nothing without the EU's permission.

Our minimum wage is twice that of Greece's and more than Spain's, and many EU member states do not have a minimum wage. Statutory maternity pay in the UK is paid for up to 39 weeks, compared with just 16 weeks in France, 16 weeks in Holland and 26 weeks in Ireland. Many people ascribe paid holidays to the EU,

[Caroline Flint]

but the truth is that it was a Labour Government who signed up to the social chapter that led to that happening, and who added bank holidays on top. With regards to equality, same-sex marriage is legal in just 14 of the 28 member states, so the rights that our lesbian and gay citizens enjoy are in many respects rights derived from decisions of this Parliament, not the European Union.

In the coming weeks and during the transition, it is not too late to adopt a different approach—a less confrontational politics. I want the Government to begin a new dialogue across parties, as they should have done earlier. I want them to consult the Opposition on the negotiations around trade now, and to commit to doing so during the transition period. With 78 days until the UK leaves the European Union, it is too easy to talk about further delay. The task is only impossible if we in this House make it impossible. Extending article 50 would not solve anything, and neither would a second referendum. Our conduct in the coming weeks and months can either seek the best deal and heal divisions, or seek to prevent a deal and divide the country further.

I believe that our path has to be one that brings the nation together—a Brexit based on a reasonable deal that protects the standards and rights that we value and shows generosity of spirit to our European neighbours, but which gets on with the task of getting through this process and dealing with the many issues that we did not face up to during our 40 years in the EU.

2.28 pm

**John Redwood** (Wokingham) (Con): This Parliament is on trial. The public voted very clearly in the people's vote of 2016. They were told by Parliament and the Government, by the remain and leave campaigns, that they—the people—were making the decision. They were promised that this Parliament would get on with the task, and they now say to this Parliament, “Do just that. Get on with it.”

The public recall that this Parliament is dominated by Members of Parliament serving in the Labour and the Conservative interests. In the 2017 election, every one of us was elected on a manifesto that made it clear that our parties supported implementing the verdict of the British people. The Conservative manifesto went further and made it very clear that we were going to leave the single market and the customs union, as had been pointed out by both remain and leave campaigns in the referendum. The Labour party manifesto set out an interesting and imaginative trade policy for an independent Britain that is clearly incompatible with staying in the customs union. So Labour too, along with the Conservatives, said to the public in 2017 that we would be leaving the customs union as well as the European Union when the decision was implemented.

There are many leave voters now who are extremely angry that some Members in this House think they were stupid, think they got their decision wrong, and think they should have to do it again. Many people in the country who voted remain, as well as many who voted leave, think it is high time that this Parliament moved on from every day re-enacting the referendum debate as if it had not happened and thinking that we can go back over the referendum debate and decision because it did

not like the answer. All those who stood on a manifesto to leave the European Union should remember that manifesto. Those who deeply regret the decision and did not stand on such a manifesto should still understand that democracy works by the majority making decisions. When a majority has made a decision in a referendum where they were told that they would get what they voted for, it ill behoves anyone in this Parliament to know better than the British public and to presume that this Parliament can take on the British public and stand against them, because we are here to serve that public. We gave them the choice and they made that choice.

I want us to be much more interested in the opportunities that Brexit provides and to have proper debates about all the things the Government should be doing for when we leave, as I trust we will on 30 March 2019. I see nothing in the withdrawal agreement that I like. It is not leaving; it is sentencing us to another 21 to 45 months of these awful, endless debates and repetitions of the referendum arguments as we try to get something from the European Union by way of an agreement over our future partnership, having thrown away most of our best negotiating cards by putting them into the withdrawal agreement in the form that the European Union wants. That would be ridiculous, and a very large number of leave voters would see it as a complete sell-out. That applies to a very large number of remain voters as well, many of them in my own constituency. They have written to me and said, “For goodness’ sake oppose this withdrawal agreement, because while we do not agree with you about the ultimate aim, we are united in thinking this is even worse than just leaving”, or, in their case, staying within the European Union. I find myself in agreement with the overwhelming majority of my constituents on this subject. For both those who voted remain and leave, this is a very bad agreement that suits neither side.

The opportunities we should be discussing today in respect of fishing, agriculture and business are very considerable. I again ask my oft-repeated question of the Government: when are they going to publish our new tariff schedule? The United Kingdom can decide how much tariff, if any, to impose on imports into our country. I think that the EU tariff schedule on imports into our country is too high. I proposed to the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy that he remove all tariffs on imported components. That would be a huge boost for manufacturing in this country. Instead of having to say to manufacturers that we might end up with some tariffs on components coming in from the EU, because we have to charge the same to everybody, let us be bold and say that we are going to get rid of the tariffs on the components coming in from non-EU sources so that we cheapen the costs of manufacturing in the United Kingdom and give people a better choice on components.

**George Freeman:** Will my right hon. Friend address the worries of farming families, communities and industries up and down the country facing tariffs on their products going into Europe? This is a £3.15 billion industry facing a very serious tariff threat.

**John Redwood:** I was going to get on to food, and I will do so immediately as I have been prompted. We run a massive £20 billion a year trade deficit in food with

the European Union, and tariff-free food competes all too successfully against some elements of our farming industry. I want the Government to choose a tariff structure on food that provides lower overall tariffs against the rest of the world but produces some tariff against EU production so that we will produce more domestically. I want to cut the food miles. I want to see more of our food being produced and sold domestically. Our domestic market share has plunged seriously during the time we have been in the European Union. I think it was well over 90% in 1972 when we entered, and it is now well under 70%. There is absolutely no reason why we cannot get back there.

We need to know urgently from this Government what tariff protection there is going to be against EU food once we have left; whether they will take advantage of the opportunity to get rid of tariffs on food coming in that we cannot conceivably grow or produce for ourselves; and whether they will lower the average tariff, because some of the tariffs that the EU imposes are eye-wateringly too high, to the detriment of the food consumer. As we will be collecting more tariff revenue in total when we start to impose some tariffs on EU products, we should be having a debate on how we are going to spend that money. I trust that the Government would rebate it all to British consumers by direct tax cuts of the right kind. There is no reason why the consumer should be worse off, because we are heavy net exporters and we are going to collect an awful lot more tariff revenue on the EU's goods than they are going to collect on ours, unless we do something very radical on our tariff schedule. We therefore need to discuss how to spend that money.

We also need to discuss how we rebuild our fishing industry. I am impatient to get on with this. I do not want it to be delayed. We need to take control of our fish and our fishing industry this year, not sometime, never. Under the withdrawal agreement, we have no idea if and when we would get our fishing industry back. Doubtless it would be in play as something to be negotiated away, because the Government have given everything else away that they might otherwise have used in the negotiation. I want to get on and take back control of the fish now. I want a policy from the DEFRA Secretary on how we can land much more of the fish in the United Kingdom, how we can build our fish processing industries on the back of that, and what kind of arrangements we will have with the neighbouring countries both within and outside the EU whereby we will be free to settle the terms and negotiate our own conditions.

This is a huge opportunity. The fishing industry is one of the industries that has been most gravely damaged by our membership of the European Union, and we owe it to our fishing communities around the country to take that opportunity. From landlocked Wokingham, I can assure colleagues from coastal communities that there is huge enthusiasm throughout the country to rebuild our fishing industry and to see those fishing fleets again expand and enable us to land much more of our own fish. We can, at the same time, have a policy that is better on conservation by getting rid of many of the big industrial trawlers that come from the continent. We can get rid of the system where there are discards at sea or, now, the system where people are actually going to be prevented from fishing completely because the

fishery cannot be managed sensibly, to the detriment of the fish and the fishermen and women undertaking the work.

There is a huge agenda there. Above all, I want the Government to set out how we are going to spend all the money that we will be saving. The Government say that we are going to give away £39 billion—I think it will be considerably more—under the withdrawal agreement. I would like to take that sum of money, which they have clearly provided for as it is their plan to spend that money, and spend it in the first two years when we come out in March 2019. That would be a 2% boost to our economy—a very welcome Brexit bonus.

2.37 pm

**John Mann** (Bassetlaw) (Lab): I invite the right hon. Member for Wokingham (John Redwood) to sign our amendment (p), because through it we want to take back control to Parliament. The substance of the amendment is on workers' rights, environmental standards, and health and safety—that, for me, is one of our red lines; not the only one, but a critical one. That is what this amendment does in directing Government through the negotiation period. I recommend that others around the House sign up to it.

The Government have a dilemma and I want to speak directly to them. This time when the Government are imploring everyone to vote for their deal is the time when we, across Parliament, have maximum leverage over the Government. The Government will need to handle this dilemma in a very sophisticated way. The time for rhetoric has gone—there have been plenty of repeat speeches on what people think; everyone has a view—and the time for negotiating has begun. The Government ought to be getting people in immediately—be it shadow Front Benchers, the shadow Brexit Secretary, or the Chair of the Brexit Committee—and attempting to negotiate directly with them on how we go forward. Otherwise the prospect of no deal gets all the more real—no deal by accident.

The focus here has been inward, and the Government's focus has been inward, on their own party and their Democratic Unionist party deal, rather than outward. It is getting very late in the day, but it not too late in the day. The weakness of the Government's deal is also its strength, in that it puts a lot off into the negotiations on the trade deal. That gives us in Parliament significant influence, if we choose to use it, all the way through.

Mr Speaker, your ruling yesterday has been seen in the context of you being biased in relation to Brexit. That is nonsense. You will have whatever view you want. The huge significance for government must not be lost in this. With a Fixed-term Parliaments Act and a minority Government, your ruling gives Parliament more power over a minority Government in the future. It happens to be a minority Conservative Government now. If there is an election, it could be a minority Labour Government. It is the same principle. This is fundamental, because it changes the way we will have to operate. Will we learn quickly enough, or will we continue with the rhetoric and fall into something that the majority do not want?

There are other red lines. These are not the only things that I or, I think, Opposition Members regard as essential. One of the reasons that my constituents voted



[John Mann]

for Brexit—it was no surprise to me—was that we have not had our fair share. There was a small period under the Blair Government when we got our fair share infrastructure-wise. We gloried in it, and it was brilliant, but other than that, we have not in my lifetime had our fair share. Whoever is in government in the next five years has to give what I call the real Brexit dividend—our fair share—to areas like mine, which means that other areas would get less. That is what “left behind” actually means.

I recall a demonstration I went on outside the power stations, with 5,000 workers. I was the only external person invited, and I spoke. The jobs were going to Portuguese workers and, because of EU laws, they could do nothing about it. We had to pressure the employer, and we succeeded, through civil action. I realised at that point how strong the feeling was, and therefore the result was no surprise. If we want to define a Brexit voter in my area, it is a trade unionist in an organised workplace. That is the core of the Brexit vote, and my area is not unusual in that. Government need to get their head around that and negotiate with the Opposition over the next weekend and the next few weeks, if that is needed to get a deal.

I stood on a manifesto that said we are going to deliver Brexit. Frankly, voters can boot me out—they can boot any of us out for reneging on or sticking to our principles. I do not for a moment demur when people take the opposite point of view. They are very principled people, and I respect them for that. I do not agree with their conclusions, but I respect them for their bravery. Everyone knows that even a second referendum will not resolve the split in the country. Part of what we need to do in this process in relation to the deal is to resolve the split in the country.

My area is sick to death of condescending, patronising words. People in my area knew what they were voting for. They knew why they were voting—and by the way, it was not the same as the vision of the right hon. Member for Wokingham. They were not voting for a race to the bottom, for the lowest common denominator, for lower wages and lower standards and for us to undercut the rest. They were voting for best practice, the highest of standards and to compete with the freedoms. My appeal to Members in my party and others is that now is the time for practical, specific proposals based on what people are in favour of precisely, not what they are against.

This is not just about whether we can get through the next few weeks. It is about whether Parliament and its authority will survive. My voters will walk. They may not vote Tory or UKIP, and they may not vote for me; they will walk. They will say, “The political process is useless and broken. You’re all to blame.” We can reach different conclusions about the outcomes of that, but understanding that reality is fundamental.

We should at least try, with the Labour party manifesto position and our stated objectives, to get a negotiated deal with the Government and vice versa. That is fundamental to the process. Will it succeed? I do not know. We are helping with this, and we are helping, not to be helpful politically, but because this is real stuff: health and safety, environmental standards and workers’ rights are real stuff.

**John Redwood:** I agree with the hon. Gentleman about how the public will react if their voice is ignored, but will he withdraw his comment that I want lower standards and a race to the bottom? I want higher pay and better standards, and that is what I campaigned for.

**John Mann:** Well, I shall finish by inviting the right hon. Gentleman and everybody else to sign amendment (p). We should see more amendments like this on equality issues and other red lines, to get the deal through by the maximum consensus based on our manifesto commitments and, more importantly, to hold the country together.

**Yvette Cooper** (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I apologise for interrupting the debate, but this seems important. The media are reporting that No. 10 Downing Street is briefing that its interpretation of yesterday’s vote and the requirements of the legislation is that, if the Prime Minister’s motion is defeated next Tuesday, the debate on the plan B that the Government would be obliged to bring forward would be restricted to only 90 minutes, and they would allow only one amendment to be chosen and voted upon.

Is that your understanding? Can you confirm that the Government could in fact provide as much time as they wanted for a constitutional debate that is so contested and so crucial to the future of our country, and that they could provide for as many amendments to be considered as is needed? Given that the Prime Minister and the Government have been saying that they want to listen, reach out and build a consensus, how, if this is the case, can we believe anything that the Government say?

**Mr Speaker:** I will respond, but as the Chief Whip is signalling an interest in contributing, I am happy to hear the right hon. Gentleman.

**The Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasury (Julian Smith):** Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. Just to confirm, no decision has been made along the lines of what the right hon. Lady has said. The Government will do everything they can to ensure that the House is fully consulted in every eventuality next week, and the information that she has is not correct.

**Mr Speaker:** I am happy to respond to the point of order from the right hon. Lady, and I thank her for giving me notice of it. She has kindly shown me the press report to which she refers, but she knows that I have not yet had the opportunity to study it carefully. Moreover, it is not our normal practice to respond to any and every press report based upon a briefing from someone who perhaps thinks that he or she knows what the procedures are in this place but does not always fully do so.

It is true to say that the default position under Standing Order No. 16(1) is that debates pursuant to an Act of Parliament must be concluded after 90 minutes, flowing from which there tends to be a practical restriction on amendments because the time has lapsed, and therefore only one amendment in such a hypothetical situation would be taken. However, it is also true to say that such provision is often disapplied by an Order of the House.

I must emphasise that all of this is hypothetical at this stage, and I do not think it would be helpful to speculate on what may happen subsequent to the decision of the House next Tuesday. I can, however, confirm that the right hon. Lady is quite correct in saying that it is perfectly open to the Government, if such a situation were to arise, to provide for a much fuller debate. In those circumstances, there would predictably be a significant number of colleagues who would want to put their own propositions on the paper. I am extremely confident that if that hypothetical scenario were to arise, colleagues would assert themselves.

**Hilary Benn** (Leeds Central) (Lab): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. Could you confirm that it would be open to Members of the House to seek to remedy this potential problem by tabling an amendment to the withdrawal agreement motion for next week, because this matter would inevitably flow from a consequence of the withdrawal agreement not being carried by the House of Commons?

**Mr Speaker:** I would like to reflect on that. It may be possible for that to be done. If it is possible for it to be done, it may well be a matter of judgment as to whether it is thought to be worth doing. The reason there is no great hurry on that matter is, of course, that I am not even in a position, under the Order passed on 4 December, to select amendments until the final day of the debate. I do not know if the right hon. Gentleman heard me explaining, in response to a point of order from the right hon. Member for Putney (Justine Greening) this morning, that it was quite wrong for people to talk about amendments that had been accepted. She mentioned to me in her point of order that allegedly the Government had signalled their acceptance of a particular amendment. That was a wholly inapposite report or claim. No amendment has been accepted at this stage, because no amendment has yet been selected. I am not allowed to select any amendment until the final day, so some people really do need to keep up with what the procedure is. The right hon. Gentleman has plenty of time in which to reflect on these matters.

**Yvette Cooper:** Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. I do not want to interrupt the debate further, but the response from the Chief Whip was obviously helpful, even if it is slightly odd that he has now left the Chamber before the conclusion of any further discussion on the point of order. Do you think, Mr Speaker, it would be helpful for there to be further clarification from the Government Benches about what plan there would be for further debates, so that we can have reassurance?

**Mr Speaker:** What I would say to the right hon. Lady is twofold. First, I do not control the Government Chief Whip any more than the Government Chief Whip controls me. I think we ought to be clear about that. I cannot comment on his whereabouts and they are not a matter of any great concern to me. Secondly, if the right hon. Lady or other colleagues want to explore these matters in the debate in the coming days, they absolutely can do so. All I can say is that, in support of Members in all parts of the House and of all shades of opinion, I will always have regard to the opportunities for Members to put their points and to advance their causes. These are not matters purely for the Treasury Bench. I think we are clear about that.

2.52 pm

**Richard Benyon** (Newbury) (Con): I should start by reflecting that the speech by the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) was one of the finest analyses of what happened in the referendum. The right hon. Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) also absolutely hit the nail on the head about where we are today and how we need to progress.

We have heard, and will continue to hear in this debate, reasons why people feel they cannot support the Government's deal. We will hear hon. Member after hon. Member describe in gruesome detail what precise strand of Brexit or non-Brexit they will support. That will be all very fascinating for their local paper or grist to the mill for their next blog, but in the context of what Parliament is doing in this debate and in next week's vote it will be utterly irrelevant. What matters is not what any of us individually think of the deal; what matters is what Members in the Chamber decide. What matters is the maths of who makes up this House.

I am happy to give detailed reasoning to the House for why I am prepared to support the Government. That would be of interest to some of my constituents. It would be welcome news to my constituent who runs a business which employs over 20,000 people and is pleading with us to agree the deal. It would be interesting to the small businesses in my constituency that wrote to me about why ideological Brexiteers are playing with fire when they breezily claim that no deal would be just a bit of mid-air turbulence. We should listen to such people and ask ourselves who is more likely than them to understand the complexity of supply chains or the competitive pricing of their products.

For some in this House the word "compromise" is a pejorative term: a sign of weakness and a word which is too quickly followed by other words like "betrayal". For me, compromise is almost always a virtue. I compromised as a soldier serving on operations. I compromised as a businessman in every negotiation I did. I compromised as a Minister when negotiating in Europe for this country. I compromise almost daily in this place trying to get some of what I want through, rather than getting nothing. Perhaps the best analogy I can use is that I compromised when I got divorced. As one hon. Member said outside this Chamber the other day, "At least his divorce was with only one person, not 27."

As the leading Brexit campaigner Dan Hannan wrote recently, if a 52% to 48% referendum result is a mandate for anything, it is a mandate for compromise. That said, like most in this House I am a democrat and I concede that my side lost. Like about 85% of this House, I was re-elected in 2017—I might add, with the highest ever popular vote in my constituency in any general election—on a manifesto that pledged to respect the result of the referendum. If we look at the bell curve of public opinion on this issue, we see the edges of the bell curve showing the irreconcilables, the small percentage at either end who are either inexorably grieving at the result of the referendum and will do anything they can to undo it, or those for whom the cleanest of breaks with the EU is a theocracy and an ideology on which, as with the other end of the scale, compromise is impossible. And then there is the rest of the country. Here we find an understanding about what we want to achieve: to move from being a country inside the EU with some opt-outs, to one being outside the EU with some opt-ins.

[Richard Benyon]

For many of them, this deal is fine. I support the Prime Minister if she can bring forward any changes and tweaks that will encourage more of our colleagues to join. I also give notice that if that fails I will seek, with other colleagues right across the House, to find a way forward. If that takes me down an EEA or EFTA route, then I will look at that. That would be sub-optimal, but it may be the only thing the House can agree. What I do feel is that there is no majority in this House for no deal. I really urge people to listen to industry and to the letter we received today from the four presidents of the NFU. If one represents a rural area and minds about our food industry and the rural economy, that letter is calm, deliberate knowledge.

In the spirit of compromise, and to ensure there is something for all of us, I am really attracted by the idea that, perhaps on workers' rights, the environment, and health and safety, we could provide a sort of triple lock where if Europe decides to raise standards above where we are today we can say that we will put them to this House. We are a sovereign House of Commons. We can make a decision on whether to support them. I am interested in that.

I wish to say a word to those who want a second vote. If someone is calling for it because they see it as the best way of reversing the first referendum, say so—be honest with the public and do not dress it up with some higher purpose. In passing, I would also say: be careful what you wish for. The further one gets from London and its bien pensant elites, the more one detects an anger and belligerence towards the campaign for a second referendum. The Institute for Government has said it would take four to five months to have a second referendum. We would be putting this poor country through another four or five months of the kind of divisions we saw in the last one. Is that what we really want? The Electoral Commission, the independent body that oversees such votes, has very strong views on some of the points being made about the kind of questions that might be asked.

My discussions with some of the 97% of my constituents who have not written to me on this issue can be condensed down to one simple message: get on with it.

**Mr Ben Bradshaw** (Exeter) (Lab): Does the right hon. Gentleman also accept, though, that if the House were to support the Government's deal, along with the political declaration, it would be a sure fire way of ensuring that this uncertainty and political wrangling continue for years to come?

**Richard Benyon:** I do not agree with the right hon. Gentleman. It will give certainty. It would certainly give certainty to many of the businesses I have talked about. I think there is a dam holding back investment in the economy. We all see it in our constituencies. If the deal were to go through, I think we would see a mini-boom in this country, as well as a determination to close this off in the minds of the electorate by trying to speed through the final stage of negotiations. If there is another emotion I detect in my constituency, it is one of admiration for the tenacity of the Prime Minister. While not everyone will agree with what she has come up with, I think we can all accept that.

I will finish with a heartfelt plea to people right across the House not to stand absolutely on the principle and clear position of what they would accept, but to recognise that the House of Commons has to raise its game, understand that compromise is not a dirty word and find a solution that we can all agree.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Before I call the hon. Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier), I must advise the House that, after she has spoken, the time limit will have to be reduced to six minutes. [*Interruption.*] Yes, I recognise that it is a pity, but very many Members wish to take part.

3.1 pm

**Meg Hillier** (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Newbury (Richard Benyon).

Is it not depressing that we are here again having moved on no further in the past five weeks? The Public Accounts Committee has produced nine reports on Government preparedness. Every day we go on indecisively, the Government are spending money preparing for no deal and other options, and that is not to mention the money that will need to be invested, if we leave, in order that we can do all the things currently done through European institutions.

I will not repeat what I said in my speech on 6 December, but I feel I need to mention the 41,500 EU residents in my borough, who are very concerned. The uncertainty that the right hon. Gentleman talked about is doing them and business no favours. I have sympathy with what he said about compromise. I am a remainer. My constituency was very pro-remain, and many of my constituents viscerally want to remain, but the distress and delay is a problem. He talked about a three to four-month plan for a second referendum, which I would reluctantly support if Parliament cannot make a decision, but according to others it would be six months. We need to think carefully about where that would lead us and what uncertainties we would have to live through along the way.

As I said in my last speech, the Government have proceeded recklessly, but today I want to talk about an issue that was never really discussed in the campaign on the mainland of the UK. I should declare that my husband is a dual citizen of Ireland and the United Kingdom. The Northern Ireland border is too often dismissed as a confected issue that does not matter greatly. I did some research. Only 108 MPs in the House today were in Parliament when the Good Friday agreement was signed in 1998, and only 144 of us were here when we had the last republican terrorist attack on the mainland. There is a diminishing number of Members who were here and closely involved in that debate, when our leaders, Tony Blair among them, took us to the signing of the Good Friday agreement.

In December 2017, the *Irish Mirror* reported that MI5 had disrupted more than 250 separate attacks in Northern Ireland alone, with seizures of explosives, weapons and ammunition, and that there had been 16 attacks in 2015-16 in Northern Ireland. There remain serious issues for peace in Northern Ireland and the



security of Northern Irish citizens, as well as of Irish citizens across the border. We have been in the common travel area with Northern Ireland since the Irish Free State was declared in 1922, except for a brief period after the second world war. Ireland has aligned itself with us to maintain that position, in 1952 signing up to our immigration rules on the Commonwealth and in the '70s joining the EU. The Republic of Ireland is not considered a foreign country under UK law. Irish citizens have a special status that confers on them the right to vote here. Under British law they have more rights than EU citizens, including the right to be Members of this House with Irish citizenship alone; they are not required to become British citizens.

It is good that article 5 of the withdrawal agreement confirms that the common travel area and free movement must remain for our Irish cousins, but it is of real concern to me that we have not debated how we will deal with the Irish border. The Prime Minister said in a statement in October 2018, and she has repeated this sort of phrase many a time:

“We are obviously committed to no hard border, and we have made it clear that in any circumstances, including in a no-deal situation, we would be doing all that we could to ensure that there was no hard border. We would look to work with Ireland and the European Union to ensure that there was no hard border, but there has been no commitment in relation to that.”—[*Official Report*, 22 October 2018; Vol. 648, c.61.]

That last half sentence is the real issue.

There are options, but none of them is good. Customs checks could be imposed at the border because Ireland becomes a third country under EU law. How does that chime with our commitment to the common travel area? We could do nothing and temporarily have no border while we work out the political agreement, but if we do so, we could be the subject of a complaint to the World Trade Organisation. We could move checks further away from the border in the so-called max fac—maximum facilitation—option, which the UK proposed and the EU rejected. Even when the UK proposed it, it was still not clear what it was. It involves a bit of number plate recognition, and perhaps taking some goods and checking them.

I have had the privilege of speaking to the Comptroller and Auditor General for the Northern Ireland Audit Office and hearing him describe the travel of goods back and forth across the border, which I know well. UK citizens in Northern Ireland and Irish citizens in Ireland have a lot of business—processing of milk and pork, a lot of other agricultural business—that relies on movement across the border. It is vital that that is maintained, and there is really no answer to that. One of the reasons why I cannot support the deal is that it does not resolve that problem.

There is, as other speakers have highlighted, no simple answer, but we have had weakness upon weakness from this Government. There has been reckless rush and unnecessary delay. The Prime Minister has reached out far too late to Members in her own party, let alone trying to have any cross-party discussions. I was dismayed to hear from the hon. Member for Mid Norfolk (George Freeman) that there has not even been proper dialogue with the Opposition Front Bench. There is no authority, and that is of real concern to me. How can we have faith that the sketchy political agreement will be fleshed out and delivered by this Prime Minister in her current weakness?

I think we need to look—I say this rather reluctantly—at revoking or at least extending article 50 unless Parliament can deliver. Even with the three-day deadline, it is difficult to know how we can begin to coalesce around alternatives. I throw that at the Government; as the Executive, they still have power to determine the business in this place. We have to have an opportunity to discuss alternatives. If we fail, we need to consider going back to the people, even with all the problems I have highlighted that doing so would raise.

3.7 pm

**Alex Chalk** (Cheltenham) (Con): In these difficult times for our country, it is as well to remember the iron rule of politics: no situation is so bad that it is not possible for politicians to make it worse. I fear that we are in such a situation now. Not to vote for the deal would be to fall into precisely that trap.

I was a remainer. I campaigned across Cheltenham for remain, from the high street to the promenade. I did not do so because I thought the European Union was perfect. It had allowed itself, in many ways, to become inflexible and too remote from ordinary people. Even if I would not have suggested joining on the terms that were proffered in 2016, it seemed to me that the process of unravelling that 40-year relationship would be so lengthy, so complex, so expensive and so divisive that the game would not be worth the candle.

I made that argument and others, which are being reheated, such as that that process would act as a headwind against growth, and I was proud of the fact that 56% of people in Cheltenham voted to remain. But we did not vote as constituencies; we voted as a country. We voted as one nation, and I am first and foremost a democrat. I stood on a manifesto in 2015 that read:

“We will honour the result of the referendum, whatever the outcome.”

Parliament then voted for such a referendum. On Second Reading of the Bill that became the European Union Referendum Act 2015, the then Foreign Secretary said that the Bill had

“one clear purpose: to deliver on our promise to give the British people the final say on our EU membership in an in/out referendum”.—[*Official Report*, 9 June 2015; Vol. 596, c. 1047.]

That was voted for by parties across the House—the Conservatives, Labour and the Liberal Democrats. During the campaign, the Government distributed to every home in Cheltenham a leaflet stating:

“The referendum...is your chance to decide if we should remain in or leave the European Union...The Government will implement what you decide.”

We all know that was the deal. I remember the words of the late and much-missed Paddy Ashdown on the evening of the referendum. Before the result came in, he said:

“I will forgive no one who does not respect the sovereign voice of the British people once it is spoken, whether it is a majority of one per cent or 20 per cent. When the British people have spoken you do what they command. Either you believe in democracy or you don't.”

Some in the House say the margin of victory does not matter. “In a referendum,” they say, “the winner takes all—one more vote is all you need to impose the most ideologically pure version of what you argued for.” I respectfully suggest there are great dangers in assuming that the 2016 referendum result—just 52:48—was a

[Alex Chalk]

mandate for a tungsten-hard no-deal Brexit, which is now one of the two obvious alternatives to this deal. Those who advocate that would do well to remember that, had the EU negotiators simply offered David Cameron a genuine emergency brake that did not dismantle the freedom of movement principle but provided a sensible derogation, it is likely we would have voted to remain.

This deal is a compromise. That means it has positives and negatives. The positives are these. On goods, the EU has accepted that the UK should have a bespoke trade deal, with no tariffs, fees or charges and no quotas. On services, the EU has accepted the principle of arrangements for financial services, which, importantly, will be based on equivalence. British nationals will be able to travel freely without a visa, EU directives will no longer have direct effect and so on.

Against that backdrop, is it any surprise that the deal has been loudly welcomed by Rolls-Royce, Siemens, the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry and the chief executive of UK Hospitality? The BioIndustry Association supports it—I could go on and on. The chief executive of BAE Systems, which employs many people in Cheltenham, welcomed the transition period, and GE Aviation, a significant employer in Gloucestershire, said:

“Ratification of a withdrawal agreement would provide business with the certainty it needs. In contrast, a disorderly ‘no deal’ exit in March would present considerable challenges for our operations, supply chains and customers.”

**Simon Hoare** (North Dorset) (Con): Does my hon. Friend share my concern that the experts and others he prays in aid, whose views I certainly give great weight to, have been too easily dismissed? People either call them fake news or say, “They would say that,” or, “They don’t know what they’re talking about; we know better.” There is a dangerous anti-business trend in what some people say, and we must resist it.

**Alex Chalk:** And this is the Conservative party, which listens to business and wants to stand on the side of people who create prosperity in our country. By the way, if we want to deliver social mobility, we will do that through jobs and enterprise, and by raising tax revenues so we have the greatest possible public services.

Of course there are negatives to the deal; we have heard about those. Concern is rightly expressed about the Irish backstop, but, as the Secretary of State indicated and the Attorney General has said, it is an instrument of pain for both sides. What is a backstop for us is a back door for them. Northern Ireland would have the advantage of being able to access both the single market of the EU and the single market of the UK. Mainland British businesses would be incentivised to relocate to Northern Ireland to supply their goods into the EU. Meanwhile, the process of negotiating trade deals would become a nightmare for the EU, as it would not be able to clarify the frontiers of its single market and the British taxpayer would not be paying a penny piece.

The fact is that all trade deals require some kind of backstop. Canada-plus and Labour’s suggestion—it wants to be inside the customs union but outside the single market—would require one, too. I have heard much

criticism from the Labour party. Some of it is fluent and cogent—we get all that—but, with respect, criticism is easy. As a quote probably misattributed to Teddy Roosevelt goes, complaining about a problem without proposing a solution is called whining. Labour does not want a second referendum, does not want an extension and criticises the Government, saying there is no way they could get meaningful changes to their deal, yet it suggests that it could get a whole new deal by 29 March—a “strong single market deal”, although that is completely lacking in detail and clarity as to what Labour would require. [Interruption.] It is indeed a “unicorn” prospect.

A hard Brexit, I would suggest, is simply not an option. There are concerns about Ireland, and I have real concerns about it. Of course it is necessary to “aim off” with respect to some of the polls, but there is a real risk that if there is a hard Brexit the appetite for a border poll will increase, and there is then a real risk of a united Ireland. There are great risks from a second referendum as well, which I cannot go into now. However, there is an opportunity for us to do something sensible and unlock the wall of investment that is poised over our economy, and I shall be voting for the deal.

3.15 pm

**Mr David Lammy** (Tottenham) (Lab): I have faced many challenges in the two decades for which I have sat in the House, but Sunday 7 August 2011, the morning after the Tottenham riots, was by far the greatest. Walking on broken glass, past burnt-out cars, homes and businesses, comforting men and women who were still in their pyjamas, I saw the place where I had lived for my whole life turned to ashes.

Many members of the community were urging me to say that the killing of Mark Duggan by police, which had sparked the riots, justified that rage: that the families made homeless, the burnt-out buses and houses and the looted shops were worth it. They told me I had to say that that wrong was right. It was not easy, but I had to look members of my community in the face, tell them that the violence was a disgrace, and condemn it unequivocally. Why? Because we have a duty to tell our constituents the truth, even when they passionately disagree. We owe them not only our industry but our judgment. We are trusted representatives, not unthinking delegates, so why do many in the House continue to support Brexit when they know that it will wreck jobs, the NHS and our standing in the world?

This is the fundamental dishonesty at the heart of the Brexit debate. Most Members now recognise that in private, but do not say it in public. Brexit is a con, a trick, a swindle, a fraud. It is a deception that will hurt most of the people it promised to help. It is a dangerous fantasy that will make every problem it claims to solve worse. It is a campaign won on false promises and lies. Both Vote Leave and Leave.EU broke the law. Russian interference is beyond reasonable doubt.

By now, every single campaign promise made in 2016 has come unstuck. Brexit will not enrich our NHS; it will impoverish it. Our trade deal with Donald Trump will see US corporations privatise and dismantle it, one bed at a time. Even the promises on immigration, which has so greatly enriched our country, are a lie. After Brexit, immigration will go up, not down. When we enter into negotiations with countries such as India

and China, they will ask for three things—visas, visas and more visas—and they will get them, because we will be weak.

Then there is the myth about restoring parliamentary sovereignty. The last two years have shown what a joke that is. The Prime Minister has hoarded power like a deluded 21st-century Henry VIII. Impact assessments have been hidden, votes have been resisted and blocked, and simple opponents of Government policies have been bullied and threatened to get into line. Even when we forced a meaningful vote, the Prime Minister cancelled it, certain we would reject her disastrous deal—and oh, we will reject it, because it is a lose-lose compromise that offers no certainty for our future. All that it guarantees is more years of negotiation, headed by the same clowns who guided us into this farce in the first place.

We are suffering from a crisis of leadership in our hour of need. This country's greatest moments came when we showed courage, not when we appeased: the courage of Wilberforce to emancipate the slaves in the face of the anger of the British ruling class, the courage of Winston Churchill to declare war on Hitler in the face of the appeasers in his Cabinet and the country, and the courage of Attlee and Bevan to nationalise the health service in the face of the doctors who protested that that was not right. Today, we too must be bold, because the challenges that we face are just as extreme. We must not be afraid to tell the truth to those who disagree.

Friends on this side of the House tell me to appease Labour voters in industrial towns: the former miners, the factory workers, those who feel that they have been left behind. I say that we must not patronise them with cowardice. Let us tell them the truth. Let us tell them, "You were sold a lie. Parts of the media used your fears to sell papers and boost viewing figures. Nigel Farage and the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) exploited the same prejudice to win votes. Shame on them. Immigrants have not taken your jobs; our schools and colleges failed to give you skills.

Hospitals are crumbling not because of health tourists, but because of decades of austerity that ground them down to the bone. People cannot afford a house because both parties failed to build, not because Mohammed down the road moved in. Wealth was hoarded in London when it should have been shared across the country.

Blame us; blame Westminster: do not blame Brussels for our own country's mistakes. And do not be angry at us for telling you the truth; be angry at the chancers who sold you a lie. As Martin Luther King said long ago:

"There comes a time when silence is betrayal."

So just as I speak plainly to the Government this time around, let me speak to the Opposition about some home truths. There is no left-wing justification for Brexit. Ditching workers' rights and social protections and ending environmental co-operation is not progressive. This is a project about neoliberal deregulation; it is Thatcherism on steroids, pushed by her modern-day disciples. Leaving the EU will not free us from the injustices of global capitalism; it will make us subordinate to Trump's US.

Socialism confined to one country will not work. Whether we like it or not, the world we live in is global. We can fix the rigged system only if we co-operate

across border lines. The party of Keir Hardie has always been international. We must not let down our young supporters by failing to stand with them on the biggest issue of our lives.

If we remain in the EU we can reform it from the top table: share the load of mass migration, address the excesses of the bureaucracy and fix inequalities between creditor and debtor states. We can recharge the economy. We can refuel the NHS. We can build the houses we need after years of hurt. Hope is what we need: remain in the EU; give Britain a second opportunity to decide.

3.21 pm

**Royston Smith** (Southampton, Itchen) (Con): I do not want to use my speech to talk about parliamentary procedure or the detail of the various options to withdraw from the EU—I will leave that to others to do. What I want to talk about today is trust: not trust in MPs, which the right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) has just alluded to, but trust in the electorate, which my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Norfolk (George Freeman) spoke about.

In 1997, I, like many others, was unhappy that Tony Blair became Prime Minister, but I did not start campaigning for a people's vote to remove him, and the same was the case in 2001 and in 2005. In fact, I think the situation was the same in 2010, 2015 and 2017, as the Opposition would have been disappointed about the outcome of the election, but they did not start campaigning for a people's vote to overturn it. That is because we accept the results of votes in this country, and we should accept this one.

Turning to the point of this whole debate, in June 2016, the British people were given a say on our future relationship with the EU through a simple in/out referendum. We chose to leave. The numbers who voted or the margin of the majority are irrelevant; the question was put and the answer was given.

It should come as no surprise that, in a contest, some people will be disappointed. We should not dismiss their concerns; we should instead try to be as accommodating as possible. That is what people have been talking about today, but we must stay true to the referendum result—we have a duty to do so.

**Antoinette Sandbach:** Does my hon. Friend accept that when Vote Leave registered, it was registering for a simple "out" vote, but said it was not binding itself to a particular form of out, and that it would be up to MPs to decide how that result was implemented?

**Royston Smith:** I appreciate my hon. Friend's intervention, but it is not for me to talk about what Vote Leave decided; it is for me to talk about what I think and what my constituents think.

Everyone in the Conservative party, including my hon. Friend, stood on the 2015 manifesto. They promised to give the British public a straightforward in/out referendum. Everyone who voted in December 2015 to legislate for that referendum did so promising to honour the result. Everyone who voted and campaigned in the referendum did so in the spirit of what had been agreed before the vote took place, and again promised to honour the result—at least I assume that they did. Can we really imagine that people were wandering around



[Royston Smith]

campaigning for in or for out, but saying to their constituents and friends, “Whatever happens, if we don’t win, we’ll just renege on the result”? Of course they did not do that; they campaigned saying they would honour the result. Everyone in here who voted to trigger article 50 and everyone in here who voted to pass—[*Interruption.*] I am not saying that everyone here voted in that way. I am talking about everyone who did vote in that way—[*Interruption.*] If Members listen, they can intervene on me. Everyone in the Chamber who voted to trigger article 50 and who voted to pass the European Union (Withdrawal) Act did so because at that time they were doing what they promised their electorate they would do.

In 2017, both two major parties stood on manifestos that promised to honour the result. In my constituency, the Conservative and Labour candidates shared 93% of the vote. Two parties that promised to honour the result of the referendum shared almost the entire vote while all the other parties lost their deposits. Almost every Conservative and Labour Member has promised to deliver Brexit at one time or another. At the time, those who supported remain accepted the wording of the referendum. At no time did they say that the result needed to have a particular majority, or that the consequences needed to be spelled out. Why was that? Quite obviously it was because the remain voters thought they would win. I thought they would win, even though I campaigned for and voted to leave.

The country has followed this soap opera for two years. It has joined us on this journey, which began with the referendum and was followed by a prime ministerial resignation, a new Prime Minister, a general election, Lancaster House, Florence, “Brexit means Brexit”, “No deal is better than a bad deal”, a delayed vote, a vote of confidence in the Prime Minister and, finally, “This deal, no deal or no Brexit at all”. No Brexit at all is not an option. This place voted for the referendum and promised to honour the result. This place voted to trigger article 50 and, in so doing, reconfirmed to the British public that our democracy is more important than political convenience. We all accepted the terms before the campaigns started, and if Members fail to implement the result or attempt to frustrate the will of the people, they are not democrats and I have no idea why they are here.

I would like to offer some clarity for those Ministers who like to appear on the “Today” programme saying that people like me know what they do not want but not what they do want. I met the Prime Minister and I could not have been clearer to her: I want a deal but, as it stands, I do not want her deal. The Prime Minister promised to protect our precious Union. Her deal does not do that, because it treats one part of our Union differently from the other parts. So, for those who repeat that people like me know what we do not want but not what we do want, I will say it again: take the backstop out, and I will compromise again and reluctantly vote for the deal.

This has been a dark time in our nation’s history. It has laid bare the divisions in our country and, by renegeing on the promises we made to the British public, we would plunge our country into an even darker place, and I would not blame the voters if they never trusted a

politician again. Many of the people outside this place believe that politicians are untrustworthy. They think that we spend most of our time talking to ourselves and not caring about what they think. If we fail to honour the result of the most important vote in living memory, we will prove them right, and I will have no part in that. I made promises to my constituents and I fully intend to honour them, whatever that takes. I would rather lose my seat, honour my commitments to my constituents and preserve what integrity is left in this place than behave as so many others are, in their own self-interest.

3.28 pm

**Sir Edward Davey** (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): My friend, Lord Ashdown—Paddy—is being buried today in Somerset, so I hope that the House will allow me to speak about this deal as I think Paddy would have done. The hon. Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) might not have known about the burial service, but my friend Paddy would have been able to apply his critical faculties to the deal and judge it on the basis of what was good for this country. That is what he would have done. I worked for him for nearly 30 years, beginning as his economics adviser, and when he talked about Europe, he talked about the way in which countries needed to co-operate and work together. Internationalism was in his liberalism. He talked about how, working with other countries, this country could regain sovereignty and regain control over global capitalism, and the multinationals that sought to undermine the interests of individual countries, people and corporations. His view was that we were stronger and had more control. That was his approach to the European Union.

However, things went much deeper than that. Paddy was a soldier and a diplomat, and he brought that experience and those beliefs to the European question. It was his commitment to peace and to patriotism—he loved his country—that made him such a strong pro-European. We see that in his books and his speeches when he talks about the dangers of rising nationalism and protectionism around the world. He worried about Trump, Bolsonaro and Brexit, and he thought that Britain being in the EU was one of the best ways of combatting those rises in nationalism and protectionism. In his work in Bosnia, he talked about how the EU’s institutions were bringing peace not just within that country, but within the Balkans. Indeed, if we look at what is happening, the EU is one of the magnets that is ending the hostility between those countries, and it can play a key role. It is an engine for peace, as it has been across Europe.

Of course, as man who was born in Northern Ireland, Paddy would look at the threat to the Good Friday agreement with serious concern. Nearly 3,600 of our countrymen and women died in the troubles, but few have died since the Good Friday peace agreement. People inside and outside this House should think carefully about anything that puts that at risk. Paddy certainly did, believing that the EU was a way of gluing people together and moving away from past hostilities.

I was Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change when Putin invaded Crimea and the Bolsheviks went into eastern Ukraine. There were crisis summits. The European Energy Council got together to work out how to deal with the matter, and one way of undermining Putin was to reduce Russia’s oil, coal and gas exports by

ensuring that the EU became more secure by going green and by trading within itself, making it less dependent on Russia. That meant less money into Putin's pockets and therefore fewer soldiers and rockets. That was how the UK could exercise soft power through the EU. Europe's energy security strategy was written in my office in Whitehall, because we were able to use soft power to try to promote security and peace. That is what the EU is about, and that is why Paddy supported it.

If Paddy applied those same thoughts to this deal, he would say that it is hopeless. This deal would lock Britain into bad diplomacy—diplomacy based on transactions and deals, not relationships. In the modern world, a country should have deep relationships with its neighbouring states. When I was in the coalition Government, I talked about having joint Cabinet meetings in Berlin and in London with the German Government. That did not go down too well on the Tory Benches, but I was trying to ensure that relationships were built on understanding between Ministers, not on press releases. I am afraid that this deal locks us into transactions between now and whenever we find out what Brexit actually means, which will be when the political declaration is eventually negotiated. Beyond that, however, whenever we get to the end of those negotiations—the Secretary of State is dreaming if he thinks that that will happen at the end of the implementation period—we will still be in a much more transactional relationship with the EU, which will damage this country and its interests. Paddy would think that this deal is not in this great country's interests.

I hope that the deal will go down next Tuesday—I will vote against it—but it is unclear what will replace it. There is a clear majority against no deal. Is there a majority for some other deal? I do not know. Perhaps Norway-plus will attract some people. I find it deeply unattractive, because we would have all the costs and rules of the EU, but no voice and no vote. That is why—I am happy to admit this—putting the decision back to the people is a good idea. I hope that they will change their minds. If the people vote on this deal based on what they have seen over the past two and a half years, they will have a lot more information than they had in 2016. Some say, “The people knew what they were voting for,” but I really do not think that that is the case. Over the past two and a half years, there has been the most immense opening of people's minds to what actually happened. In addition, more than 1 million young people did not get a vote in 2016, and they would like a say in their future. I believe that the case for another vote is made.

3.34 pm

**Mr Alister Jack** (Dumfries and Galloway) (Con): In September 2014 the people of Scotland were confronted with a choice between remaining a member of the United Kingdom and becoming an independent state. The debate that preceded that vote brought politics alive in Scotland, and it did so precisely because it went to the heart of our national identities and challenged the idea that we could be proud of being both Scottish and British.

As the House knows, in that referendum, the people of Scotland voted to remain part of the United Kingdom and, ever since the result was declared, it has been incumbent on those of us who believe in our United Kingdom to continue defending it. It is in that

context that I considered the withdrawal agreement, because I would never vote for anything that threatened or undermined the integrity of our United Kingdom. I respect colleagues who have taken a different view on this matter, and I fully understand the concerns they have expressed because I initially shared those concerns. I have always been clear that, when we leave the European Union, as I voted to do, we leave as one United Kingdom.

Members may know that my constituency is home to the strategically and economically important port of Cairnryan, which handles approximately 45% of Northern Ireland's trade with the rest of the UK. Any border down the Irish sea or proposal to carve off Northern Ireland from the rest of the United Kingdom would be hugely detrimental to the port, which would be wholly unacceptable.

Although the withdrawal agreement is clear that nothing in it prevents the UK from ensuring unfettered access for goods moving from Northern Ireland to the rest of the UK's internal market, I welcome the specific commitment in the paper published yesterday that the Government will enshrine a guarantee to that effect in primary legislation. I do not want a situation to arise in which the UK needs to enter the backstop arrangement, and the text is clear that the backstop is neither the preferred nor the expected outcome. With the right level of political will and determination, it is entirely possible to reach an agreement on our future relationship before December 2020 and I, like the Prime Minister, sincerely hope we do.

I would have preferred a provision in the agreement that would enable us to end the backstop unilaterally, but that is not in the agreement. Although article 1(4) of the Northern Ireland protocol explicitly states that it is intended to apply “only temporarily,” I cannot help but think that inserting an end date, even one as far away as 2023, would focus both parties' minds on finding a solution. I have no doubt that, when the solution comes, it will come down to money, as I am quite confident that the technology already exists. The proposed backstop arrangement is uncomfortable. However, I am reassured by the words of my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney General. Like him, I believe that, compared with the other courses available, this is a reasonable, calculated risk.

The Prime Minister has accepted that this deal is not perfect, and we have to recognise that the withdrawal agreement is only one step in the process of leaving the EU. The Environment Secretary correctly said in his opening remarks that we should not make the perfect the enemy of the good, and I agree. I also believe that, if David Cameron had come back with this deal before the referendum, we leavers would have taken it. For me, Norway-plus, no deal and a second referendum are all less appealing than the deal before us. Even worse is the possibility of a Government led by the Labour Front Bench team who, despite having plenty of time to come up with something, have absolutely no plan for Brexit.

As a result of this deal, we will again become an independent coastal state. In December 2020 we will be free to decide who has access to our waters. We will be able to create a support system that meets the needs of our farming and rural communities, including my own in Dumfries and Galloway. In Scotland the withdrawal agreement has the support of organisations such as the

[Mr Alister Jack]

Federation of Small Businesses, the National Farmers Union of Scotland, the Scotch Whisky Association and the Scottish Fishermen's Federation.

In 2016 a majority voted to leave the EU. The Prime Minister has been clear in her determination to deliver on that result, and we leave the European Union on 29 March. After much deliberation, I have reached the view that this is a deal that delivers for the whole United Kingdom without undermining the integrity of our precious Union. It is a deal that moves Brexit forward. It is a pragmatic compromise that means we leave the political union, the customs union, the common fisheries policy and the common agricultural policy. It ends free movement and it ends the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice over the United Kingdom. It is also a deal that reflects the closeness of the referendum result, by leaving the EU at the same time as protecting our jobs and our economy. Despite my backstop reservations, I support it.

3.40 pm

**Maria Eagle** (Garston and Halewood) (Lab): There is no ideal way forward now that will satisfy all. I will not be voting for the withdrawal agreement that the Prime Minister has negotiated. I am afraid it is a mess, and the way she has handled Brexit from the beginning of her premiership has been fundamentally flawed. If we go forward on the basis of her deal and the political declaration, I believe that terrible damage will be done to the jobs, life chances, finances and prospects of my constituents, and to many other people in the rest of the country.

Colleagues from across the House have talked today about compromise, but the Prime Minister and her Government have made no efforts to seek a consensus across this House, or across the country, on the best way forward. From the beginning of her negotiations two years ago, she has focused her efforts on keeping her warring party together, rather than looking to do what is best for the country. She has not sought to set out a range of Brexit options and lead a great national conversation about the best way forward amongst potential options or available choices; she has simply ruled out the ones that she does not think some in her party will support. She has not sought to heal the divisions exposed by the toxicity of the referendum campaign, and the fears and divisions it exploited, or to reconcile the differences between those who voted to leave and those who voted to remain that have been revealed as a consequence.

The Prime Minister has purposefully since run down the clock, to prevent anyone but a small group around her from having a say on the way forward. Her negotiating red lines were more about keeping her most uncompromising Brexit-supporting colleagues on board and preventing them from removing her from office, than about finding a consensus across our nation, but they have had the effect of ruling out sensible and less damaging Brexit options, and now we are being told that it is her deal or no deal.

In my view, the Secretary of State, the Prime Minister and the Government should rule out no deal straightaway. It would be the most irresponsible, self-harming stupidity, and should not be contemplated. Seeking compromise and finding agreement across the House has not been a

focus of what the Government have tried to do, and we need to recall that when they now stand up and say they want compromise.

Let us recall that the Prime Minister did not want the House to have any meaningful say on Brexit at all. She wanted to trigger article 50 without allowing a vote in the House; only public-spirited citizens and the courts stopped her. She wanted to negotiate a deal and implement it without a meaningful vote in this House; only parliamentarians across parties have stopped her. She wants the Executive to take back control of our laws, with its full panoply of Henry VIII powers, not Parliament. Now, with her deal in deep trouble, she talks about compromise, but she has been trying to run down the clock and threaten us with catastrophe if we do not do her bidding, pulling the meaningful vote to waste another month—all to give the impression that it is her deal or no deal.

What are the consequences of the Prime Minister's deal? The National Institute of Economic and Social Research said that the White Paper version of her deal would cost the UK up to £100 billion by 2030 and cut GDP by 4% compared with the status quo. No deal, which she threatens the nation with, would be even worse, seeing a fall of up to 9% of GDP, on the Government's own forecasts, over the next 15 years. GDP would be cut in the north-west by 12% in the next 15 years, hitting manufacturing particularly hard.

My constituents are already reeling from the seemingly never-ending austerity imposed by the coalition and Tory Governments. Poverty is rocketing upwards. Food bank use is becoming institutionalised. The services towards which my constituents used to turn to get help and support at Liverpool City Council and Knowsley Borough Council are severely compromised; both had two thirds of their money removed by the Government. My constituents cannot afford the economic dislocation of the Prime Minister's Brexit, much less a no-deal Brexit.

My constituents did not vote for this. They voted, like me, to remain. Research shows that, since that time, sentiment has moved further towards remain, currently standing at about 64-36, and that accords with my own sense of what is happening in the constituency. My own survey shows an 80-20 split for remain. I accept, of course, that it is not as scientific as opinion polls and research; it is a self-selecting set of people who reply, but they are my constituents. When I asked about the PM's deal, 73% said that Brexit should be stopped altogether, with only 2% supporting her deal. A further 7% said that it was a bad deal but the only one available, so only a tenth were willing to back her deal. Some 80% told me that they expected leaving the EU to be bad for their families and an even higher number said it would be bad for the country, yet that is what the PM now expects me to vote for. I will not do it; I cannot do it.

I will not vote to make my constituents poorer just to get the PM off the hook on which she has ineptly but willingly put herself. The UK faces the biggest political crisis we have had in my lifetime—precipitated by the 2016 referendum, the subsequent general election, when the PM lost her majority, and the botched negotiations. The Government have no majority in this House, yet persist in acting as though they do.



Enough is enough: Parliament must take back control. It is showing welcome signs of doing so. There must be no more delaying tactics from the Government. If the deal goes down next week, Britain must find a new way forward. If we cannot have a general election because of the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011—although the possibility has yet to be tested—we should extend or revoke article 50, to enable a people’s vote on the deal, with the option of remaining in the EU.

3.46 pm

**Trudy Harrison** (Copeland) (Con): On 23 June 2016, I voted to leave the European Union—not as a Member of Parliament, as I had not yet been elected, but as a resident and parent of four daughters who has always lived in Copeland and hopefully always will.

I do not describe myself as a Brexiteer. I voted to leave because I am proud and desperately ambitious for this country. That pride and ambition are based not on an out-of-date rose-tinted nostalgia, but on fact. The success of our country and our place in the world was secured well before we joined the European Union, and as part of the EU our success has continued. But over recent decades the north of England, despite being responsible for so much of our industrial and technological prowess, has not had the investment, particularly in infrastructure, that it should have had to really achieve its full potential.

Much of the dialogue around Brexit has focused on process. If I am honest, the mantra of control of our laws, borders and money motivates me less than what we are all surely trying to achieve. We are striving for a successful UK. If the outcome, aim and prize of Brexit is a more successful country, I do not want to scupper the very educational establishments and businesses that will be absolutely critical to achieving that outcome.

To be clear, I voted to leave the EU, I want to leave the EU and I respect our country’s democratic process. I look forward to Parliament’s getting this agreement over the line. As I see it, this is a skeletal framework. Each and every one of us has the responsibility to put the flesh on the bones. The key points of leaving are met in the deal: free movement, the direct jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice, and the vast budget payments to the EU all end. We are leaving the common fisheries policy and the common agricultural policy. Critically, citizens’ rights will be protected both here in the UK and in the EU, which means that the benefits of healthcare, pensions and other important matters will be protected.

Most importantly, we will have the time, through the implementation or transition period, to adjust. Time will allow us—the people and businesses on both sides of the channel—to adjust to the new arrangements, but the period is limited to December 2020. For my constituency of Copeland, that time to adjust is essential for the nuclear industry. As we leave Euratom and move to a UK regime under the Office for Nuclear Regulation, the extra time afforded by the transition period will ensure that all the safeguards officers, procedures and equipment are in place, along with the bilateral agreements with other countries. Given the international and collaborative nature of the nuclear industry, that is vital. It is especially critical for Cumbria because 27,000 of the 87,000 people who work in the nuclear industry live in Cumbria and depend on that industry. Just about

every household in my constituency has a family member who works in or for a business that is connected with the nuclear industry. That is why I want the security that the withdrawal agreement brings.

The industrial strategy and nuclear sector deal contains much cause for optimism. For more than 60 years, Copeland has led the way, and it was the first place in the world to generate electricity for the grid when Calder Hall was opened in 1957. This Government are the first in a generation to construct a new nuclear power station at Hinkley Point, and I am determined that we will also get Moorside power station built in Copeland.

We have an undisputed need for more low-carbon electricity, and an undeniable, globally respected, safe nuclear capability in Copeland. I will do nothing to damage that, and everything I possibly can to grow that capability further. We must secure more research and development in advanced and small modular reactors. We must export more of our current decommissioning operations, and increase exports of skills, components, products and processes that are working well at Sellafield and being developed by our superb nuclear supply chain. Equally important is securing our farming industry, and I am concerned that extortionate tariffs would not help, but hinder the incredibly hard-working farmers and their businesses. The common agricultural policy will come to an end, to the delight of many Cumbrian farmers. Again, I want to do all I can to ensure that we deliver a UK farming policy that works for Cumbrian farmers and avoids damaging tariffs.

Our place in the world is based on a number of factors that I fear could be hindered, not helped, without this agreement. It is based on the number of top universities we have in this country, the creative industries, award-winning books and films in our language, our time zone, our national resolve, our military might, freedom for the great institutions and think tanks, and the legal and financial economy that has grown in this country. It is based on our road, rail, sea, air and digital connectivity. I will be supporting the agreement.

3.52 pm

**Eleanor Smith** (Wolverhampton South West) (Lab): I rise almost a month to the day since the original meaningful vote on the Brexit deal was suddenly called off by the Government. Since then, nothing has changed. No new documents have come forward, and no further clarification or revisions have been made. I cannot support the withdrawal agreement and political declaration of our future relationship with the EU because the deal does not protect workers’ rights or trade union legislation. The document I have seen, which describes what the future relationship between the UK and the EU will look like, is only 26 pages. Those pages contain a few meaningless phrases about future legislation. On protecting workers’ rights they state that

“the UK will consider aligning with Union rules in relevant areas”.

As a lifelong trade unionist, I must ask what kind of deal to protect workers that is. Why have negotiations only achieved a vague wish list of the so-called “high standards”? The only thing that seems clear and certain is that this deal will make the country poorer and severely affect areas such the Black Country.

[Eleanor Smith]

In the 2016 referendum, people did not vote to be worse off. The Attorney General has confirmed that this deal lacks safeguards to prevent UK employment rights from falling behind those of neighbouring EU countries. I am being asked to put on a blindfold and walk meekly into the Lobby, believing that the Government will guarantee the rights of working people, and that if I do not do that it will lead to a no-deal Brexit. It is unfair of the Prime Minister to seek to hold Parliament to ransom in that way. It means that working people have no way of knowing what the UK's future relationship with the EU will look like, and how it will impact on their lives.

The Government have no record of standing up for the rights of working people in the UK—indeed, many Tory MPs have spent years undermining them. The Cameron Tory Government tried to introduce an anti-trade union Bill to take away many of the unions' hard-won rights. The Government fought for years to defend the imposition of employment tribunal fees, which were scrapped only when the Supreme Court found them to be unlawful following legal action by the trade union Unison. Ministers are more likely to speak of a bonfire of red tape. The Secretary of State for International Trade, the right hon. Member for North Somerset (Dr Fox), wrote in 2012:

“To restore Britain's competitiveness we must begin by deregulating the labour market. Political objections must be overridden. It is too difficult to hire and fire and too expensive to take on new employees.”

The Prime Minister has refused to rule out scrapping the working time directive, the agency workers directive and the pregnant workers directive. All those are in the EU and currently protect UK workers. After the 2016 referendum, the trade union movement was willing to sit down with the Government to discuss its members' concerns, but the Prime Minister has failed to engage with and listen to trade unions and the millions of their members in this country who need a union to protect their working conditions and contracts.

We now have a deal that nobody wants. When article 50 was invoked, the Government should have called together the leaders of all the political parties in order to form a cross-party Brexit consensus to help in the negotiations with the EU. I understand that the Government have to rule, but this is a matter of such national significance—perhaps the most important event since the second world war—that it will affect our lives and those of generations to come. A strong leader would have reached out to politicians beyond their own party, rather than keeping it to a small clique within Government. Instead, we have a deal that satisfies nobody—neither leavers, nor remainers.

As politicians, we will be blamed for this mess, but the only people to blame are those who have been involved directly in the Brexit negotiations. It is for these reasons that this deal cannot command my support. If it cannot achieve the support of Parliament, the country will need to find a real alternative.

3.56 pm

**Mr Philip Dunne** (Ludlow) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my parliamentary neighbour, the hon. Member for Wolverhampton South West (Eleanor Smith). I would

like to focus my remarks on the rationale for the decision I have taken, which I believe to be in the best interests of my constituents and this country, on the vote next Tuesday.

I have received plenty of advice from constituents, as I am sure all hon. Members have, much of it contradictory, reflecting the division in the country since the referendum. Many have asked me to represent their views, which, given the range of views and the physical impossibility of being in both Division Lobbies at the same time, it is not possible to achieve. I stood on a manifesto in 2015 that pledged to respect the result of the referendum. I voted to remain in 2016, but 57% of my constituents voted to leave. I have accepted the referendum result, and indeed I stood on a manifesto in 2017 that pledged to do so. That is why I voted with the vast majority of Members of this House—498 to 114, with a majority of each of the Conservative, Labour and Democratic Unionist parties—to invoke article 50.

The Government have had the most complex negotiations to undertake of any Government since the second world war, as evidenced by the sheer length of the EU withdrawal agreement and the number of pieces of secondary legislation that the European Statutory Instruments Committee, on which I sit, is currently scrutinising. There have undoubtedly been many challenges presented by the EU and its 27 other members throughout the negotiations. On some of these we have prevailed, and on some we have not.

Although I would not have started the negotiations by accepting the EU framework for the negotiations in the way we did, I have accepted that leaving the EU after 43 years of membership, during which our laws, regulations and standards have become increasingly intertwined, will require a negotiated deal, and negotiation requires compromise. I spent 20-odd years negotiating as an adviser to companies around the world, so I know that every negotiation comes down to the last moments, when the final compromises have to be made. We are now at that point. The word “compromise” has been used across the Chamber today, and it was particularly well encapsulated by my right hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Richard Benyon), the right hon. Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) and the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann).

The reason why we are debating this issue so long after the invocation of article 50 is primarily its complexity, but coming a close second is the lack of consensus in the House, which is partly a result of the balance of arithmetic in the House following the 2017 election. We still do not have a consensus, which is why we have had to delay the debate. The only consensus in the House was on the decision to invoke article 50 in the first place.

We have heard from Conservative Members who have a strong tradition of seeking to leave the EU, and I respect their conviction and consistency of purpose. Some of them, including my right hon. Friend the Member for Maldon (Mr Whittingdale) earlier and my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Royston Smith) just now, have made it clear that they are willing to compromise and support an orderly withdrawal if the Irish backstop issue can be removed or time-limited. I hope the Government will find a way to give them satisfaction before we vote next Tuesday, but if not, I believe that a willingness to compromise among Members

from all parties is essential in order that we can do our duty as representatives of the people of this country and bring this matter to an orderly conclusion.

Opposition Members have told us that they will not support the deal because it does not reflect what they would like to see in a deal. Some have been straightforward in acknowledging that they wish to ignore the referendum and remain in the EU, but others have not, and they have not come up with any pragmatic suggestions as to what could be done to improve the deal. The official Opposition Front-Bench team has been consistent about one thing, and one thing only: it will not do anything at all to help, and will only try to bring about a general election, because that is its purpose. Opposition Front Benchers are not interested in compromise, whatever their warm words earlier. They have made no suggestions whatsoever on how to improve the deal.

The prospects are extremely alarming to those watching the debate from outside and for the countless businesses and constituents who are urging us to get on with it and provide some certainty to the nation about how we leave the EU in an orderly fashion. That is why, despite the deal's imperfections and my concerns about aspects of it, I shall support it in next week's vote. I will not support any proposal to have a second referendum, because that would be to deny completely the initial referendum, and it would perpetuate the division in this country that we can frankly no longer afford.

4.2 pm

**Mhairi Black** (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (SNP): When I started to write this speech, I truly did not know where to start, so I will try to explain my feelings and views on this madness as bluntly and simply as possible.

Since long before the ink had even dried on the text, the Prime Minister has been trying to create the narrative that it is a choice between her deal and no deal. But the Prime Minister quite clearly has other options beyond her deal and no deal—she could ask for an extension of article 50; she could keep us in the single market and the customs union; or she could take the choice back to the people—so to say that it is her deal or no deal is a piece of nonsense. She is failing to say to the public that she has deliberately manufactured things to appear that way, in a cynical attempt to save her own skin.

I will vote against the Prime Minister's deal, because of the simple fact that it is an appalling deal for my constituents. That is not just me looking at the deal and making a decision on their behalf: since the deal was announced, thousands of my constituents have written to me, and more than 97% of them have asked me to vote against it.

To explain my thoughts and feelings a wee bit better, I must go back a few years. I often hear Members from both sides of the House—I have heard this today—accuse the Scottish National party of not respecting the result of the 2014 referendum or the 2016 referendum. They are wrong. The key difference between us and those who criticise us is that we do not fear referendums. We do not fear democracy. We do not fear holding up our vision and hopes for a better Scotland to the electorate for them to at least consider. Most importantly, we are not afraid to learn lessons. My presence and that of my SNP colleagues in this Parliament serves as evidence that we do respect the outcome of referendums because when Scotland voted no to independence, we said, "Okay. We didn't convince you. That's fine. So long as

Scotland wants to stay in this British Union, we will respect that. But let us fight to make sure that we get everything that we were promised." If anything, it seems that it is the winners of both referendums who are terrified of being held to account for the promises they made.

As I mentioned earlier when I intervened on the Secretary of State, I went to the House of Commons Library, where the wonderful staff dug out this HM Government booklet that was sent out during the Scottish referendum. The Government, of course, were a Tory coalition—the Secretary of State corrected me—but Tory none the less. And I have to be honest about this booklet: there is a stoater on every page. Page 1 speaks of "All the advantages of the pound".

That is the same pound that had an 18-month low. Later, the booklet mentions "Safe savings and pensions". I wonder whether WASPI women would agree with that. It went on to state that there would be

"More support for public services",

which was followed by an austerity agenda. And then there is the quotation I mentioned earlier:

"As one of the EU's 'big four' nations, the UK is more able to protect Scottish interests in areas like agriculture and fisheries."

The last page reads:

"Together with England, Wales and Northern Ireland, Scotland has created one of the world's most successful families of nations."

Now, that is a legitimate point of view, but it is one that does not hold up to scrutiny. Call me biased, but this does not feel very successful right now. If you are an EU national, a nurse or a student, or if you are working on the minimum wage, I doubt this feels successful. If you are a lorry driver in Dover, I imagine it feels even less successful.

I believe in independence for Scotland for democratic, logical and moral reasons, but when Scotland voted no to independence, at least we came here for a genuine fresh start—to try to make this Union work better and find some compromise where possible. After all these promises and all the precious Union chat that is dished out by the British nationalists of this place, when Scotland votes to remain in the EU, it is cast aside as irrelevant because it was a UK-wide vote, where Scotland was treated as a region. The people of Scotland watched as our Scottish Government tried to make sensible suggestions and compromises with the UK Government with regards to Brexit, such as asking for continued Scottish membership of the single market and the customs union. This was not even considered.

If Unionist Members truly believe that Scotland should be subject to an English and Welsh EU result, they concede that we are not a family of nations and that, to Westminster, Scotland is no more than a province; or they could live up to their partnership of equals pater and recognise that the second largest nation in this family of nations has outright rejected leaving the EU, and show us the respect that we are due. Either way, this hypocritical doublespeak will not wash much longer with Scotland. As with most things on the Government's plate these days, time is running out. And to be honest, who knows how much longer Scotland is going to stick about?

4.8 pm

**Mark Pawsey** (Rugby) (Con): I shall support the Government on Tuesday because the withdrawal agreement delivers on the referendum while gaining control of our money, laws and borders. If people want to know what



[Mark Pawsey]

the UK is getting out of this agreement, they should look once again at the opening remarks of the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

Since the withdrawal agreement was announced, I have engaged with many of my constituents, from those who want to leave with no deal and cut all ties with the EU to those who were arguing for a second referendum. Of course, this agreement is not going to satisfy either of them. It is a negotiation, so it has to go between two parties. I have done enough negotiation in my career as a businessman to know that neither party gets everything they want out of a negotiation. Having said that, I recognise the concerns that have been expressed about the backstop, and I hope that my colleagues will be given some comfort on that issue in the coming days.

I also recognise the lack of detail in the political declaration because, of course, that is the next stage; that is what we come to once we accept the withdrawal agreement. Based on my business background and the evidence that I have heard from the business community as a member of the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee, I think this deal is right for our country.

Of course, the voice of business is important. Some of my constituents have told me that it is too loud and that big business is running the show, but I have to say to them, and to the Opposition, that when big business does well, workers do well. There are more people in jobs, there is more secure employment, people in work get more hours, and there are more promotion prospects. When business does well, pensioners do well, because its profits fund the pensions that people receive. When business does well, the economy does well, and generates the wealth to do all the things that we want Governments to do. It is therefore vital that the views of business should be listened to.

There are important voices from big business and from smaller businesses. Only today, I have heard from the Coventry and Warwickshire local enterprise partnership, which surveyed businesses across the region in December, and 60% of them argued that Brexit is negative. They are concerned about pricing uncertainties as a consequence of the value of the pound, reductions in sales, the administrative burden on exports, loss of confidence and delayed investment plans.

As a west midlands MP, I have particular concerns about the motor industry. Coventry is its historic home. The business declined due to issues in the '70s, but in recent years it has been resurgent. London Electric Vehicle Company in my constituency has built many of the electric vehicles that people are seeing around the streets of London, but regrettably—I hope this is not an early case of postponement of investment—it took a decision only yesterday to delay the introduction of the electric light commercial vehicle. We have seen tremendous improvements in Jaguar Land Rover under the ownership of Tata, but there has been more bad news on that today. Members will rightly point out that that is due to changes in the diesel legislation and a downturn in the Chinese market, but it is also linked to Brexit. In addition to the company itself, we must remember the 200,000 companies in the supply chain.

We have seen investment in the UK from Japanese companies. This morning, the Business Secretary talked on the radio about Margaret Thatcher's welcome to

Nissan in the north-east. In our evidence session in the BEIS Committee, the managing director of Toyota reminded us of why it was here. Margaret Thatcher said to the head of Toyota, "Come to the UK, where you can build cars as part of the European Union and export to the European Union as a free and open arrangement." If we do not accept this deal—if there is any danger of us crashing out—how are we going to attract that level of investment in the future? In fact, the Prime Minister of Japan is in the country today. He has spoken about the need for predictability and stability. I want to be able to say to him that Britain is the best place to set up and grow businesses.

The Committee heard from other manufacturing sectors. We heard from aerospace that the deal is not perfect, but the longer it takes to get certainty, the more likely it is that investment decisions will go against the UK. The food and drink sector spoke of real concerns. Business welcomes the language in the declaration but is bothered about business that would otherwise have come to the UK going overseas. Only yesterday, the chief executive of Rolls-Royce, which has a plant in my constituency, stated in a letter:

"I have been clear that a deal is better than no deal for Rolls-Royce, our customers, suppliers and employees. Agreement of the Government's deal will provide certainty which all businesses require and will ensure an orderly withdrawal from the European Union."

Getting the right deal for business is phenomenally important to the UK. I encourage my hon. Friends to bear that in mind. I also ask Opposition Members to think long and hard about the consequences for the businesses in their constituencies if, as a consequence of voting down the deal on Tuesday, we end up with no deal.

4.14 pm

**Mary Glendon** (North Tyneside) (Lab): It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Rugby (Mark Pawsey). Like many other Members, I have been contacted by hundreds of constituents in the last few weeks about the meaningful vote. The vast majority of those people, whether they voted to leave the EU or remain, have asked me to represent them by voting against the Prime Minister's withdrawal agreement, as they all agree on one thing: this is a bad deal.

I voted to remain in the EU because, among other things, my region is a net gainer from the EU, and our economy is heavily dependent on trade with Europe. However, 59.5% of voters in my constituency wanted to leave, and across the whole borough, which incorporates the Tynemouth constituency, 53.7% voted for Brexit. I was shocked and disappointed by the result, both locally and nationally, but I accepted it as a democratic result.

I know that the vast majority of voters I spoke to before and after the referendum all held very sincere views, whichever way they decided to vote. A number of voters in North Tyneside said that they voted to leave so that we could take back control of our borders, laws and finances, but during the referendum campaign, many voters on both sides told me of their concern about immigration and freedom of movement. Many realised the absolute need for EU workers across all roles in our economy in the north-east, including on our farms and even in the abattoir in my community. However, on the other side, there was grave local concern, because in recent years a number of employers have taken

advantage of the fact that they could employ EU workers on short-term contracts directly through employment agencies based outside the UK, undercutting the going rates of pay and bypassing local skilled workers in the process. I challenged those procedures with the employers, as they were fair neither to the EU workers, who were being cheated of pay, nor to our local workforce, who desperately needed these jobs.

Leave voters could not be swayed by the argument made by or to me on behalf of many businesses—large and small, each important to our local economy in creating work directly and via the supply chain—that the uncertainty of Brexit threatens their businesses and the local economy. It is estimated that 140,000 jobs in our region depend on trade with the EU. The North East England chamber of commerce has pointed out that the EU remains the region’s top export market, worth 57.5% of overall trade, or £1.8 billion, compared with 40% nationally.

The chamber’s third quarterly economic survey results for last year reported less international trade activity and cited Brexit uncertainty as the key reason, which resulted in a 6.75% downturn on the quarter and 0.35% on the year. The chamber’s survey for the last quarter of 2018 highlighted that, while scores for growth in domestic sales and a rebound in exports showed business performance and confidence improving towards the end of the year, “uncertainties and concerns surrounding Brexit, chiefly expressed in terms of future market conditions, demand shocks and increased costs are dampening many businesses’ confidence.”

It is a sad reflection that this deal goes nowhere to meeting Labour’s six tests, does not protect jobs, workers’ rights or environmental standards and gives no certainty of frictionless trade to our businesses. My constituents, whether leavers or remainers, have made it clear that this deal does not meet their hopes and expectations for our region’s future. I want the best for the people of North Tyneside and for the whole of the UK. I will support the views of my constituents and of those on my Front Bench and will therefore vote against this deal.

4.18 pm

**Robert Neill** (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): It is a privilege to speak in this debate, which is important and, to some degree, painful for me, because I voted to remain in the European Union in the 1975 referendum and in 2016. I have not changed my view. My constituency voted to remain, but this was a national poll, and I respect it. My duty, as I see it, is therefore to ensure that we leave the European Union but do so in a way that, as has been observed by many Members, recognises the narrowness of the result—something that works for those who voted to remain as well as those who voted to leave, and for the majority of my constituents. The margin therefore, as the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs observed, is not a mandate for a hard Brexit. It is, in the words of my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk), not a mandate for some Teflon-coated departure from the EU. I suggest to the House that it is a mandate for a managed, orderly and considered withdrawal that keeps close and important ties in our economic interests.

My manifesto, my personal message to my electors, was that I would respect the outcome of the referendum, but would do so in a way that protected their jobs, businesses and livelihoods. I will support the Prime

Minister’s deal for that very reason. It is the best opportunity and the best alternative we have to deliver that. No one else has put a viable alternative plan on the table. With every respect to Opposition Members, the suggestion that the Leader of the Opposition will provoke a general election and find anything even remotely better is risible to the point of being beyond parody. We have to get on with this deal.

For me, that means in particular dealing with arrangements for the financial services sector, which is critical to my economy. It is critical to the economy of the whole of the UK. About 11% of the economy is generated from financial services alone. We are an 80% services economy. We must get this right. Some 36% of my constituents work in financial and professional services. The total financial services sector contributes some £72 billion in tax revenue. Everyone I speak to in that sector—since I have been in this House, I have worked closely with the City of London, City UK and others—says to me, “We would have preferred to have remained, but with a transition period, above all, we can manage it.” Everyone in financial services, everyone in the whole of the services sector and beyond whom I speak to says, “The key thing is we must have transition. We cannot have a crash-out.” With nothing else on the table, this deal is the only appropriate way of avoiding that crash-out. It gives us time to negotiate the future arrangement. That is the really important thing: not just that we withdraw in an orderly fashion, but that we then have time to develop the key future relationship with our EU friends and neighbours, who are always going to remain very significant trading partners for us.

World trading patterns may well change and other parts of the world may become more significant, but the EU will always remain a very, very important partner for us. The truth is that trade deals elsewhere, as we all know, take time to develop. That is true, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex (Sir Nicholas Soames) observed, even with America and the EU, who are willing partners, never mind in other cases. Some emerging economies—India, China and others—have been particularly resistant to the liberalisation of their markets in services. Having a transitional period is therefore absolutely vital. That involves compromise. I have some issues about the backstop, but I think it is workable, as I said in my intervention on the Secretary of State. There are means whereby we could seek future clarification on the legal definition of “temporary” within the protocol. As has been observed, compromise is not a bad thing in politics. In fact, we should be positively saying more often that compromise is a mature thing. It is a mark of mature politics and that is what the Prime Minister has sought to achieve.

Throughout my constituency, people come up to me and say the deal is not everything they wanted, whichever side they were on, but it keeps the show on the road in terms of the economy. They say that it enables them to develop our new relationship in a sensible way. The Prime Minister deserves credit for working hard to try to get it through. They say, “Do your best to back her.” That is what I will seek to do.

If this deal were to fail, the worst possible result would be to leave without a deal. The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, who I am delighted to see in his place, is right to observe that were that to be the case, it is important that this House and Parliament be active participants in deciding the way in

[Robert Neill]

which we go forward. Even better would be to remove that uncertainty for businesses—one constituent of mine says that that is pressing in terms of his own firm's viability—at the earliest opportunity, vote for the deal and then get to work moving forward. The onus is on this House. If we fail in that regard, all other options perhaps do have to be considered, and we might have to go back and seek the advice of our electors. I do not want to do that, because that would be a failure of maturity and judgment in this House. Taking back control means us stepping up to the mark and taking a decision. In my book, that means supporting the Prime Minister's deal.

4.24 pm

**Debbie Abrahams** (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): My constituency voted in 2016 to leave the EU. Although I voted to remain, as a democrat, I believe that it was right to accept the will of the people, and so I voted to trigger article 50 in March 2017. I believe, however, as a democrat and a politician who uses evidence in their decision making, that it is not only my right but my duty as an MP to consider new evidence as it becomes available. That is how a democracy should work. The new evidence I am talking about is the draft withdrawal agreement and political declaration, evidence from my constituents and expert analysis, and I would like to take each in turn.

To be where we are, two and a half years after the EU referendum, following a month in which absolutely nothing has happened, is a shocking indictment of this Government. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) spelt out the situation yesterday: months of torpor, the Government, with their strategy and their red lines, digging themselves into a hole they cannot get out of, and now, unfortunately, this appalling deal. I have gone through the nearly 600 pages that amount to the withdrawal agreement. It covers very little other than the backstop agreement, the rights of EU citizens, how much the UK has agreed to pay the EU and the transitional arrangements. It is clear that we will become a rule taker, not a rule maker. How on earth is this taking back control?

On so many levels, too numerous to mention, we will lose out. As Lord Kerr of Kinlochard said in the other place last month, the political declaration is a blindfold Brexit and a gangplank to the unknown. It is nothing more than a non-binding, meaningless wish list that will do nothing to bring the certainty that our businesses, economy and people need. Our future relationship with the EU beyond 2020 still has to be negotiated.

My constituents, to whom I have been listening very closely, are growing more and more concerned. There is evidence, not just from those who have been contacting me but from those I have been meeting regularly in my door knocking and at my surgeries, and evidence also from recent polls, that their views are shifting. There is also the evidence from data and expert analysis. I know some people do not like using experts, but this is a time when we really should value them, as I think we are doing, given the experts on the Benches over there.

On this expert analysis, I want to cover two aspects in particular. The first is the evidence of the unlawful activities of the Vote Leave campaign and the second is

the evidence from recent economic analyses. We cannot ignore the fact that the Vote Leave campaign was recently found guilty of significant breaches in spending. In addition, there is evidence of potentially illicit involvement in their campaign by a foreign power, in both the funding and the spreading of propaganda and disinformation during the referendum. The Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee report in the summer exposed this and was most compelling. I have argued since that there was enough evidence to start an investigation.

The second—and for me key—aspect is the impact on the economy. We already have significant poverty and inequality across the UK. Whatever analysis we take, from the Bank of England, the National Institute of Economic and Social Research, the Treasury and so on, all exit scenarios show that the economy will shrink. All show no deal as disastrous, a “close deal” or Chequers-style deal almost the same, and Norway somewhere in the middle. There is further evidence from the Institute for Fiscal Studies that certain sectors will be particularly affected and that we will be poorer as individuals. We really should be referring to this.

The impact of reduced growth on our public finances—on public spending and services—will be significant. It is estimated that by 2023, we will be borrowing £15 billion a year more as a result of leaving the EU. This is at the same time as spending demands—for examples, for pensions and social care—will be increasing. Our NHS is already in crisis. How will this affect the resources it needs? We already know that the £350 million a week for the NHS was a lie. Social care is also in crisis. As a result, there were 50,000 emergency admissions of people with dementia in 2017. How much more will that figure be as a result of Brexit and what will happen with a dwindling pot for universal credit? In the last Budget, the Government restored only half of what they cut in 2015.

For all the reasons that I have set out, I cannot support the Government's motion and I will vote against the deal. I will also support a vote of no confidence, if one is tabled. If not, or if it fails, I urge the Government and colleagues to consider a citizens' assembly as a way forward. Such assemblies have been used in various countries as democratic circuit breakers on contentious and complex issues. A citizens' assembly could detoxify Brexit and help to restore confidence in politics as a form of democratic renewal. It could be a precursor to a new people's referendum, and could even consider the questions for such a referendum. I hope that all this will mean that we need to extend article 50. I know that that is anathema to many, but I think it is a way forward.

4.30 pm

**Scott Mann** (North Cornwall) (Con): When we relinquished responsibility to the British people on 23 June 2016, the people, in the largest democratic exercise in this nation's history, answered. They bravely rejected the easiest option, and now we, as legislators, must be brave, too. The great British resolve demonstrated, in a single act—an act that made me proud to be British—a will to self-govern and to push back against further integration. The British people did so not because of some fear of migrants, as some would have us believe, but in the belief and hope that our nation of Great Britain and Northern Ireland could unshackle itself and once again stride out into the world.



The withdrawal agreement and the deal represent a failure to truly comprehend the scale of the disfranchisement felt by many working people. For some, leaving the EU is not a priority, but the Government have misjudged the resolve of those who care deeply about it, and the instruction that they have given. The Prime Minister and the negotiators staked all their chips on immigration and fundamentally misunderstood the fact that the vote to leave was about more than that. It was an expression of self-will and self-government.

If we fail to listen to those concerns, we will make the gravest of errors. We will rightly be judged by our actions in the coming days, and I will not put my name to something that sells the UK short. Like many of my colleagues in this House, I have constituents who have never voted before but who saw the opportunity to take part in an historic democratic event. That huge but silent group of people felt that the systems and arrangements within the EU no longer worked for them, and they saw the referendum as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to use their voice for change. I will not ignore them.

Before I move on to the withdrawal agreement, I will raise some specific concerns about the implementation period. The north Cornwall sea is a productive mixed fishery, which has a number of fish that are known as choke species. Early next year, the discard ban will come into effect, and our Cornish boats will be tied up when they reach their quota limits, through no fault of their own.

The withdrawal agreement allows for the implementation period to be extended. Any extension would be devastating to an industry that has suffered for years under the deeply unpopular common fisheries policy. It would be impossible for me to ask fishermen in my constituency to consider signing up to that when they have been under a 40-year stranglehold from Brussels. They need access and improvements to their rights now, not in two years' time. Any extension of the implementation period would be completely unacceptable. We know where we want to get to on fisheries but in the 585-page withdrawal agreement there are more pages devoted to the pension rights of EU civil servants than there are to fisheries. That has not gone unnoticed in places such as Cornwall.

I cannot support the backstop set out in the withdrawal agreement. No independent country could or should allow trade policy to be set by a third party. Far from offering control, the backstop would mean that the UK ceded control on an unprecedented scale. No businessperson would enter into a contract without a break clause or review date. No member of the public would enter into a mobile phone contract without a break clause or end date, in which the conditions could be changed while the contract was in place. Signing up to the backstop would place a sword of Damocles over this Parliament and Parliaments to come.

In short, it is my view that the backstop, if it is implemented, will be used as a stick with which to beat the UK and force us to accept whatever terms the EU wants to trade on. How can we return to the British people two and a half years since they gave us an instruction and offer them a relationship worse than the one we are already in? We can leave the EU by triggering article 50, but we will have no way of exiting the backstop.

President Macron has already made it clear that he wishes to exchange fisheries access for trade. The UK Government should not be in that position. I am told

that if we have not reached a deal by the end of the implementation period, we will have a choice between extending the transition period and entering the backstop. That is like picking a favourite Kray twin. I am not in the business of doing that, and it is not what Governments in this country should be doing.

I have heard people say, "Let's put this issue to bed. Let's vote for this withdrawal agreement and get on with it." If we vote for this deal, far from solving this issue for a generation, we will extend the implementation period, lose our sovereignty and enter a backstop with an arbitration panel. We will be talking about this issue for 10 years. People will rightly ask, "What's your plan? What should the Government do?" We should mandate staged payments of our divorce bill to ensure we get a better trade outcome, we should put an end date on the implementation period, and we should either completely remove the backstop or, at the very least, time-limit it.

This is now a matter of trust. Do we trust the EU to follow through with delivering a trade deal after the Government have burnt through all their leverage? Do we trust the EU not to place us in a backstop we cannot get out of? These issues are too important to leave to trust alone; they must be made conditional in the legally binding text of the withdrawal agreement. It is a simple fact that, at this time of division in Parliament and the country, the British people need us to deliver on the specific mandate they gave us back in 2016.

4.36 pm

**Emma Reynolds** (Wolverhampton North East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Scott Mann). I, too, will vote against the deal next week, but probably for different reasons.

Earlier this week, more than 100 Back Benchers from across the political divide met the Prime Minister to stress the economic self-harm that would be inflicted by a no-deal Brexit—a point the Business Secretary made today and earlier this week. I was of course grateful for the Prime Minister's time, but I sat there thinking, "Could things have turned out differently if this meeting had taken place two years ago?" If she had reached out to Labour, the SNP, the Liberal Democrats and others instead of spending all that time negotiating with her party and giving too much ground to the extreme Brexiters, who always put ideology before people's jobs and livelihoods, we might be in a very different place.

That, of course, would have involved compromise on all sides, not just in the Conservative party, and it certainly would not have pleased the right-wing Eurosceptics on the Tory Benches, but the Prime Minister might have brought on side Members from other parties. I believe, for example, that there is a majority in the House for continued membership of the customs union, because most Members understand the importance to our economy of having no delays at the UK-EU border and of just-in-time manufacturing. However, due to the Government's lack of cross-party working, she faces pretty certain defeat next week.

It was totally irresponsible to delay the vote in December and run down the clock. The Government have wasted a month seeking reassurances on the Northern Ireland backstop that have yet to materialise, but they have done nothing to address the concerns of hon. Members from different parties about the economic impact of the deal.

[Emma Reynolds]

Businesses tell us that the lack of certainty is already leading them to decide either to invest elsewhere or to hold off investing in the UK. The delay has also meant an eye-watering amount being spent on planning for no deal—an eventuality that the Prime Minister and most of her Cabinet in reality will not countenance. Just think of all the things we could have done with that money to improve people's lives—preventing homelessness and rough sleeping; hiring extra doctors, nurses and teachers; and putting more police officers on our streets.

The Government like to lecture us about acting in the national interest, but I am afraid they have put party interest before the national interest at every turn. Now they are trying to blackmail us into voting for this deal or crashing out without a deal. I am sorry, but it will not wash. I cannot, in all conscience, vote for a deal that will make my constituents poorer and the economy smaller. I cannot remember a time in British history when the Prime Minister and the Chancellor recommended a course of action that they knew would make people worse off—and that is according to their own economic analysis.

There is a simple reason the Government's deal does not please either those who voted remain, such as me, or those who voted leave, as we heard from the hon. Member for North Cornwall. On the one hand we lose sovereignty, control and our seat at the table; on the other, the deal is worse for our economy than the current arrangements. The Government made a huge mistake very early in the negotiations by laying down the red lines that we must leave the customs union and the single market. They simply have not levelled with the British public.

Exciting as they may sound, trade deals with countries around the world, even if negotiated quickly and in our favour—which is by no means certain; look at the President of the United States—would not make up for the trade that could be lost with the EU, our biggest trade partner. In trade, geography matters. As business has made clear, it is not just a no-deal Brexit that would be catastrophic. Anything short of staying in the customs union would threaten just-in-time manufacturing in, for instance, the aerospace and automotive industries, and the integrated supply chains that have built up over so many years.

The other huge failing of the Government is that they have not addressed the causes of Brexit. They have done nothing to bring our divided country back together. They have done nothing to address the sense of loss in many of the communities, including those in my constituency, that voted for change. They have done nothing to tackle the regional inequalities that drove the Brexit vote.

The Government have refused to come up with a plan B to be implemented if the deal fails to win a majority next week. However, talking to colleagues on both sides of the House, I sense that there is a cross-party mood in favour of finding a way forward, and coming together to find an alternative. I am not sure exactly what that is yet—[*Laughter.*] Conservative Members may laugh, but I think that much more cross-party work is going on between Back Benchers than anything the Government have done.

We must have a chance to consider all the options, which include going back to the people; the so-called Norway-plus arrangement, in which we would stay in the single market and the customs union; and an extension of article 50. If the Government will not come up with a plan B, it is incumbent on us to do so, because the prosperity of our constituents depends on it.

4.42 pm

**David Duguid** (Banff and Buchan) (Con): I rise to speak in this important debate as the Member of Parliament for arguably the most pro-Brexit constituency in Scotland: 54% of my constituents voted leave. Although I voted remain—only just, after much soul-searching—and continue to respect the views of those who voted remain and would still prefer to remain, I firmly believe that we in the House have a duty to carry out what the majority in Banff and Buchan, and indeed in the UK as a whole, voted for in the 2016 referendum.

In the 2017 general election, 56% of voters in Scotland, and 85% across the United Kingdom, voted for parties that were committed to delivering on the democratic will of the British people—to leave the EU. The people of the United Kingdom have given us a clear mandate to leave the EU, and leaving the EU is precisely what the withdrawal agreement delivers.

When I publicly declared my support for this deal, I was immediately confronted by social media ideologues saying, “Ah, but have you actually read the agreement?” And yes, I had read the agreement. In fact, I am supporting it precisely because, when we look at it as a whole rather than taking single lines of text out of context, which usually happens on social media, it is clear that it delivers what the British people voted for.

Some argue that this agreement is not the best deal that could have been made with the EU. Perhaps it could be said, with the benefit of hindsight, that certain aspects might have been negotiated differently, but that is in the nature of negotiations. The outcome is rarely perfect, and, as other Members have pointed out, there will always be some compromise. That said, this agreement—an agreement that is available to us now to facilitate a pragmatic transition towards the opportunities that Brexit presents—will deliver on the result of the 2016 referendum, bringing an end to freedom of movement, introducing an ability to sign trade deals with others, bringing an end to vast annual contributions to the EU budget, and bringing an end to the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice.

We will be out of the one-size-fits-none common agricultural policy, allowing us to develop our own fit-for-purpose agricultural frameworks and policies, working with devolved Administrations to develop a system that works in the interests of farmers and rural communities. Only today, we all, as Members of Parliament, received letters from the four different presidents of the farmers unions across the UK illustrating the risks identified by farmers from a no-deal situation.

It will come as no surprise to Members that I also mention that we will be out of the common fisheries policy—a “big, fat opportunity”, as described just yesterday by Bertie Armstrong, chief executive of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation. It is an opportunity for fishing communities such as those in my constituency.

Since being elected last year, I have been consistent in my fight to get the best possible Brexit deal for the fisheries sector. In that time, the Government have confirmed that we will be leaving the CFP when we leave the EU and will become an independent coastal state like Norway, Iceland and even the Faroe Islands. I have pushed for assurances that we must not cave in to EU demands that any future trade agreement be tied to continued free access to our waters. Despite the best efforts of Michel Barnier, President Macron and the fishing nations of the EU, there is nothing in this agreement that provides this free access to them. We have seen the anger and disappointment shown by EU fishermen precisely because this withdrawal agreement does not deliver the continued free access that their negotiating team promised.

Despite what is often asserted by politicians on the Opposition Benches, this withdrawal agreement does not represent a betrayal of Scottish fishermen. In fact, I find it extremely strange that the SNP and others are so keen to declare such a poor outcome for our fishermen when the future fisheries agreement has yet to be agreed. The fishing industry can see through the doom-mongering. In fact, during a recent meeting I had with local representatives of the fishing industry, I was asked by one of the processing sector's key leaders in my area to pass on a message to my colleagues across the House. That message is to stop using fishing as an excuse not to accept this deal.

Yesterday, in evidence given to the Scottish Affairs Committee, the Scottish Fishermen's Federation, Scottish Seafood Association and National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations stated their support for the withdrawal agreement. Like them, I am supporting this agreement as the best means to move towards the best possible Brexit outcome. While I recognise that it is not perfect, we must not let perfect be the enemy of the good. I believe that this agreement is better than no deal and certainly better than no Brexit. This agreement delivers on the democratic will of the British people to leave the EU while delivering an outcome in the national interest.

Many people have expressed concern about the backstop. Although I share many of those concerns, such as the lack of a unilateral mechanism for the UK to leave such an arrangement, I have made my decision on a balance of risk. The backstop would come into effect if the UK and the EU had not agreed a solution to the Northern Ireland border within the implementation period. Neither the UK nor the EU has a desire for the backstop to be enforced, and maximum focus should be on achieving the agreement on the future economic partnership by July 2020.

On top of the moves this Government have made in providing reassurances to the fisheries sector—that we are to leave the CFP and become an independent coastal state, and that there will be no trading off of access to our waters for favourable trade deals—I am sure Ministers will forgive me for reminding them that even after we leave the EU I will continue to campaign for the support of and investment in an industry that is so critical to our coastal communities.

People in Banff and Buchan voted to leave the EU because, as well as the other benefits mentioned by me and others in this debate, Brexit presents such a great

opportunity for our fishing industry and our communities, and this deal is a good first step towards making those opportunities a reality.

4.48 pm

**Angela Smith** (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): I rise to speak as someone who voted remain in the 2016 referendum and I am astonished to find today's debate has been dominated by the use of the word "compromise", not because I do not agree with compromise but because for two and a half years we have had no sign of compromise, particularly from the Prime Minister—no attempt to reach out across the House, no attempt even to reach out across the Benches of her own party. So I am astonished suddenly to find, two and a half years later, that the deal on the table—the withdrawal agreement and the political declaration—is being presented to us and we are suddenly being told that we have to compromise. It seems to me that compromise has any meaning to the Prime Minister only when it relates to her deal and is on her terms.

I stand as somebody who did not vote for the article 50 Bill. As a result, I was accused in the media and by hard-line Brexiteers of being a traitor, but actually the reason I did not vote for the Bill was that I did not think that enough time had been given to building the necessary consensus across the House to make the process work. I believe that those of us who took that line have been proved correct.

I have repeatedly voted for amendments to legislation that want to deliver a deal that keeps the United Kingdom in the single market and the customs union. I am one of perhaps only 100 MPs who have done that repeatedly as legislation on Brexit has gone through the House. On every occasion, we were told that we were traitors to the cause of Brexit and denying the will of the people, but those votes were an attempt to compromise and to arrive at consensus on the best way forward, in the national interest and in line with the vote that was delivered in 2016.

Now, my colleagues and I on the remain side who do not like this deal are suddenly being told that we are on the extremes of the debate. There is nothing extreme about wanting to stay part of the largest trading bloc in the world, and there is nothing wrong or extreme about voting against a deal because it promises to make the country poorer.

The Prime Minister drew Brexiteer red lines around her negotiations, and because of that the deal before us includes a political declaration that gives no clear indication of the way forward for the long-term trading relationship. That means that if we get a new Prime Minister or another Brexit Minister in six months' time, there will be no guarantee that we will not end up with a hard Brexit of the kind that could take about 7.6% off GDP. This is a blind Brexit, and it is impossible to listen to the language of compromise and to go along with it on the basis of a political declaration that gives us no clear shape for the way forward.

The problem is that the Prime Minister's approach to the negotiations has effectively boxed the Government into a corner, with nowhere else to go. Parliament must not be intimidated or threatened. MPs who genuinely believe—not because of their ideology but because of a genuine belief—that the closest possible relationship



[Angela Smith]

with the European Union is the right way to go must be given the right to vote against this deal without threats or intimidation. That is really important.

If Parliament decides next week not to support the withdrawal agreement and the political declaration, it is the responsibility of the Government, not Parliament, to present their plan B. In that context, it will be incumbent on the Government to start talking seriously to Members of Parliament on both sides of the House to establish the way forward.

My feeling, however, is that there will be no consensus, because of the Prime Minister's approach, which has driven the Government into a corner, and because of her Brexiteer red lines. We are going to be in an impasse, and on that basis, the only way forward is to go back to the people for a people's vote. Colleagues say that that denies the will of the people, but we now know what leave looks like. Two years ago, at the time of the referendum, we did not know that. We were presented with fantasy promises about what leave would look like, none of which has been delivered. The people therefore have the right to have the final say and to give their informed consent on whether this agreement should form the basis of our future relationship with Europe.

I say to those on the Government Front Bench that I will be voting against the agreement next week, but if, before the vote next Tuesday, the Prime Minister were to offer a people's vote in the form of a final-say referendum, I would seriously consider voting for the motion on the basis of an amendment that would give us the referendum we are looking for. I do not think that the Government will do that, but it will be on the Prime Minister's and the Government's heads if they refuse to listen to the views of people in this House and refuse to understand that the people of this country want a final say. The polls are telling us that, and it is for this Parliament to listen to the people and go back to the people.

4.54 pm

**Victoria Prentis** (Banbury) (Con): I was brought up to believe strongly that the EU was a force for peace and prosperity. My maternal grandmother, whose parents had been badly affected in two world wars, is still a great believer in the European Union. My father has spent his career embedding British values in European projects. I am an Erasmus scholar, and I used to work for the Christian Democratic Union of Germany. I am also a linguist of sorts, although my daughter did say the other day, "Mummy, you think you speak Italian. Sadly, nobody else agrees." I cut my political teeth in the events leading up to 1989, when students from around the EU acted together to overcome communism, which was really exciting for an 18-year-old.

So, I was a remainer, but stronger by far than my respect for the EU is my love for this nation, for our institutions, for our hard work, for the rule of law, and for the common law, in which I have spent my whole career working. I believe in our flexible—if I can cheekily say that to you, Mr Speaker—but stable constitution, and in a robust democracy that has endured for centuries, and that is why I cannot support a second referendum.

I wonder whether my European Research Group colleagues have ever read to the end of the fabulous leaflet that was delivered to all households before the

2016 referendum. Colleagues might remember it, but I bet my ERG colleagues never got to the page near the back, which reads:

"This is your decision. The Government will implement what you decide."

The back page says, in bold, that

"The EU referendum is a once in a generation decision."

We must do this.

Colleagues will realise that this is a considerable compromise—to use the word of the moment—for me. It is one that I will make because I respect the decision of my constituents and of others across the nation who voted to leave, but I say to colleagues—particularly fellow Conservative Members—who propose to vote against the withdrawal agreement that they must compromise, too. I politely and respectfully say to Opposition Members, respecting much of what the hon. Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith) just said, that it is ridiculous to think that they could negotiate a better deal from where we are now.

The Prime Minister, for whom I have considerable respect, and thousands of civil servants, for whom I also have considerable respect, have spent two and a half years working hard to get this agreement. It has tariffs at zero. It does quite a lot—not everything we want, but quite a lot—for citizens' rights. There is clearly a lot more work to do, but it is a fair start, and it is where we are at this minute. I say to Conservative Members that there is a real risk that those who want a harder Brexit will end up with no Brexit at all. As a democrat, I do not believe that that would be the right outcome—although let me say that if there is a second referendum, I will campaign with every fibre of my being. Let us hope that rabbits can be pulled out of the hat in the next week.

**Chris Bryant:** We don't want rabbits.

**Victoria Prentis:** The hon. Gentleman must remember that I am a keeper of ferrets.

Today's debate has been completely different from the debate before Christmas, during which I set out sensibly—without talking about ferrets—the views of the people and businesses in my constituency. I love the EU, and I love the UK more than the EU, but I love Banbury much more than both. I ask all Members, setting aside both ideology and pride for a minute, if they can, to think about their constituents and the jobs that will be at risk if we head for a no-deal Brexit, which would be a complete disaster. Could we please unite around this deal, which is frankly the only one on the table? Together—I agreed with some of what the hon. Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge said about working together—we could then start setting out a positive vision for a global Britain. Let us vote for this deal and move on.

5 pm

**Stewart Malcolm McDonald** (Glasgow South) (SNP): In his denunciation of Stalinism from exile in Paris in 1951, the Polish poet and diplomat, Czeslaw Milosz, wrote in his seminal book "The Captive Mind":

"Men will clutch at illusions when they have nothing else to hold to."

He was, of course, admonishing his fellow citizens who had sought to convince themselves that any progress

was to come from the road to servitude that had been planned for eastern Europe in the wake of two world wars.

As we reflect today on the Herculean tyranny that engulfed the people of Europe in the form of gulags, gas chambers and a wall in Berlin, it is surely right that we ask ourselves whether we really want to embark on the road the Government are asking us to take next week. The Government are asking Parliament to clutch at their illusions. As we consider a document that seeks to sever our membership of the Union of Europe, we should remind ourselves time and again of what that great peace project was born from.

As Europe stood at the gates of hell, as it did for years, great leaders across the continent pulled it back and authored the fragile but imperfect peace that millions of us enjoy today. Those of us who believe in that peace should defend it and guard it with jealousy. After centuries of war among our people, a pan-European social, diplomatic and economic architecture, underpinned by rules, reason and a desire to keep the peace, is what our forefathers gifted to us.

UK citizens, not least in Scotland, have been among the largest beneficiaries and most enthusiastic participants. Just look at the rhapsodic uptake of the freedom of movement. Where once the skies and waters of Europe were filled with warring air forces and navies, now our skies are filled with innumerable airlines packed with people. Our waters and skies were once the scenes of war, and now there is free movement across a market of 500 million people.

Gone are the days of tyranny, war and walls. Instead, a new easyJet generation have had their hearts and minds opened to the continent. We have all been made immeasurably richer by the ability to move around the continent, driven by a desire to do commerce, exchange ideas, experience new cultures and share our own. Surely free movement is an unparalleled triumph of democracy.

Look at what opening up the nations of Europe, and all the advancements of humankind that followed, has done for Europe. Look at what it has done for countries that were once satellite states of the Soviet Union or that lived under one of Europe's assorted dictatorships. It has transformed nations and economies. Where once stood communism and Nazism, there now stand strong democracies across the continent with a free press, an open economy and civil society.

Freedom of movement is quite literally the living embodiment of the freedom that wars have been fought over, yet here we have a Government presenting the ending of that diplomatic achievement as some kind of gain. Only a fool could think so. Only the historically illiterate could champion the ending of the freedom of movement.

In my constituency there are just under 1,500 EU nationals in active employment, with many more studying or living in retirement. I cannot, in all good conscience, return and tell them that I have voted to end the very right that has allowed them to come here and, worse, that they will have to pay £65—essentially a tax on foreigners—and go through a registration process, all to enjoy the rights that they currently enjoy and have enjoyed for decades.

I foresee Scotland regaining her independence, which I want with every fibre of my being. I believe that the nations of the UK will always be the friendliest of

neighbours, looking out for each other and looking out for each other's interests in the different forums that underpin the international rules around the world.

**James Cartledge:** Which currency would that independent Scotland use?

**Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** I will confine my remarks to the issue at hand.

The current constitutional arrangement forbids Scotland from interacting on an equal footing either with our neighbours in the rest of the UK or, indeed, with the other nations of the European Union. We in Scotland can see it every day, whether the hon. Gentleman likes it or not—we see the cost to Scotland of not being an independent country and member of the European Union. Instead, we are locked in a Union that has little appetite to take Scotland's interests into account. Nobody is buying the empty platitudes of the “plucky Brits” that once struck a chord at home and abroad. This is the stuff of white noise and it makes us a laughing stock in the capitals of Europe.

I do not want this miserable deal imposed on Scotland, but I also do not want it imposed on the people of the rest of the United Kingdom. It is solipsistic; it is isolationist; and at times it is even capricious—I want nothing to do with it. The deal puts us on a devastating path, as the security landscape across the continent and the wider world is ever more complex. So I will not vote for a deal that discards our security needs—needs that the Government fail to take seriously.

The day when we were originally due to vote on the deal, 11 December, marked five years since the then Yanukovich Government in Ukraine opened fire on young protesters in Maidan Square who wanted to join the European Union. How perverse that this sorry Government would ask us to vote to leave that European Union on the day that marked five years from when the so-called “heavenly hundred” were killed by their own Government for wishing to join the European Union.

I say this to progressives around the UK: Scotland has stood by you since Brexit was voted for in 2016. When Scotland finally—finally—regains its independence and seeks to join the European Union as an independent member state, I say to our progressive friends around the UK: just as we stood by you, we want you to stand with us.

5.6 pm

**Chris Green (Bolton West) (Con):** The hon. Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald) has made a superb speech. I want to pick up his statement that free movement is very important, and that the economy is very important. I would say that it is more the case that it is free markets that have enabled people to move around the European Union and to go on holidays to other European Union countries. That has really broken down barriers. Also, on the military side of things, NATO has been an incredibly important part of what has kept us together and has brought us peace in our time.

In terms of the debate we are now having, there is a huge question of trust in our democracy and, if we get this wrong, it can damage our democracy. I believe that part of the debate that we have been having has been undermining people's recognition of our democracy.

[Chris Green]

The referendum was not an opinion poll that people were asked to participate in. It was an instruction from the country to leave the European Union, and it must be seen as such. There are different ways of interpreting that instruction, but I do wonder about some of the things that people say about the referendum.

Some people talk about the influences on the British people during the campaign—they claim that Russia had an influence. Some people allege that the electorate were ignorant or not sufficiently informed. Some of that rhetoric is pretty disappointing. My view is that, in the polling booth, the vast majority of people were responding to their lived experience within the European Union over a period of years or decades. The importance of free markets has just been highlighted. We joined the Common Market. Over a period of years we saw it transform into the EEC, then the EC, then the EU, and now we are on the verge of creating a united states of Europe. We can see the External Action Service. We can see the diplomatic and foreign service side of the European Union. We can see the developing European Union military. We can see these things happening. We can see that, with ever-closer union, there is a track that the European Union is on, and it is a question of whether we go quickly or slowly. We recognise that we are on that track into ever-closer union, so we must decide whether to continue along that track or leave. The British people could see where we came from, where we are and where we are going, and, having seen that clearly, chose to leave.

I believe that the withdrawal agreement will be defeated on Tuesday; there is overwhelming opposition to it, which is not to say that there is any particular support for any other solution. I am very concerned that this defeat will be seen as an opportunity to extend article 50, although we know that the European Union most effectively concludes negotiations towards the end—the last week, day or hour. The defeat might even be seen as an opportunity to cancel article 50, have a fundamental renegotiation and go for the Norway option, perhaps. We have been in this process for well over two years. Can we really tell the British people that we ought to start again and seek a brand new option?

I am even more concerned about having a second referendum; actually, precedent suggests that the time-scale for EU referendums is once in every 41 years. The British people have given their instruction to Parliament. If we disregard the vote, saying that the people were ignorant or not sufficiently well informed by their betters, that will be incredibly damaging to our democracy. We cannot and should not do that. Why would people bother to vote again if this vote was so easily dismissed?

Those who demand a “good, well informed” referendum often give no answer to the issue of what the question would be. From what I can see, there would be three options. Remain would definitely be on the ballot paper, even though it was rejected decisively first time around. A World Trade Organisation-rules Brexit would probably also be on it, as would the Prime Minister’s withdrawal agreement. In that referendum, the Brexit withdrawal agreement and WTO options could get 33% of the vote each, while remain could get 34% and so win. That result would be considered decisive. We do not know

where we will end up if we go down the route of having an additional referendum. We should be cautious about being so dismissive.

I believe that we can unite the British people. Their understanding of leave is fairly clear already—most people would understand Brexit to mean taking back control of our money, borders, laws and trade. Most people also want more direct democracy—not referendums, but in terms of voting for the Member of Parliament who makes the decisions.

5.13 pm

**Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods** (City of Durham) (Lab): It is nothing short of a tragedy that today we are discussing this totally inadequate deal at the 11th hour, with the threat of “this deal or no deal” still being exercised by the Government, despite there being no majority in the House for no deal. It did not have to be this way.

As many others have said today, the Prime Minister should have reached out across the House to secure a cross-party agreement that we and the country could coalesce around. Instead, she pandered to her own Brexiteers and set ridiculous red lines, which is why I am voting against the agreement. It rules out a permanent customs union with a British say; it does not deliver a good deal on services; it would limit access for British businesses to vital EU markets; and it does not sufficiently guarantee workers’ rights or consumer or environmental protections. There are no guarantees that equivalent arrangements with EU programmes and agencies will survive the Brexit process. There is also a lack of clarity about our security arrangements and what will happen in Northern Ireland. Indeed, the political declaration is so big and conditional that I am surprised any Member could vote for this deal. I cannot understand what they think they are voting for.

I want to concentrate on four areas regarding why I think this is a bad deal, and why leaving the EU is not good for my constituents. First, as others have said, it will make my constituents poorer. The North East England chamber of commerce—not a bunch of remoaners—say that more than half its members believe that leaving the EU will have a negative impact on their company. Treasury analysis from 28 November shows that the north-east will be worse off after Brexit, with a GDP reduction of between 3% and a massive 16%, and with pharmaceutical and automotive industries most at risk. The loss of funding from the European Regional Development Fund for infrastructure and skills development will be a huge blow to the region, and as yet the Government have given no guarantees that the Prosperity Fund will replace that funding for the north-east.

The second issue is university funding. It is no coincidence that the previous two higher education Ministers resigned their positions, because they know this deal is bad for our universities. Universities UK has been clear about what is needed from the Government in terms of guaranteeing access to the EU’s research and innovation programmes and research networks, yet what we see in the political declaration is very vague language indeed:

“The parties will explore the participation of the United Kingdom in the European research infrastructure consortium”.

That is no guarantee whatsoever. The third reason is that the EU provides strong policies that seek to protect our natural environment, heritage, rights at work, and



helps us to tackle climate change, but again there is no guarantee from the Government that those policies will be maintained.

Fourthly, I come to Northern Ireland. A few weeks ago I asked the Prime Minister to come back to the House with guarantees to ensure that the Good Friday agreement would not be put at risk by her deal. I therefore read the addendum on Northern Ireland with great interest, but I was saddened because, although it mentions the importance of the unique relationship with Ireland, and of fostering the development of the seamless border that now enables unprecedented levels of trade and co-operation, it contains nothing to say how that will be achieved. All the points in the addendum relate to the operation of the Northern Ireland Assembly, and I am afraid I was led to believe that the Government have not realised that the Assembly has not been sitting for two years. We need to hear a lot more from the Government about how they will ensure that the Good Friday agreement—in particular the cross-border institutions and structures that support it—will not be diminished whenever Northern Ireland leaves the EU. The Government have heard from other Members about the issues with the backstop, but I want to hear about the Good Friday agreement.

**Paul Masterton:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Dr Blackman-Woods:** I am sorry, I will not because we are short of time.

If the deal is voted down next week, as we expect it to be, and if there is no general election, the House must have the guts to go back to the country and ask again for people's opinion on this deal. When people voted in 2016, in good faith, we did not have the details of this deal, and in order to make progress it is important to allow them to be considered.

5.19 pm

**Antoinette Sandbach** (Eddisbury) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for City of Durham (Dr Blackman-Woods). She might wish to refer to the speech made by the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon), given her knowledge of Northern Ireland, who made it very clear that this agreement does in fact protect the Good Friday agreement.

I made a promise to my constituents that I would work to deliver the result of the referendum by implementing a pragmatic Brexit. I will be voting for the Prime Minister's deal, despite my concerns—and I have very many—because of that promise. However, I want to quote my hon. Friend the Member for East Renfrewshire (Paul Masterton), who spoke powerfully yesterday. He said:

“There are many Conservative Members who, like me, voted to remain but accept, admittedly reluctantly and with some misgivings, that we are leaving the European Union. We have compromised at every stage of the process to try to find a way to make this work, and the deal before us is as far as I am prepared to go. If some of my colleagues want to blow this up in pursuit of an ideologically purist fantasy, fine—go ahead—but I am done. My patience and good will will be gone, along with the patience and good will of many other Conservative Members.

Would it not be something if, when the history books are written, it emerged that it was owing to the arrogance and belligerence of the hard-line Brexiters in refusing to compromise that, rather than ending up with this imperfect Brexit, they ended up with no Brexit at all?”—[*Official Report*, 9 January 2019; Vol. 652, c. 472.]

That encapsulates perfectly how I feel. I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton West (Chris Green), my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (John Redwood) and my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Royston Smith) that I stood on a manifesto that committed me to a “deep and special partnership” with the European Union, including a “comprehensive...customs arrangement.”

I say to ideological colleagues that after this vote I will have done my duty and delivered on my promise. From then on, my duty will be to do what is best for my constituents and for future generations. Of those constituents, I want to talk about farmers. I refer to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. Farmers are one of the groups likely to be most affected by Brexit. The first and biggest risk to them is tariffs, and the second is phytosanitary checks. Even Brexiteer Ministers such as the Environment Secretary know the risk. He told the Oxford farming conference about the impact of tariffs, pointing out that there would be no upside—he might have said different things during the referendum campaign, but I cannot comment on that. He said that

“new tariffs would undoubtedly exceed any adjustment in the currency markets”.

We export 15% of our beef and more than 30% of our lamb. Of those exports, more than 90% goes to the EU. A tariff on those goods can be as high as 87% and averages around 40%. That would be devastating for livestock farmers. Eddisbury is a big dairy constituency, producing about 3% of UK dairy. Some 90% of all UK dairy exports were to the EU. A report from the LSE warns that tariffs of between 41% and 74% will be imposed on dairy produce in the event of no deal. The UK managing director of Arla Foods has warned that “most likely we would see shortages of products and a sharp rise in prices, turning everyday staples like butter, yoghurts, cheese and infant formula into occasional luxuries.”

It would make exports from both sectors uncompetitive and would send my local farmers to the wall. With half of all farms making less than £20,000 a year, and a fifth making no profit at all, such a huge increase in costs would be the death knell for many UK farmers.

Beyond tariffs, non-tariff barriers could hit farmers hard. Sustain noted in its evidence to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee:

“Generally, when standards start to diverge then costs start to accrue in tracking the difference between the products. What kind of paperwork will have to be provided? What kind of proof of certification or standard-setting will there have to be, and also what kind of inspection regimes, particularly at borders?”

Those are questions that the farming community is having to wrestle with daily as a consequence of irresponsible rhetoric about no deal. I urge all Members to give some much needed certainty and reassurance to farmers and other businesses across the UK by voting for the deal. It may not be perfect but if Brexit is to be delivered, it is the only way forward.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Richard Benyon) said, though, if the spirit of compromise is not present in the House, I will no doubt ultimately join my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis) back on the campaign trail. I say to my ideological colleagues that if they do not support this deal, they risk no deal. From now on in, after the vote on this deal, I will vote for the best interests of my constituents, which is definitely not no deal.

5.25 pm

**Kerry McCarthy** (Bristol East) (Lab): This is undoubtedly one of the most important votes that I or anyone else in the House will participate in during our parliamentary careers. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for City of Durham (Dr Blackman-Woods) that we should not be here. The very fact that we are where we are, having this debate 78 days before exit day, is a sign of failure. It is a sign that the people have been badly let down by the politicians to whom they look for leadership.

Brexit began as a crisis of the Conservative party's own making. From the red meat of a referendum thrown to Eurosceptic Back Benchers to the red lines drawn up before a Tory party conference speech, for them it has never been about the interests of this country or of the people we have been sent here to represent. The whole process has been characterised by complacency and, indeed, by an astounding degree of arrogance on the part of some from whom we should have expected better. There was the casual approach to the referendum itself—a vote that was called with not a thought given to the consequences of it being lost—and article 50 was triggered when the country was clearly not ready, just so that we could show that we were “getting on with it”. Even then, as the clock started to tick down towards exit day, we were still not putting in the work and still did not have a clue as to what we wanted from our soon-to-be-former EU partners, let alone having a clue as to how we could go about getting it.

We saw Government Ministers display shocking ignorance, whenever they appeared before Select Committees, before the House or in the media, of the potential consequences of Brexit. The Secretary of State for International Trade said that a UK-EU free trade agreement would be

“one of the easiest in human history”.

The former Brexit Secretary, the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis), said:

“It is like threading the eye of a needle: if you have a good eye and a steady hand, it is easy enough”.—[*Official Report*, 7 December 2016; Vol. 618, c. 233.]

I assume the right hon. Gentleman is still searching in the haystack for that oh-so-elusive needle, let alone getting round to threading it.

This idea that Britain is somehow—perhaps because of its history or the empire, or perhaps because we have always punched above our weight as a small island—subject to different rules and can do things a different way is a total fallacy. We cannot dictate terms to the European Union. We certainly cannot tell the people of Ireland what to do these days. We cannot demand trade deals entirely on our own terms. They are deals: they require agreement. That seems to me to be an absolutely fundamental, basic point that so many proponents of Brexit have entirely missed. Freedom is nothing unless we have somebody else who agrees with us and wants to go along the same path. The rest of the world is not waiting breathlessly for us to leave the EU. They are not eager to give us exactly what we want just because it is Britain asking. Any future trade deals will involve compromise and lengthy negotiations.

I have something of an obsession with the pig trotter protocol, which we discussed in the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee yesterday with the International Meat Trade Association. I have this obsession

partly because of its comedy value, although it is not so funny for the pigs involved. It was first talked about in 2008 and then resurrected by David Cameron after he led a huge trade mission to China. We are still trying to negotiate the sale of pigs' trotters to China. It is a product that we do not need and that China likes, for some bizarre reason.

The fact that it has been so difficult to get a tiny deal like that in place should be a wake-up call to people as to how difficult it will be to get these fully comprehensive trade agreements with all these other countries that actually do not want exactly what we want. Australia and New Zealand have been pressing us about lamb quotas post Brexit. US Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross has said that yes, he does want a race to the bottom on standards post Brexit. He does not want to agree to a deal whereby we do not allow chlorinated chicken and hormone-pumped beef into this country. That is why I tabled new clause 1 to the Agriculture Bill so that we can try to avoid that scenario.

I was one of 122 Members who voted against the triggering of article 50. That decision has been more than vindicated every day since that vote. I will vote against the Prime Minister's deal next week and I will support a people's vote, should the opportunity arise. It is now the only way I can see to get us out of this mess. That people's vote would obviously have an option to remain on the ballot paper.

The promises made in 2016 are not going to be delivered, and any Brexit deal will impoverish my constituency as well as the whole UK. No deal would be a catastrophe, but I reject any attempt to use that threat to strong-arm us into supporting the Prime Minister's deal. Article 50 could be extended or, more sensibly, revoked. Rejecting what is clearly a bad deal does not mean accepting no deal, and it is entirely within the Prime Minister's power to take no deal off the table.

The choice before us now is not between deal and no deal. The choice is whether we accept Brexit on the terms on which we know it would happen—the terms that the Prime Minister has been able to agree with the EU—or whether, now that we know what Brexit looks like, we still want to do it. This journey began with the British people and it is only right, now that we know the facts, that they choose its final destination.

5.30 pm

**James Cartlidge** (South Suffolk) (Con): Mr Speaker, I am sure that you will remember that famous quote of Dean Acheson, the former United States Secretary of State, who, when addressing the West Point Military Academy in 1962, said that Great Britain had

“lost an empire and not yet found a role.”

Here we are, many decades later, and the fact is that in relation to the continent of which we are a part—this core relationship—we still have not found our role.

There are three fundamental choices available to us and we have to make a decision pretty swiftly about which one to go with. No. 1: we can be fully in, although that would now require a second referendum to overturn the original one. No. 2: we can be fully out and completely separate from Europe, trading on WTO terms. No. 3: we can find a compromise and have what I would call a semi-detached relationship—half in, half out.

Like many colleagues, I have reservations about the backstop, but I will support this deal because we are a semi-detached country by nature. It suits us to have that type of relationship because it is in our DNA. We are a European nation with many close ties with our European neighbours, yet we have the Commonwealth. We have a very strong relationship with the United States and the English-speaking world—with countries that play cricket, football and all the rest of it.

John Major once talked about trying to make Britain a country “at ease with itself”. Leaving through that semi-detached compromise deal may not be perfect in every way, but we would become a country at ease with itself in terms of our relations with our European partners. However, if we go for the other two options, we will not be a country at ease with itself. Having a second referendum would be saying to those who voted leave and want to vote leave again, “Your vote did not count.” That would leave lasting bitterness and great division in our society. Equally, choosing no deal and WTO terms—a very alluring prospect for those who voted on sovereignty grounds—would also leave great bitterness. I want briefly to focus on the latter option because it is certainly growing in popularity in my constituency and in my association. Some may dismiss it, but there is a logic for people who voted on grounds of sovereignty: they want the deal that they believe provides the greatest sovereignty. For many, that is leaving on WTO terms. However, sovereignty is about far more than legal power. It is about agency and power in the real world through the economy and so on.

There are three key points. First, leaving with no deal on WTO terms is based on a fundamental contradiction, which is this idea that we can go and negotiate trade deals. Those trade deals would be with the countries with which we currently trade on WTO terms. In other words, its fundamental premise is that we should upgrade those trade deals to superior preferential terms, and do so by relegating our preferential access to the EU to standard WTO terms.

Secondly, people talk about a managed no deal. This is a free market economy. The idea that by sticking a few billion pounds in Government Departments, we can suddenly have command and control of the UK economy come April is for the birds. We know from history that we cannot manage the market and we cannot manage consumer sentiment. We certainly cannot manage business investment sentiment. That will be so critical in the months after we leave, and it is why we should reject no deal.

My final point on no deal is this. Let us say that we ignore the worst-case scenario, although that is of course a worry for all of us—let us take it at its best. At its very best, someone who advocates a WTO no deal, particularly if they are a hard Brexiteer, is saying that after all this effort, all this campaigning and all these years, the best we can do on leaving is to give British industry standard terms that are, in mortgage terms, the standard variable rate. They are bog-standard, ordinary, plain, common-or-garden trade terms available by default to any country on earth: nothing special, nothing preferential. In my view, that is not good enough for British industry and not good enough for my constituents.

I believe that this deal, for all its failings, does satisfy the requirement of giving us that new semi-detached relationship. We will have strong economic ties with Europe,

which are vital, and yet, over time, once we have established frictionless trade—once we have left through a robust withdrawal agreement that secures our departure in a steady state—then, yes, we can negotiate trade deals around the world.

People should not be dismissive of that, because there is a real-life version of being semi-detached—it is called Norway and it is called Switzerland. Whether we take those countries as models or not, we can see that they are prosperous, rich, successful, happy countries that trade in the single market—one through the EEA, the other bilaterally—and yet have trade deals around the world and strong links in the global economy. We can do the same. We should have confidence in ourselves and say that when we get into the long-term negotiations, we will be successful because we will be positive about it and realise that this an opportunity. I encourage everyone to think positively, back the Prime Minister’s deal, and help us to have this happy, steady state.

5.36 pm

**Tonia Antoniazzi** (Gower) (Lab): So here we are in January 2019 bearing the brunt of David Cameron’s back-of-a-fag-packet politics of 2015. His ill-thought-out plan aimed to appease the Brexiteers in his own party at a time when he thought that he was invincible. That know-it-all attitude is exactly why people turned out to vote leave: they wanted to vote against the establishment.

Never-ending austerity since 2010 has driven a rise in in-work poverty. Our constituents have been hit hard in the pocket. People are fed up and they are angry, with food bank use in Swansea up 50% since universal credit. Life is challenging at the best of times, and being stuck in a Catch-22 situation of spiralling personal debt and stagnant wages means that people have got angrier and angrier. I understand how that feels, because it is why I am standing here. When faced with the lies on a bus and promised a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow—let us throw some unicorns in as well—Brexit was painted as a way out.

But the promised land was not based on facts. In total contrast, as we hear from Scottish National party Members, in the 2014 Scottish referendum, a 400-plus-page White Paper was published called “Scotland’s Future”. It gave a detailed assessment of the impact of Scotland leaving the United Kingdom—not a leaflet, as shown by the hon. Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis) earlier. Why did those hard facts not exist for us? We did not know what we were voting on.

At the beginning of the debate yesterday, I was taken aback to hear the hon. Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy) intervene on the Secretary of State for Exiting the EU, saying:

“This House is not representative of the people.”

The Secretary of State responded:

“the majority of the House voted to trigger article 50. It is...incumbent on Members...to be clear what they are for.”—[*Official Report*, 9 January 2019; Vol. 652, c. 393.]

Well, I beg to differ. I did not vote to trigger article 50, and neither did the rest of the 2017 intake. The Prime Minister called a general election to try to convince the UK that she could provide a strong and stable Government. It didn’t work, did it? Members lost their seats—67, I believe. Let us not forget that the make-up of this House has changed considerably since 2016, pretty much like public opinion, which has also changed since 2016.



[Tonia Antoniazzi]

Opinion certainly has changed, as I have seen since I have been the Member of Parliament for Gower, and the electorate has changed as well. Since June 2016, there are 2 million more people in the UK who have reached voting age. According to the House of Commons Library, that is estimated to be 2,400 in my constituency alone.

To add to the confusion about how constituencies voted in 2016, the ballot boxes were not counted by constituency. In my case, Gower was counted as part of the city of Swansea. Across three constituencies, the majority for leave was a mere 3,629. I would call that a marginal win. I took a marginal seat after it was held by a Tory for only two years, and I, along with the other new Members elected in 2017, prove that opinions have changed.

The House of Commons Library's independent research on the vote estimates that Gower was 49.3% leave and 50.7% remain. That picture has changed significantly since 2016. Like most MPs, I have received a vast amount of correspondence from constituents. When analysed, it gives me statistics of 82% remain and 18% leave. From all that correspondence, 61% are asking for a people's vote. I realised that I had to test that in the constituency, so I held public meetings. Our mock ballot in each of those meetings showed pretty much the same—80% remain and 20% leave.

Since the 2017 election, this House is the most representative it has ever been, and I am very proud to be here. The Secretary of State says that it is incumbent on Members to know what they are here for, and I want him to know that I know exactly why I am here. I am here to represent the fact that my constituency has not only changed its allegiance to Labour, but it has changed its mind on Brexit.

Moreover, my constituents want the Government to know that small businesses in my constituency such as Rose and Rebellion—a baby carrier business exporting all over the world—have lost 50% of their business directly because of impending Brexit. What assurances will the Government give to protect companies like those that are struggling to compete with America, which is swamping the market?

From the parliamentary logjam to the Government can-kicking, there is no simple answer to Brexit. There is no Brexit that is good for the United Kingdom. This Government have proven that they cannot be trusted and are not capable of winning. My constituents deserve to see the light at the end of the tunnel. I am applying sense and good logic to give us a way out of this logjam. Why can the Government not? That is why I am backing a people's vote. We need to move this on and get back to the issues.

5.42 pm

**Huw Merriman** (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): When I was elected in 2015, it was on the basis that we pledged to give the people the opportunity to determine whether they wished to stay in the European Union or leave. I for one felt that, having given people that opportunity, it was not for me as an MP to then tell them which way they should vote.

I wrote to every single one of my constituents and invited them to 10 meetings across my constituency before the referendum. I also provided them with

information from the House of Commons Library, so that they could make their own mind up. During those meetings, I explained what an article 50 process would look like and what a reformed EU would look like, should we vote to remain. I did not expect to be talking about article 50 again, but, to my surprise and disappointment, given the way I voted, my constituency voted to leave by almost 60:40, and the country by 52:48. I declared my vote on the night because I did not wish to influence any of my constituents. I made it clear to my constituents that, having been elected by the ballot box, which gives me the authority to speak here now, I do not feel that I have the right to then ignore that ballot box when it gives a different determination from the vote I cast.

I swore to honour the referendum result. That is what I believe I am doing and will be doing when I vote for the Prime Minister's deal on Tuesday. I can then look in the eye those who voted leave and say that I am voting to ensure that we leave the European Union on 29 March 2019, that we will take back control of our borders and immigration, that we will leave the common agricultural policy and the common fisheries policy, that we will leave the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice and that we will stop paying moneys in, save for those agreed in the withdrawal agreement. Equally, I can look in the eye my constituents who voted to remain and wanted us to continue to have a trading and security relationship with the European Union. That is what the withdrawal agreement does and what the political declaration sets out. That is what we have two years to put in place. I feel I can honour that result.

Many of my colleagues will not vote for the deal. Unlike me, it has been their life's work to see us leave the European Union. The direction of travel that Parliament is currently focused on may mean that they never get an opportunity to vote for leaving the European Union if they do not vote for it this time around. It may well come off the table. Equally, other Members are more persuaded by the argument for a second referendum, or the latest and ludicrous thing I have heard about, which is a "people's assembly". That is what I thought I was standing in right now, making this speech. But we cannot delegate our responsibility. This House, by 498 MPs, voted to allow the Prime Minister to trigger article 50. That means we have to take responsibility for the outcome. We have a deal that will give us that outcome. Anything else would be a complete denial not just of the referendum result, but of the vote that night when 498 MPs said that this was the way to proceed.

I am very concerned about the House not agreeing to the withdrawal agreement, because the no-deal scenario fills me with great dread. It is all well and good for many people and many of my constituents to say, "No deal will be absolutely fine. We were warned the worst would happen after the referendum result and it didn't happen." However, Bank of England models suggest that the economy will be 11% worse off by 2030 in a no-deal situation. It is all well and good for individuals to say that it will be fine, but they will not be the ones going into the Division Lobby to vote for a no deal—I will. What if it turns out not to be fine? What if I knock on my constituents' doors to be told that they have just lost their job, are about to lose their house and do not know what they were going to do with their family because it has turned out that it was not all absolutely fine? They would say, "It's your fault, Huw Merriman MP,

because you made that happen.” I will not play Russian roulette with my constituents’ lives, their security and everything they hold dear just because “It may be okay”. I say to all those right hon. and hon. Members who may be willing to take that risk: be careful what you end up playing with.

I take the view that we would be a lot worse off from a democratic perspective if we saw a second referendum, the can being kicked down the road or no Brexit at all. How difficult would it be for us to go back on the campaign trail and knock on the doors in the general election to ask people to put their faith in democracy if we have just denied the democratic result that they thought they had gained in 2016?

Compromise is not a very sexy word, but when we look at the percentages, 52% versus 48%, it was always going to need a compromise to unite those two positions. It is possible for us to leave the European Union, but it is also possible for us to leave and enter into a new trading arrangement. It is also possible for us to look outside the European Union. The European Union is a great 28-country club if you are a member, but not if you are an African country that is getting poorer and poorer because it will not trade because it pulls up the walls. The population of Africa is due to double in the next 25 years. That is where we should be looking, not just for our own future but for their future too, and for a global economy that comes to us. That is why I will support this deal on Tuesday.

5.48 pm

**Ben Lake** (Ceredigion) (PC): Diolch, Mr Speaker. This debate, and the votes that will follow next week, will probably be the defining moments of this Parliament. They will certainly determine Ceredigion’s prospects and prosperity for decades to come. The withdrawal agreement and the declaration on the framework for the future relationship can perhaps be described as the Government’s attempt to convince Parliament to abandon the familiar benefits and certainty of the status quo, and risk it all by embracing the possibilities of the unknown and moving towards a relationship with the European Union whose opportunities are apparently unencumbered by the constraints of reality.

The matter in question is deeply significant and serious. This is our future relationship with our closest and largest trading partner and ally. It is therefore our duty as parliamentarians to challenge the ambiguity and the risks inherent in this deal, especially in the political declaration on the future relationship. As detailed in the Government’s own analysis, the UK will be poorer over the next 15 years under all possible scenarios than it would have been within the EU single market and customs union.

Ceredigion is reliant on the knowledge and rural economies. The education sector alone accounts for 20% of our economic output and sustains around 5,000 jobs in total, more than 2,800 of them directly supported by the county’s two universities. Agriculture is key to wealth and job creation, with every £1 generated translating into £7.40 for the local economy through supply chains and spending. Each job in farming supports another 3.5 in other sectors.

There is a lot of uncertainty at the moment, but there are a few things we can be certain about. We know that the single market is a vital export destination for Welsh

food and drink, with more than 80% of exports going to the EU. We know that the Welsh universities thrive on our membership of the EU and particularly benefit from the contribution of staff and students from the EU, as well as from European Research Council funding. We know that both the agricultural and higher education sectors will therefore be heavily impacted by changes to our relationship with the EU and devastated if we were to leave the customs union and single market.

That said, we do not know what the future relationship under this deal will look like, despite our having triggered article 50 two years ago and having debated the matter ever since. During this time, sectors such as agriculture and higher education have been plunged into unprecedented uncertainty, so it is entirely understandable that some find the prospect of a period of stability appealing and therefore the Government’s deal worth supporting. Let us be clear, however, that the proposal is no more than a 20-month stay of execution, not a reprieve. It offers a brief respite, but no assurances for the long term.

Uncertainty over the future relationship will continue to plague businesses and communities throughout the transition and most likely beyond. Far from the detailed and substantive document promised, the political declaration merely sets out a spectrum of potential options. The details will materialise only on the conclusion of yet further negotiations. While the Government have stated repeatedly that they will not entertain the prospect of another referendum, it is unclear what role Members of Parliament, as the elected representatives of the people, will have in the negotiations and whether they will have a role in the ratification of any agreement reached.

Admittedly, the declaration expresses a great deal of ambition for a close trading relationship, but to echo the Brexit Select Committee, ambition is no guarantee of success, and the experience of the past two years does not instil great confidence in the Government’s ability to deliver on such ambition or indeed to engage with others to seek compromise. It has been heartening to hear a lot tonight about compromise. Those who argue that opponents of the Prime Minister’s deal have not offered alternatives are mistaken and have not been listening. Several alternatives have been aired this evening. Back in January 2017—two years ago—a colleague in the Senedd, Steffan Lewis, in co-operation with the Welsh Government, published a White Paper detailing a range of options and a conclusion about what they thought was the best future relationship for Wales and the EU.

Ceredigion voted to remain, and conversations I have had with constituents have given no indication of a change of heart. The Government present us with an offer of embarking on a voyage to an unknown destination, warning that it will leave us poorer and possibly lead to ruin, yet they nevertheless ask us as parliamentarians to relinquish any say over the choice of destination and to renounce all influence over the course charted. Given the reservations I have expressed, this is an undertaking that I cannot in good conscience support.

5.53 pm

**Eddie Hughes** (Walsall North) (Con): Thank you for calling me so early in this debate, Mr Speaker. One of the great things about being called at this late stage is

[Eddie Hughes]

that I get the opportunity to listen to other people articulate the case far better than I could. My comments might be slightly briefer as a result of having listened to the other arguments, not least those of the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann), who gave a very impassioned speech, much of which chimed with what I think the people of Walsall North would think. It is unfortunate, however, that I am following the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Ben Lake) and his beautiful baritone. He speaks for a rural community in Wales that is in contrast to the urban industrial one that I represent in Walsall. There are many elements to this argument that need to be represented, although when we vote we will make a binary decision about whether to walk through the Aye Lobby or the No Lobby. I am sure that each of our constituents will interpret that decision differently, in the same way, perhaps, as the 17-odd million people who voted for Brexit each thought that they were voting for very different things.

In my constituency, I have found most recently that the loudest voices—the ones that I have heard most of—are of those who would like a no-deal Brexit. In Willenhall and Bloxwich, we are definitely on the hard Brexit end of the spectrum. When I campaigned and voted for Brexit, I had in my mind something akin to a very hard Brexit. For example, I expected us to absolutely minimise the amount of money that we had to send to the European Union, so I find it a bit heartbreaking that that figure is close to £40 billion, and that we are paying it up front before we know what the final deal will be on our trading relationship. But all deals require an element of compromise.

Over recent days in Parliament, I have seen the idea that the possibility of a no-deal Brexit is diminishing. Clearly, that will be disappointing to the people of Willenhall and Bloxwich, but they need to understand that it is Parliament that decides. I do not think we should expect much sympathy from the general public, but I feel that an incredible responsibility rests with us. When I campaigned for Brexit, it was all very well me shouting at the TV at home and having my own opinion about how things should be. It is a bit like being a spectator on the sideline at a football match shouting that the referee or the managers should make different decisions. When we are in the game, we must be cognisant of our responsibility and of the number of different elements that we need to consider.

I am a naturally optimistic and enthusiastic person, and that is how I view the future. Now, here is a peculiar thing. We talk about the financial forecasts and people say that Brexit might make us less well off, which would be a terrible thing. Imagine, Mr Speaker—this might be difficult—that you are a plumber. You work for a good company, for which you have worked for a while, and you are, no doubt, an excellent plumber. But there are some things about the job that you are not happy with. Occasionally, your employers send you to work away from home, away from your family. They make you work weekends. They issue policies and edicts that you do not like, and things that you have to comply with because you work for them.

People say to you, “Do you know what? If you were to go out on your own, you could be a self-employed plumber. You could develop a business and employ

other people.” You think about that, and you realise, “Hang on a second. That is likely to mean that I have to work harder initially while I build up a client base. I will have to do my own accounts and work longer hours. That seems counter-intuitive, given what I am trying to achieve. I am complaining about having to work away from home and having to work weekends. If I go self-employed, that is exactly what I might end up doing.” But you are a good plumber, Mr Speaker. You have great ability and great confidence in your ability to strike out and make deals yourself, work for yourself and create a business that employs other people. You can not only create a very bright future for you and your family, but develop jobs and opportunities for other people. So that is what you decide to do. You quit your job and you decide to go it alone in this brave new world.

Mr Speaker, I have faith in you and your plumbing abilities in the same way as I have incredible faith in this country. We have some of the best universities in the world. We are developing technology for things such as driverless cars. Who would not have faith in the potential for the United Kingdom, working collectively, to forge a great place in the future?

I heard the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) say to the Secretary of State that he was laughing at the idea that the EU might, in the future, look longingly at us and the deals that we had struck. I say that that is rubbish. I have confidence in this country and our ability to do great things. When people look back at what we have achieved, they will know that we did the right thing when we left the European Union.

5.59 pm

**Dr Paul Williams** (Stockton South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Walsall North (Eddie Hughes). We both represent proud towns, but I will vote against the deal because it is my assessment that it would leave people in my constituency worse off and make their jobs less secure.

Back in June 2016, I approached the EU referendum not as my town’s local MP, but as one of Stockton’s local GPs. My experience of working in the NHS taught me the principle of informed consent, which is given based on a clear appreciation and understanding of the facts, implications and consequences of an action. Do we really have informed consent for this Brexit deal?

Did people have a clear appreciation of how this interpretation of Brexit would affect health and social care, for example? Half of us will get cancer. Did people really give their informed consent for us to leave the European Medicines Agency and get new cancer drugs six months later than other countries, or to risk our health and social care workforce? We depend on people from EU countries coming here and sharing their skills.

Did my constituents who make car parts for Nissan give their informed consent for a Brexit deal that the North East chamber of commerce says threatens the very future of car manufacturing in the north-east? Their jobs will be on the line when we cast our votes next week. This is no small thing: will “taking back control” be any kind of compensation for not having a job?

What if someone wants to retire to the sun? Sorry—no. There will be no ongoing entitlement to go and live in Spain. Was informed consent given for that? Young



people will lose their right to study and work in Europe. Did they give their informed consent for that? Did members of our armed forces who have served our Union give their informed consent for us to go back to the bad old days of conflict in Northern Ireland? Peace in Northern Ireland was hard won, and it will be under threat if we leave the EU in this way.

My constituents were told clearly that their lives would be better, that the rest of the world would be queuing up to trade with us and that the NHS would get more money. We now know that none of those things will happen. Informed consent was never obtained for this version of Brexit. That detail just was not there.

Brexit has never been about igniting the better, prouder country that my constituents want. The whole Brexit project stems from a group of people who want fundamentally to weaken our country's safety net. They want to water down workers' rights, pension protections and leave to care for children—those extra costs of employment that we in the EU have all agreed to share. They are a good thing that unions and workers support, but they are threatened by Brexit.

Let us be clear: this version of Brexit does not have the support of the NHS either. The Royal College of General Practitioners says:

“It is essential that the public are fully informed about the damage exiting the EU could potentially cause to the health service.”

Nurses and midwives say the same. Brexit will damage because it will lead to less money for the NHS, as our economy grows less than it would; damage because it will exacerbate the existing staffing crisis; and damage because it will delay access to new drugs. It just is not worth it.

I spend my weekends listening to people on the streets of Stockton South. Opinions are mixed and emotions strong, but my constituents have given me two clear messages. First, they agree that Brexit is not going well. They are as frustrated as I am with how the Government have handled it, and they do not want me to vote for this deal. Secondly, they want a final say—a public vote on the final deal—now the facts about Brexit are clear. If Parliament cannot agree what to do, we need to go back to the people for a people's vote, which would be the first chance for everyone to give their truly informed consent, knowing all the facts about what Brexit means.

There is nothing to fear from more democracy. We owe it to the people we represent, before taking this giant risk to the future of our country, to check with them that we truly have their informed consent.

6.4 pm

**Vicky Ford** (Chelmsford) (Con): It has been a pleasure to listen to many of the speeches that have been made today, and I thank the hon. Member for Stockton South (Dr Williams) for his.

I will support the Prime Minister's withdrawal agreement when we vote for it next week. I do not celebrate the fact that we are leaving the European Union, but I do recognise that this was the decision of the British people.

I have seen at first hand the ways in which being a member of the EU can be a force for good, enabling us in the UK to work with neighbours on common issues such as environmental matters, financial market reforms

and the building of a network for scientific co-operation. What my kids loved most was the end of charges for mobile roaming. However, I have also seen an EU that has changed dramatically from the Common Market that we joined, and many people throughout our country were very uncomfortable with that.

We gave the people the vote. I campaigned for remain, but leave won. We told people that their vote would be respected, but they were also told, again and again, that a no-deal Brexit was not what would happen. They were told, “Trade will continue. The Germans want to sell us their cars. We will get a trade deal. It will be easy.”

Many of my constituents work in areas that are not covered by the World Trade Organisation. Leaving without a deal is not a good deal, and a no-deal Brexit is not what people were promised. The withdrawal agreement gives stability on citizens' rights and gives businesses a breathing space to transition from where we are today to a new relationship. The declaration on the future framework paves the way towards the deepest trade partnership, and the deepest security partnership, into which the EU has ever entered with a third country—and yes, it does cover environmental protections and workers' rights.

I know that Labour Members would like more detail on the long-term relationship, but time after time, EU negotiators—my contacts across the EU—have said to me, “We cannot give you that detail until you accept the withdrawal agreement.” I say to Labour Members, “You want to tear up the whole negotiation and start again, but that is really high-risk.” Come 18 April, the European Parliament will shut for its elections. Its Members will be gone. There will not be another European Commission until autumn, possibly not until Christmas or, according to some people, not until after Christmas. Meanwhile, what will happen?

Last week, Universities UK warned of the risks of no deal to our science community, and the real possibility of a brain drain. This week, the manufacturers' organisation published its annual survey. Our businesses are diverting investment, stockpiling and reviewing supply chains.

Yesterday in the Chamber, the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) warned us of the real risk that no deal could lead to a border poll in Northern Ireland and the break-up of our own United Kingdom. I was born and grew up in Northern Ireland, and my friends and contacts also say that that is a real risk. I know that Members from the Democratic Unionist party—my contacts on the other side of the Chamber—are concerned about the backstop, but I believe that we will be given more reassurance. The Irish Prime Minister said that this week, and I know that when the EU negotiators want to move, they can move fast. Let us make sure that we get that reassurance.

I know that colleagues also want more detail on the future framework—that is apparently why they will not vote for the withdrawal agreement—but they will not have it until we pass the agreement. I say again that no deal is not a good deal, and that a second referendum will not reduce uncertainty or risk. At the time of the last referendum, I campaigned in 58 Westminster constituencies. I genuinely believe that there is a significant risk that the result of a second vote could be even more anti-EU than the result two and a half years ago. Going back to square one will not reduce uncertainty or risk either.

[Vicky Ford]

I will vote for this deal because everything that I have seen leads me to believe that it is the best way to protect jobs and security, enable us to have a long-term relationship with our neighbours across the EU and deliver the future framework that Members on both sides of the House want so that we can care for the lives and livelihoods of our constituents.

6.10 pm

**Jo Platt** (Leigh) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford), although I do not agree with her analysis. Next week, we are set finally to vote and make one of the most important decisions that this House has taken. It is a decision that will have enormous and lasting repercussions for our communities, our economy and our security.

Over the past few weeks, I have taken the time to reflect on this deal and what it would mean for the people of Leigh. My constituency is made up of post-industrial towns in the north, and the deal will particularly impact us because of the fragile social and economic landscape we face after the real hardship we have endured over the last few decades. With the decline of our manufacturing base and then austerity cutting to the bone, we have been left feeling isolated from the economic prosperity seen in some of our cities. We face higher than average unemployment, ballooning social issues on our streets and a social mobility crisis that threatens the life chances of our young people.

When I looked at this deal, I considered two points. First, does it respect the referendum result, in which the majority of my constituents voted to leave the EU? Also, crucially, does it deliver on the message my constituents sent and provide a blueprint for transformative and inclusive prosperity for all our communities that will help our towns to thrive and prosper once again? Looking through the deal and the political declaration, I can only conclude that, for three key reasons, this will be a bad deal for our constituency that will fail to deliver that foundation for the future.

First, the deal will not safeguard the existing jobs and businesses in the constituency. Without the assurance of a permanent customs union, our manufacturers in Leigh will be left with uncertainty and without an assurance of frictionless trade. We have seen before that when businesses and the economy take a hit, our town economies are the first to suffer. Secondly, the deal does not protect our workers' rights. If we accept it, we risk the lowering of rights and standards by a future Tory Government. As a Labour MP, I cannot and will not vote for a deal that does not guarantee all our hard-fought rights and protections.

Thirdly, this deal does not protect our national security. Through my work in the shadow Cabinet Office team, I am well aware of the critical cyber risks facing our nation and of how much we rely on threat information from our European partners. It is simply not good enough to "aspire" to a close security relationship. Our national security needs concrete reassurances; it is not a bargaining chip.

Those are just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to my serious concerns about the deal. Representing a community in desperate need of transformative investment, there is no way I could support such a gamble. If the

last 10 years have taught us anything in Leigh, it is that in times of struggle our post-industrial towns are the first to be hit. I cannot risk that for our community again.

It feels we have got nowhere in the last two years. Nothing has changed, including the heated and often polarised debate. It is upsetting to witness MPs—mostly female—on the receiving end of some of the most vile abuse, be it online or via email. If there is one thing that the Government must take control of, it is the narrow arguments on Brexit. The same characters are preaching the same rhetoric, and as a country and a community we have not moved forward or even reunited.

We are left in a truly sorry state of affairs, and what pains me most is that it really did not have to be this way. Instead of negotiating in seriousness and respect, recognising the close relationship the UK wants with the EU—our closest and most important partner—the Government wasted two years fighting among themselves and botching together a deal that pleases nobody. Therefore, whichever way people voted in the referendum two years ago, one thing is miraculously unifying my constituency: we do not want the Prime Minister's deal.

We are calling the negotiations out for the failure that they are. We reject this botched, blindfold Brexit, and we agree that we must, and certainly can, do better than this to keep our country strong and safe while helping our communities to thrive into the future.

6.15 pm

**Anna Turley** (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op): I will start by taking some time to reflect on the issues that I heard about in 2016, and have continued to hear about since, while representing a seat that voted substantially to leave the EU. I completely understand the valid and sincere reasons why people on both sides voted how they did. Our area, once the beating heart of Britain's industrial empire, has seen 30 years of deindustrialisation and rising unemployment, with our youth unemployment now two and a half times the national average. Many towns, including Leigh, as my hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Jo Platt) just so articulately described, feel a sense of being left behind, of anger, of loss and of betrayal. Just six months before the referendum, our steelworks was closed by this Government, with 3,100 jobs lost overnight. So, when people were asked back then, "Are you happy with the status quo, or do you want things to change? Do you want to make Redcar, Teesside or Britain great again?", of course they were going to vote out of anger and frustration. They were going to vote to take back control when they were told that the blame for our troubles lies in Brussels.

However, it was not the EU that closed our steelworks. The Government had no qualms about state aid when they stepped in to take a stake in the Port Talbot works just a few months later. It was not the EU that drove down our industry and manufacturing in favour of an economy based on the financial and services sectors. The EU did not take £6 billion out of public spending in the north in the past eight years, and it did not give us zero-hours contracts, a low-pay economy, austerity and food banks. However, many in my patch at that time simply said, "What's to lose? It can't get any worse." The facts are clear now in a way that they were not in 2016, as there is plenty to lose and, as always, it is people in work in areas such as mine who stand to lose the most again.

The Government's impact assessment showed that the economy of the north-east will be hit to the tune of 16%. That is not just a "Project Fear" figure; that means real jobs and real wage packets. That will mean homes repossessed, businesses going under, and personal tragedies like we saw in 2015 after the closure of the steelworks. There is no way in which I or anyone in this place who claims to want the best for their constituents should even be contemplating a no-deal Brexit, although we see the Prime Minister wielding it as a threat to steamroller her failed deal, which is reckless and irresponsible.

I want to take a moment to focus on a sector that remains a huge international asset in our area. The chemicals industry employs around 7,600 people in Teesside. We have the second biggest chemical cluster in Europe and the biggest in the UK, and it is heavily integrated with supply chains that span the English channel. Companies such as Huntsman process chemicals in Redcar and send them to Rotterdam for the next stage of processing. If there are any costs or delays, companies will just shift their entire processing operations to Europe, taking jobs with them. Chemicals cannot be stockpiled, and any delay is deeply damaging. However, it is not just a no-deal Brexit that would jeopardise that precious industry. The chief executive of the North East of England Process Industry Cluster told me that while the Prime Minister's deal is better than no deal, any kind of Brexit will leave the crucial industry worse off.

The Government have already made one industrial site in my constituency a wasteland, and I am not prepared to risk a second when we are working so hard to get back on our feet. I cannot accept the Prime Minister's deal, which is an historic and unprecedented concession of sovereign control. It leaves us in a weak negotiating position internationally, £50 billion worse off, and no clearer on our future relationship with Europe. The Chancellor himself told us that it will make Britain poorer. If it is not what people voted for, why on earth are we putting ourselves through this pain? We must now extend or revoke article 50 and go back to the people—this time with the truth and a picture of what the reality of Brexit actually is.

To those who say that they just want this over and done with, I am afraid to say that the Prime Minister's deal will be just the beginning. We will be bogged down in negotiations for a decade, with a slow haemorrhaging of our power and wealth. To those who say another vote is a betrayal, I am afraid to say that the betrayal has already happened. The betrayal happened in 2016: when people were promised something that could not be done, and when they were promised £350 million a week for the NHS, the exact same benefits as being in the EU and the easiest deal in history. When a promise cannot be kept, everything that follows from it is a betrayal, and we need to face up to that and be honest.

To those who say there is a better deal yet to be negotiated, I am afraid to say there is no other deal. There is no jobs-first Brexit or sensible Brexit. This deal is Brexit. This is all there is and, after two and a half years, the public can see it is a disaster. They know it has gone horribly wrong and they do not like where we are headed. It is disrespectful to say that they have to be bound by a decision they made two years ago when they know that this is not what they were promised. They do not like the mess we are in and, like me, they do not recognise the Britain we are becoming.

Our Britain is not insular, fearful, jealous, selfish, pompous or cruel. It does not look backwards to a world that never was or blame other people for our failings. Our Britain is decent, kind and compassionate, but firm and fair. Our Britain is confident in its values and of its place in the world. It respects other nations and actively wants to stand alongside our friends, partners and neighbours. This Britain wants to have its say. I have absolute faith in the British people to find a way through where the Government and Parliament have failed. We must put this back in the people's hands.

6.20 pm

**Liz Twist** (Blaydon) (Lab): I am glad to have the chance to contribute to the debate, but I will be brief, as so much has already been said.

I say from the start that I will be voting against the Government's agreement, which is not an agreement but a short-term fix that raises huge questions about backstops and borders. The political declaration is a statement of intention. There is no deal. There are promises, politely-termed phrases and wishes for our future relationship with the European Union, but wishes will not protect workers' rights, jobs or our living standards.

We are two years on from the decision to trigger article 50 and less than three months away from the date on which we are due to leave, and what we have are some temporary arrangements and the intention to negotiate longer-term deals. We have no certainty.

What confidence can we have that we will, in fact, reach final agreements that protect our economy, our jobs, our environment and so much more? What we have now does not address the key issues facing my constituents. My constituents did not vote for a worse life. Many of them have already been hit hard by the Government's policy of austerity, and it is not right for me to support this deal and make things worse for them. Over the past two years this Government have failed to negotiate a firm future arrangement. How can we possibly believe that, during the implementation period, they will be able to negotiate and agree the positive arrangements that we need?

It cannot be the case that it is this deal or nothing. The Government have cynically left putting this deal to the House to the last minute in a determined effort to put the pressure on and say, "You must support this or it's no deal." It is the Government's responsibility to allow this House to have real influence on the terms of the deal we need.

No deal is not an option. The Government know that leaving without a deal would not be in our interests, the interests of business or the interests of individuals. Some are calling for a clean break, but the Minister knows full well that there will be nothing clean about no deal, which would leave us trying to navigate the rugged coastline of the former agreements of our last 40-plus years in the EU.

I am glad to have been one of the Members on both sides of the House who wrote to the Prime Minister to say that no deal cannot be an option. We need a much better deal that will protect jobs, the economy, workers' rights, the environment and the living standards of my constituents in Blaydon. This deal does not do that, and we must have the opportunity to change it, by extending article 50 if necessary.



[Liz Twist]

Over the last year, thanks to my constituent Barbara McGovern, I have been working with colleagues on both sides of the House in the all-party group on phenylketonuria, or PKU, which is a metabolic condition. Those with PKU have a very restricted diet that eliminates protein. Failure to do so leads to serious neurological and developmental problems affecting all aspects of life from childhood. It is not curable—although if the Government would agree that Kuvan could be prescribed, that would help 20% of sufferers, such as my constituent Archie McGovern—and those with PKU rely on prescribed foods, many of which are imported from overseas. It is not a question of choice; they need those dietary products. These people are really concerned that post Brexit, those products will not be available in time and in the quantity required to ensure their continued availability. People with PKU, and those with many other conditions who have fears about the continuing supply of their medicines or products, are hugely concerned for the future, and we need a firm long-term agreement to ensure that those supplies continue to be available—not in the short term, but right into the future. The Government's withdrawal agreement does not offer that permanent solution, and buying 5,000 new fridges will neither help nor reassure.

Finally, I want to talk briefly about my constituents' views. So many have taken the opportunity to contact me, and their messages have reflected a wide range of views from "I want to remain" to "Leave now with no deal" and everything in between. Of course, many of them are asking for a people's vote. My constituency voted leave. I respect that decision, but I do not believe that my constituents voted to be worse off, to risk environmental protections, such as those covering the Blyden Quarry landfill site in my constituency, or to risk employment rights and, of course, jobs. It is clear that a huge majority of those who have contacted me are asking me to reject the deal that is on the table, and that is what I will be doing next Tuesday.

I could go on, but so much has been said already that I would simply repeat what many other hon. Members have said and will say in the rest of the debate. I will therefore end by reiterating that the deal is not in the best interests of my constituents and I shall vote against it.

6.26 pm

**Lloyd Russell-Moyle** (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): I prepared a speech, but at 5 pm I decided to scrap much of it because I wanted to express how I and many of my constituents feel. We are hurting, Mr Speaker, and I often feel that I am in a horrid dream—a nightmare that has continued from the moment when I broke down in tears at the referendum count on result night. At that moment I felt—I still feel this now—that something had been stolen from me. Viscerally, something had been taken from me, and not for others to gain from, but to be destroyed and torn up. My rights, my citizenship, my culture—all had been ripped away from me and many of my constituents.

On my way home on that miserable morning, I of course went to my local shop. I chatted to my Spanish friend there, and all that I could say was, "I'm sorry. We have failed you." We in the remain campaign failed millions of migrants who work here, who live here and

who made this place their home, and we have made them feel less welcome. But why should our failure—my failure—in the campaign harm them? Why should a failure of 2016 bind our future and mean that we fail forever? There is a principle in democracy that no Parliament may bind future Parliaments. There is a principle that no votes may bind future votes. The '75 vote did not bind us in 2016, so why now do we say that the tyranny of history should for some reason bind us to a decision that I think was a manifest mistake?

I am against referendums generally. We live in a parliamentary democracy, and I believe that we should avoid them if we can. But once the genie is out of the bottle, the only way of getting it back in—the only way of ending this nightmare—may well end up being, at the end of this long journey, whenever it is, another people's vote.

Many women in Ireland, after losing the referendum in 1983, immediately started building and working for another referendum to overturn that awful decision. Three referendums later, they managed to do it. There was a vote in Taiwan a few months ago to ban same-sex marriage, which passed, stripping people of their rights and their identity. Do we castigate the women of Ireland for pushing to overturn the will of the Irish? No: we celebrate the role of those women who overturned an historical wrong. Do we tell the LGBT people in Taiwan, "I'm sorry, but you just have to live with the fact that you can't now marry"? No: we say to them, "Continue fighting and pushing on—democratically, of course—and try to overturn the absolute wrong that has been done to you." I feel that an absolute wrong has been done to our country—to me.

I believe that there is no good Brexit for Britain. It just does not exist. No Government can produce a good Brexit. Yes, if Labour got in, we would limit and mitigate some of the damage, but even then we could not produce a good Brexit. Brexit is fundamentally linked to a xenophobic, petty nationalist view. That is not to say that those people who voted for Brexit are xenophobic or petty nationalists. When I lived in Yorkshire and we voted, unfortunately, for a British National party MEP and I had BNP councillors up the road from me, I did not say that the voters in those wards were xenophobic and racist. I said that they had made an historic and terrible mistake, and we worked for four and five years to make sure that those people were kicked out. This is a horrible and terrible mistake that was initiated by extremists in UKIP who infected the Tory party. We must now say that that mistake must be undone.

Of course, people are right to say that there are problems with the European Union. It is not perfect. Of course some of the rules on state aid, for example, are problematic. But the deal in front of us enshrines all the same state aid rules without any of the opt-outs and agreements that we could get from the Commission. This deal is far worse for the left than remaining in the European Union. That is why it must be rejected. That is also why we on the left must understand that staying in and reforming is the only feasible option for socialists.

We must also understand that there are some goods in things such as state aid rules. They stop a race to the bottom. For example, the recent European Court of Justice rulings against Ireland and Google mean that there is not some sort of Dutch auction of giving tax breaks and giveaways to multinational companies. We live in a global capitalist world and in a system where

multinational companies can have more power and clout than many nation states. The only way we can counter that and do things on climate change and other big international global issues is to work together and form a democratic union. My God, the European Union is far more democratic than some things in this country—just look down the road at the other place.

6.32 pm

**Gareth Snell** (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Lloyd Russell-Moyle). He and I disagree on answers to Brexit, but no one can doubt his passion for his community and the causes that he champions. I wish to make a brief contribution in that spirit of conciliatory debate.

I wish mainly to speak to amendment (p), which I have tabled along with my right hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) and my hon. Friends the Members for Bassetlaw (John Mann) and for Wigan (Lisa Nandy). We hope that our amendment is the start of a conversation: a process to understand that there are various things wrong with the Prime Minister's deal that mean that we are unlikely to be able to support it next Tuesday—things that will probably not be resolved by next Tuesday. But whatever the result on Tuesday, it is the start and not the end of a process.

We as a Parliament have to be honest and up front with ourselves about where we go after Tuesday. On Wednesday morning, we are not suddenly going to have a magic answer coming from the rejection of the deal. We will see people who ardently advocate leaving on WTO terms with no deal going into the same Lobby as those who ardently want a second referendum with a remain option, and to campaign for remain. I am sorry to burst their bubbles, but one half of that unlikely coalition will be very disappointed in whatever we get out of Brexit as a result of our votes in this place.

The grown-up response is to look at the cross-party group—it exists, unfortunately, mainly on the Back Benches, not the Front Benches—who want to find a way of getting through this that does the least economic damage to our country but respects and understands that those who voted leave did so not because they were duped by words on the side of a bus, or because they were not clever enough to understand the Facebook ads put towards them, but because they had deep-seated anxieties about the inequalities that exist in this country. The amendment would, I hope, start that conversation.

For me, as a Labour and Co-operative party member, and someone who has worked in the trade union movement, how we protect and enshrine workers' rights in future is fundamental to the sort of country we want to be. A number of those rights have been derived from Europe, but we must be honest about the fact that a number of rights that Europe now holds up as a bastion of its good practice came from work done by the United Kingdom in the first place, by driving those changes through Europe and providing the bar that everybody else needs to reach.

We must protect those rights and ensure that we do not regress or water them down once we leave the European Union. Any new changes from Europe must be considered by this place, and once we have brought back sovereignty, we will choose whether to adopt them. My argument will be that we should adopt all

such measures and continue in step with Europe, because in my opinion any change or improvement to environmental standards, consumer protections or workers' rights is a good thing.

**Angela Smith:** Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Gareth Snell:** I am afraid I will not. Everyone else has had their time, so I will carry on.

It is important to find a mechanism that protects those rights, and does not kick the can down the road with another referendum, or simply add procedure and stop talking about the people. Too much of this debate—we saw this yesterday on both sides of the House with tedious and continual points of order—has been about a point of process that does not progress the debate further, or resolve the fundamental issues that are important to my constituents in Stoke-on-Trent, and those of hon. Members across the House.

At some point in this Parliament we must decide what we are for—not what we are against, or what we wish to rehash or reargue, but what we are for. I wish that the conversations I was privileged to have this week with Government and Opposition Front-Bench speakers had taken place two years ago. I wish that the Government and those on the Labour Front-Bench had got together after the general election to try to hash out some sort of plan. Such a plan would not have pleased everybody or given them what they wanted, but we need a pragmatic approach to find a way of healing the country, bringing forward the things we know are important, and delivering a Brexit referendum outcome that does not do economic damage to our country. We must ensure that people who voted leave, and those who voted remain, feel that they have a stake in the future of our country.

My frustration with this process is, and continues to be, that we appear to be moving away from a pragmatic middle and towards two extremes. Those who do not support a second referendum are labelled as hard Brexiteers who wish to sell their country down the river, and those—like many of my colleagues—who hold the principled position that we should have a second referendum are an affront to democracy. Neither of those things is true, but at some point we must face facts and understand that the country voted to leave—albeit marginally—and our job as parliamentarians is to work out how we take that forward and bring everybody together. The amendment that I have tabled is one way of achieving that unity. It by no means solves everything, and it will not remove a number of the concerns that I still have about the vote on Tuesday, but if we can use it as a starting point after that vote, I hope we will have achieved something better.

6.37 pm

**Alex Cunningham** (Stockton North) (Lab): People in my Stockton North constituency voted two to one to leave the EU. They wanted to take back control, they wanted £350 million a week more for the NHS, and many had genuine and understandable issues with freedom of movement and immigration. They voted for other reasons too—they were discontent with their lives after six years of Tory austerity, and unemployment in my constituency is still double the national average. They felt ignored in a society where the rich were getting richer, poverty was, and is, on the rise, services were

[Alex Cunningham]

being cut, and they saw limited prospects for their lives to get better. Worse still, they believed that their children faced an uncertain future.

However, people did not vote to be worse off, or to see chemical and other energy-intensive industries on Teesside devastated, with a huge impact on jobs and investment. They did not vote to weaken food standards, for their own movement to be restricted, or for hard-won rights for workers to be set aside. They did not vote for a backstop arrangement to protect Northern Ireland, leaving us to abide by EU rules without influencing them for who knows how long. Yet that is exactly what they will get with the Prime Minister's deal.

We are on the cusp of shattering the hopes of our people. If we vote for isolation from Europe with the Prime Minister's deal, not only will we find ourselves on the outside, but we will face an indefinite period of uncertainty. If we were to find ourselves with no deal at all, we would be cast aside from our most lucrative markets, left floundering in the world, dependent on countries across the globe for trade deals, and face the prospect of surrendering our standards for everything from food to chemical manufacturing.

I am always mindful and respectful of that voting statistic from people in my constituency, but my constituents are not daft. They know that the false promises made about NHS funding, immigration, taking back control, and so many other things, will not be delivered. They also know about the controversy over the illegality of the leave campaign.

I cannot possibly vote to satisfy everyone in my constituency, from the no-deal leavers to those demanding a second referendum and many in between, but I can vote to protect them from a bad deal and from no deal. The Government are failing to deliver a prosperous deal for our country. I favour a general election or, failing that, a second referendum, which, according to my own and national surveys, the majority of my constituents now want.

My votes are also for the north-east of England, which is a huge net exporter of goods to the EU and depends on markets there for cars, chemicals and countless other manufactured goods. It also depends on the EU for expertise, grants and tourists. Much of that is starting to go wrong, as evidenced by members of the North East England chamber of commerce, whose quarterly economic survey results recently reported less international trade activity, citing Brexit uncertainty as the key reason. The region looked set for a record year of trade, outperforming 2017 in the first and second quarters of 2018, according to the chamber of commerce, but a 10% decline in exports to the EU represented a reduction of £200 million in business, dwarfing other gains.

As some Members might know, I have a long-standing interest in UK energy, having spent a large part of my career working in the gas industry. A year on from the launch of the Government's industrial strategy and the Helm review into the cost of energy, a new report published last month by UK Steel shows that UK producers face electricity prices twice those of their direct competitors in France, and 50% more than those of German producers. Gas prices also remain high, at more than twice those of US manufacturers and three times those of Russian producers. Carbon prices have

also sustained new peaks during the autumn period. In short, the cumulative impact of the cost of decarbonising energy risks becoming unaffordable for chemical businesses in my constituency. The truth is that this deal does nothing to help that and little to allay the fears of industry in any of those areas.

Ministers are also trying to replicate all manner of regulations in British law, but companies in my region—international companies—tell me that it is not good enough. One set of EU regulations, the REACH—registration, evaluation, authorisation and restriction of chemicals—regulations, are critical to my region. I have been contacted by many of the companies affected. SABIC is an international petrochemicals company and an employer in my constituency. Its chemical products and technologies are utilised in a vast number of everyday essentials, such as medicines, food, drinks, tele-communications, IT, clothing and much more. The volume of its activities, in terms of exports and imports, and the complexity of just-in-time supply chains, with multiple border crossings involved in moving raw materials to finished products, mean that any disruption will adversely affect the competitiveness of its business and the potential for future trade and investment. That is industry telling us that we cannot simply trust that things will work out and that we can go it alone. Industry employers—the people who pay the wages of millions of people—are saying that this is a problem.

By voting against this deal and against a no-deal Brexit, I am standing up for my constituents and their industry. If the Government cannot secure a deal that has the confidence of Parliament, and if Parliament cannot persuade the Government to change tack and seek a different kind of agreement, based on a strong customs union and other links to guarantee trade, investment, jobs and people's rights, we should either have that general election or return the matter to the people in a second referendum.

6.43 pm

**Hugh Gaffney** (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (Lab): Thank you for calling me to speak, Mr Speaker—you are saving the best til last. This is an important debate that will shape the future of our country for years to come. It was an eventful few days before the House rose for the Christmas recess, and the Prime Minister probably wishes that she was still on holiday. This Government became the first in modern times to be found in contempt of Parliament, through their refusal to publish their legal advice. The Prime Minister then announced that the Government would be pulling the parliamentary vote on the withdrawal agreement after days of impassioned debate in this House. The Conservative party then threw itself, and the country, into further political chaos with a vote of no confidence in the Prime Minister's leadership.

The Prime Minister survived and promised to listen to the House's concerns by securing legal changes to aspects of the withdrawal agreement. She found herself in office, but not in power. Having failed to secure any meaningful changes to her withdrawal agreement, I suspect she will soon find herself out of office as well.

Let us not be kidded that this deal commands any kind of majority in this House. It can barely command the confidence of the Cabinet, with stories constantly in the press of Cabinet Ministers urging the Prime Minister



to prepare for the deal to be voted down and to start to look at alternative options. I do, though, commend the Prime Minister for bringing some much needed unity to the country: her deal has managed to unite those who voted to remain and those who voted to leave in opposition to it. She has united both in hatred of the deal.

The Prime Minister tells the country that her deal is the best one on the table, yet she did not have the confidence to put it to the House as originally scheduled before the Christmas recess. If she really believes that it is the best deal, why has she chosen to attempt to scare MPs into supporting it by stepping up preparations for no deal? In Operation Brock, 150 lorries were supposed to turn up, but only 89 did. She could not even get that deal right.

Why has the Prime Minister not chosen to make the case for her deal on its own merits? She went into the 2017 general election telling the British people that no deal was better than a bad deal. She set out a series of red lines that would drive her negotiations with the EU. Well, things have certainly changed. The Prime Minister now tells the British people that a bad deal is better than no deal, and those red lines have been abandoned, just like many of the Prime Minister's previous promises. Remember when she said that she would not call a snap election? I have to say thanks to the Prime Minister: thanks for bringing me down to Parliament to be here today as a voice for the people of Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear!"] Thank you.

This is certainly a bad deal. It fails to protect jobs and living standards. It risks the workers' rights, environmental standards and consumer protections that we currently enjoy through our EU membership; it fails to properly protect the rights of EU nationals living in our country and UK citizens living in EU countries; and it risks dividing our United Kingdom, with economic hardship for working people in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the English regions, as the Government's own forecasts highlighted.

The Prime Minister continues to play games with this House and the country because she knows that this deal will be voted down on Tuesday. It is about time that she ruled out the prospect of no deal. A no-deal Brexit would be devastating for our economy. It is time for the Government to get real and provide some certainty for the businesses, workers and communities that are concerned about the prospect of no deal.

My constituents in Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill do not just reject the Prime Minister's deal because it fails to protect their jobs and living standards, and workers' rights; they reject her deal because it highlights the unfairness at the heart of her Government. They are a Government who are prepared to put forward this deal or entertain the idea of no deal, despite the real and damaging consequences for some of the poorest people and communities in my constituency and others across the UK. They are a Government who have pushed 14 million people into poverty. In case the Secretary of State did not hear me, I will repeat it: a Government who have pushed 14 million people into poverty, including in my constituency, because of their failed welfare reforms, such as universal credit. They are a Government who have pursued austerity, cutting our public services and creating an economy in which workers are paid less and have greater job insecurity.

My constituents do not just need the deal to be rejected; they need a general election and a change in Government. They need a Labour Government who can negotiate a Brexit deal that unites the country and delivers a fairer Britain. More importantly, they need a Labour Government who invest in our communities, tackle low pay, end job insecurity and bring our vital services back into public ownership.

When the deal is rejected on Tuesday, I urge the Prime Minister to reflect on the fact that she has failed to deliver a Brexit deal that protects working people and their livelihoods; to recognise that she no longer commands the confidence of this House; and to recognise that she has failed to deliver for the country. She should call a general election so that the British people can elect a Labour Government who will get to work tackling the real issues of delivering a Brexit deal that works for the many and not the chosen few. And let that Labour Government stop anyone else being pushed into joining the 14 million people in poverty in this country.

6.49 pm

**Rebecca Long Bailey** (Salford and Eccles) (Lab): We have heard more than 50 impassioned speeches today from both sides of the House, from Perth to Don Valley, from Cheltenham to Walsall and from Tottenham to Ceredigion. I will not attempt to reference every single speech as I certainly would not do them justice, but it is clear that all Members who have spoken recognise the weight of responsibility on their shoulders—the critical decision that they must make to support their communities.

What also became clear from today's contributions is that the Prime Minister's deal has not found consensus in this House. The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs began by stating that we should not let the perfect be the enemy of the good. Well, this deal is significantly deficient in qualifying for the presumption in this well-known quotation. This deal is simply not good. It does not work for business and industry, it does not work for working people and it does not work for our environment. In fact, as we have been sitting here today, the former head of MI6 is reported to have told the Government that it threatens national security.

The withdrawal agreement and the outline political declaration will not ensure the relationship with the European Union needed for UK businesses to operate unhindered post Brexit. The Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee has already stated that

"no business that we have taken evidence from held the view that—from an industry perspective—the Withdrawal Agreement and Political Declaration provide a deal as good as the one we already have with the EU".

For instance, in the likely backstop scenario, the withdrawal agreement does not provide for a customs union as we enjoy now. As the Institute for Public Policy Research said, it provides for a "bare-bones customs union", meaning that it does not cover areas such as services, trade or public procurement, and it certainly does not provide for frictionless trade between the UK and the EU. Specifically, it will not address non-tariff barriers such as VAT and product regulation checks, which will have a significant impact on industries such as car production and pharmaceuticals—sectors that are essential to our industrial strategy. Indeed, the Attorney General's advice confirmed this, stating that, during the backstop,

[*Rebecca Long Bailey*]

“Great Britain will no longer be a member of the EU’s Single Market for Goods or the EU’s customs arrangements. This means that any GB goods crossing the border into the EU will be subject to third country checks by Member State authorities”.

Let me turn to the outline political declaration, which is hardly worth the paper it is written on, quite frankly. It includes phrases such as “explore the possibility”. But even if the aspirations listed there were implemented, that would not guarantee frictionless trade. In the best-case scenario, there will be barriers to trade in goods and market access for services will be reduced. That is a fact.

As the IPPR also summarised,

“there will be significant barriers to trade in services between the UK and the EU. UK firms will only have EU market access under host state rules and will lose the benefits of single market treatment... Under these plans, we should therefore expect significant new non-tariff barriers in goods, particularly in heavily regulated sectors such as chemicals and pharmaceuticals.”

Clearly, this is not a good deal for UK business as the Prime Minister keeps alleging. The fact that we are still discussing it today—two months since its inadequacy was revealed before Christmas—rather than negotiating a better deal is harming businesses in the here and now. It takes only a quick Google search to see that businesses up and down the country are already delaying investment, implementing mitigation plans and, in some cases, cutting jobs and moving operations.

Significant manufacturers such as Bombardier, Rolls-Royce and Cobham have applied to come under the jurisdiction of regulators in other EU countries, and this week Aston Martin triggered its contingency plans—at an accumulating cost, according to its chief executive. Indeed, as we have been sat here today, Honda has announced that it is doing the same and implementing its contingency plans.

I am sure that the Secretary of State will quote some of the business organisations that have cautiously welcomed the Prime Minister’s deal, but I gently say to him that they are doing so with a gun held to their head. They have been presented with a false choice between this deal or no deal by a Government who are recklessly threatening the worst-case scenario and attempting to run down the clock. In fact, it is economic sabotage.

The will of this House has been clearly expressed. There is virtually no support for no deal, and it would therefore be unthinkable for the Prime Minister to proceed down that road. Indeed, according to media reports this morning, even the Secretary of State himself agrees with this principle. If this is true, political posturing in the media is simply not good enough. Will he assure businesses today that the prospect of no deal will be taken off the table?

This unambitious deal will not only hinder the UK in terms of trade, but risk a bonfire of the regulations that ensure that high standards are maintained. Members across the House will recognise the strength of feeling that our constituents have on Brexit. However, I can assure you, Mr Speaker—we have heard from many Members on this issue today—that none of them voted for the watering down of workers’ hard-won rights after we leave the EU. Unfortunately, however, despite assurances from the Prime Minister that

“existing workers’ legal rights will continue to be guaranteed in law”,

the TUC’s verdict is that the deal

“doesn’t guarantee jobs or rights at work into the future.”

Indeed, Thompsons Solicitors has stated that the so-called non-regression clause in the political declaration will be “ineffective” in maintaining workers’ rights, and the IPPR has stated that it is not sufficient to maintain current protections, individuals cannot even bring about proceedings and if the EU raises standards, the UK is permitted to simply fall behind.

Indeed, attempting to use all parliamentary levers to mitigate against—

**Caroline Flint:** Those of us who have put our names to amendment (p) realise that it is not perfect and that, like all other amendments, it is not legally binding. However, does my hon. Friend agree that whatever happens next Tuesday, if there is a willingness, we can open up discussion about how we can ensure, going forward, that we can, in law, see a way to enshrine the protection of these workers’ rights, and would she be willing to engage in such dialogue?

**Rebecca Long Bailey:** I thank my right hon. Friend for her comments. I can certainly state that the sentiment behind the amendment that she and various colleagues have tabled is to bolster workers’ rights and make sure that our workers’ rights in the UK do not fall behind those in the EU.

**John Redwood:** Will the hon. Lady say who is threatening these rights? No party in this House wants to reduce them, and there are clear promises from the Government, so it is not an issue.

**Rebecca Long Bailey:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his comment. However, with my tongue in my cheek, I say that I am not looking at a party that has a track record in this House on bolstering workers’ rights, so my confidence will certainly need to be increased significantly over coming weeks if I am to believe his statement.

Going back to the comment by my right hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint), I certainly hope that the Secretary of State welcomes the sentiments outlined in the amendment that she recently tabled with colleagues, because, as he knows, a combination of the deficiencies of the withdrawal agreement and the Government’s unwillingness to listen to the concerns of MPs has forced Members across the House, such as my right hon. Friend, to gymnastically attempt to secure debate on key issues by any means possible.

My right hon. Friend is right in stating that to secure real confidence in this House, the Government do need to go much further. So far, their words fall far short of what Labour has been asking for. As the TUC has stated, they do not provide the binding long-term guarantee that working people need. It would be very helpful if the Secretary of State stated today, unequivocally, that he will guarantee that the UK will not be permitted to fall behind future improvements from the EU on workers’ rights, environmental protections, and health and safety standards. If so, in the light of the withdrawal agreement’s deficiencies, what legislation does he propose to legally reflect this position?

**Simon Hoare:** What the right hon. Member for Don Valley actually asked was whether the shadow Secretary of State and her Front-Bench team would take part in these cross-party discussions, not what the Secretary of State would do. It is a very simple question. The right hon. Member for Don Valley does not need me to speak on her behalf, but will the shadow Secretary of State answer that question?

**Rebecca Long Bailey:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments. Perhaps he was missing during the contributions, but numerous Members have outlined the Government's inability to liaise with Members across the House to develop a consensus. I share the sentiments of my right hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley on the need to work together across this House to deal with the many issues outlined during these debates and ensure we find a deal that provides a consensus that we can all rally around. Unfortunately, we do not have a Government who have been capable thus far of delivering that. I will move on, because I know we are short of time.

I want to talk briefly about environmental and climate protections. We know that non-regression clauses in relation to environmental protections would not be subject to the arbitration procedures set out in articles 170 to 181. Instead, standards would be enforced at the domestic level and through far weaker state-to-state procedures that are rarely effective in international treaties. The political declaration, meanwhile, contains only hortatory statements regarding climate, energy and the environment that have no legal effect. How can we trust this Government to maintain domestic standards when they have taken quite an active role, shall we say, in opposing EU progress on energy and climate change?

**Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op):** We are now tackling air quality, and that is through the EU and environmental regulations, but the Government had to be taken to court three times. If such a health and environmental crisis engulfs us again, who will protect us if we are not in the EU? It will certainly not be this Government.

**Rebecca Long Bailey:** I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention; he makes an important point. The Government's track record has been rather deficient, to say the least. For example, in 2017 this Government lobbied for EU renewable energy and energy efficiency targets to be reduced, made non-binding or even scrapped. Is it now this Government's position after Brexit to adopt and maintain to 2030 at least the same ambition as that in the revised renewable energy directive and energy efficiency directive? If so, how can we trust the Government to honour that position?

Of course, no deal in relation to energy and the environment would be even worse, risking chaos and catastrophe for energy, climate and the environment according to the Greener UK coalition of non-governmental organisations. As I have outlined, it is extremely irresponsible of the Government to leverage the disaster of no deal to hard-sell what is quite frankly a dismal alternative.

I will bring my comments to a close. I have outlined briefly some of the deficiencies in the withdrawal agreement and political declaration, which, in their present form, demonstrably divide the House and, indeed, Britain.

They will not protect jobs and the economy. They will not protect workers' rights, environmental or health and safety standards, and they give barely any indication of what our future relationship with the EU will look like, causing chronic uncertainty for business.

Members have a choice: do they vote for a deal that they know will make us worse off, with a huge question mark for years to come over our future relationship with the EU, or do they demand the negotiation of a better deal for Britain that will secure support in Parliament and the country? That deal can be found, but this Government have demonstrated that they are not capable of delivering it.

7.3 pm

**The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Greg Clark):** I pay tribute to colleagues for an excellent debate. We have had some important contributions, and that justifies the time given to Members to state their views clearly. It is incumbent on all of us, and particularly the Government, to reflect carefully on the contributions made.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Norfolk (George Freeman) said, Parliament is sovereign and "to be elected to this House is one of the great privileges and responsibilities that our citizens can bestow."

All of us who were elected in 2017 had a particular responsibility, knowing that we would vote on probably the most important decision that this House will take during our time in it, which is the terms of our departure from the European Union and our future relationship with it.

In that respect, this is not simply a matter for the Government, important though that is. It is for every Member to be able to shape and participate in our deliberations. That has been reflected in the contributions of many Members. My hon. Friend the Member for Mid Norfolk talked about reaching out across the House. He expressed the view that there is no majority for a disorderly no-deal Brexit, but of course avoiding that requires an agreement that the House can enter into. I say to the hon. Member for Salford and Eccles (Rebecca Long Bailey) that to take the prospect of no deal off the table is in the hands of this House: it comes through agreeing a deal.

**Sir Edward Davey:** Will the Secretary of State say how he thinks the House could best be involved in reaching a decision for the country if the Prime Minister's deal is voted down next Tuesday?

**Greg Clark:** I will come on to describe and respond to some of the contributions that have been made. It is very important to consider the constructive contributions that many Members have made, which can, in the days ahead before the vote, be reflected in the decision that is taken on Tuesday.

In that regard, let me start by mentioning the contribution of the right hon. Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint). She was right to say that we should be proud of the record of this House over many centuries in establishing a defence of and a commitment to the rights of workers. That gives us cause to be proud around the world, certainly in Europe. We should be determined to continue that tradition. It is fair to reflect that this has involved



[Greg Clark]

Governments led by her party and Governments led by my party. The Labour party introduced the minimum wage and the Conservative party introduced the national living wage. Going back to previous generations in Parliament in different centuries, this House has always taken an active view in these matters. The amendment that she and her hon. Friends have tabled is entirely in accordance with that. Far from, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Richard Benyon) put it, involving a ceding of those decisions to the European Union, what is attractive about the contribution that has been made is that it firmly gives to this House the opportunity to make a sovereign decision on how we want to act on the opportunities that might exist to constantly upgrade and strengthen workers' rights. That should be something that is open to us.

The hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) made a powerful speech and a notable contribution. He said that the time for rhetoric had gone and that the time for negotiation had come. I think that that is a way in which we can proceed and his contribution was consistent with that. He was determined to avoid no deal by accident, which a majority do not want. Again, he reflected on the fact that the Trade Bill, as well as the motion before the House, will give very significant power to this Parliament to shape the ongoing relationships we have with other countries. He made references to the importance of exercising the authority of this House to ensure that all parts of the country, including those whose communities have not felt advantaged by our membership of the European Union and the conduct of the economy over decades past, are heard and recognised as they deserve to be. I will come on to say something more about his amendment in a second.

In the same spirit, my right hon. Friend the Member for Newbury very powerfully made the point that compromise is a virtue and something to be prized in this House. He also made the point that the mandate for compromise reflected in the narrowness of the result—even though it clearly indicated the preference of the population to leave—should be reflected in our deliberations.

The right hon. Member for Knowsley (Mr Howarth) emphasised the important point about our proximity to our trading partners in Europe and reflected on the fact that if we want to engage in good and close trading relationships, as all Members do, it makes sense to think very clearly about how we can do that with those who are geographically closest to us.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (John Redwood), who has over many years given much thought to these matters, nevertheless set out a case that I could not agree with. I hope that I do not mischaracterise his contribution, but he asserted that we should be aiming for greater national self-sufficiency in certain of our trading relationships. He mentioned foodstuffs. I am a proud Kent MP—some of the produce of Kent, as my hon. Friend the Member for Rochester and Strood (Kelly Tolhurst) will attest, is among the best in the world—but to aim for a model of national self-sufficiency while failing to recognise, as David Ricardo did all those centuries ago, the benefits to all if we concentrate and specialise is not something that we should embrace.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) reflected on the economic benefits of the deal and how they would benefit his constituency. The hon.

Member for Salford and Eccles talked about business having a gun to its head. Not at all! Many businesses and business organisations campaigned for remain during the referendum and yet have recognised that what the Prime Minister has negotiated is a settlement that would allow them, and therefore our constituents, to continue to prosper.

**John Redwood:** As the Secretary of State is in love with free trade and Ricardo, would he agree with my proposal to remove all tariffs from imported components for manufactures to give our manufacturing a boost?

**Greg Clark:** My preference is to be part of the arrangements that we benefit from now in terms of our manufacturing industry, but as a general proposition I believe that we should be engaged in reducing tariffs. Part of our contribution to the EU has been that we have been probably the foremost advocate in Europe for the reduction of tariffs. That would be a good thing.

**Sir Edward Davey:** Could the Secretary of State tell the House what David Ricardo had to say about non-tariff barriers, which are the main issue in trade agreements today?

**Greg Clark:** The right hon. Gentleman reflects the reality of trade today and in the time of Ricardo, which is that it is not simply about the tariffs, but about the arrangements and impediments we put in place. Again, that is one of the important parts of the agreement we have entered into.

I wanted to mention the right hon. Gentleman's speech and from the Dispatch Box associate the whole House with his reflections on a previous Member, Paddy Ashdown, who I understand was buried in Somerset today. He would no doubt have made a fine speech in this debate, and the right hon. Gentleman was right to make reference to him.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr Dunne) made the point again—this was a theme of the debate—about the need for compromise and support in securing an orderly withdrawal, and he reflected on the fact that our debates and their conclusions are watched by businesses and boardrooms around the world. It is important that we live up to the reputation we have long enjoyed in this country as a dependable place in which to do business—a country where we come together and take pragmatic decisions and offer that confidence to the world.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rugby (Mark Pawsey) emphasised the point that when businesses do well, workers do well and pensioners do well. Workers' rights are a theme of the debate, and we need that prosperity in order to advance our constituents' circumstances. That is something that Mrs Thatcher was particularly alive to. My hon. Friend referred to her pitch to Japanese investors in the early 1980s, and on the day on which the Prime Minister of Japan is visiting Downing Street, it is appropriate to recall that Mrs Thatcher made the case to Nissan, Toyota and Honda that this country was skilled, innovative, flexible and able to command markets across Europe. That is as true today as it was then.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill) reflected on taking a pragmatic view. He campaigned very vigorously to leave the European Union—

**Robert Neill:** Remain!

**Greg Clark:** He campaigned to remain in the European Union—I was never under any misapprehension about that—but he advocated a managed, considered and orderly approach. He stated in his election address in Bromley and Chislehurst that that was the approach he would take, and I think he has delivered on that commitment during this Parliament. He has also pursued his commitment to achieve a deal that protects jobs, businesses and livelihoods.

**Robert Neill:** I campaigned to remain, as my right hon. Friend did. He may recall that I have referred to the importance of a managed no deal for a particular business in my constituency. He may be interested to know that since the debate in which I spoke about that, I have had an email from the managing director, who said that with a managed deal—the Prime Minister’s deal—his business is survivable. In the event of no deal, he says, it will downsize 75%, close or leave the UK. That is what is at stake.

**Greg Clark:** My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the stakes. This is a matter that engages all Members of Parliament. We all have a responsibility to our constituents now and for the future, and every one of us will need to make an individual decision that reflects that.

I want to mention a few colleagues, and I am sorry not to be able to do justice to all the contributions that have been made; there were more than 50 of them. The hon. Member for Wolverhampton North East (Emma Reynolds) said—wrongly, I think—that it was too late to engage across parties and across Parliament. If I have misrepresented her, I would be delighted to hear it; I was going to admonish her gently for saying that. If we believe, as I do, that this is the most important decision that this Parliament will take, it is never too late to establish that agreement.

**Emma Reynolds:** The right hon. Gentleman invites me to correct the record. I did not say that it was too late; I said that it would have been better to do so earlier. As I said at the end of my speech, I really hope that if the deal is voted down on Tuesday next week, the House will come together. Quite a lot of cross-party working is going on among Back Benchers—more, I am afraid, than is happening between the Government and the Opposition.

**Greg Clark:** I am delighted to know that, and I am delighted that that is the hon. Lady’s view. It is important that Front Benchers do likewise, and I was a bit disappointed that the hon. Member for Salford and Eccles did not take up the invitation to participate in establishing what this House can support.

I think we all admire the optimism and enthusiasm of my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall North (Eddie Hughes), which he referred to. This is a matter that merits such optimism and enthusiasm. His contribution to the debate, looking at how energy can be applied to finding a solution, is much to be commended.

Let me reflect on the amendments that indicate the progress that can be made. It is important to reflect that the standards of workers’ rights we have in this country

not only meet but often far exceed EU standards. The right hon. Member for Don Valley pointed out that the UK offers 39 weeks of statutory maternity pay, compared with the 14 weeks required under the relevant EU directive. We in this House have given fathers and partners a statutory right to paternity leave and pay—something the EU is only starting to consider. Less than a month ago, I said at the Dispatch Box that we were laying legislation to repeal the so-called Swedish derogation from a European directive, removing what many in this country see as a loophole that allows employment agencies to undercut agency workers’ wages.

Those sentiments and that approach are reflected in amendment (p), which was tabled by the right hon. Lady and her colleagues. It is in keeping with traditions on both sides of the House, and we very much agree with its spirit and intention. Today’s contributions show what can be done in this instance and may be a totem for what is possible more broadly. We stand ready to engage in discussions on the amendment. As ever, we need to look very carefully at its implications and drafting, but I am hopeful that it will be possible for us to accept it.

The amendment rightly mentions the environment. We have no intention of lowering our ambitious environmental protections after we leave the EU. We have a duty to continue the leadership we have exercised on that in Europe and across the world. It seems to me that we also have a responsibility, given that time is running out before 29 March, to take advantage of the availability of a means of preventing a damaging no-deal Brexit. It is difficult for investors around the world to understand why the most rudimentary trade terms available between any nations on earth should govern our relationship with the rest of the European Union.

I hope that the tenor of today’s debate continues in the days ahead. I say on behalf of my colleagues that hon. Members’ contributions will be listened to seriously, taken into account and acted upon, as I indicated in response to the amendment relevant to today’s discussions, so that, in the weeks ahead, the whole House can move towards a greater sense of compromise and resolution to implement the decision that the people of the United Kingdom took. At the same time, we must ensure that we can move our economy forward and strengthen our workers’ rights and environmental protections, recognising the House’s ambition to establish this country, now and in the future, as one of the most successful and admired in the world in terms of the economy, workers’ rights and the environment. I commend the motion to the House.

*Ordered,* That the debate be now adjourned.—(*Amanda Milling.*)

*Debate to be resumed tomorrow (Order, 9 January).*

**Mr Speaker:** We come now to the Adjournment.

I find it extraordinary, to the point of being inconceivable, that all colleagues present should not wish to remain so in order to hear the hon. Member for Henley (John Howell) dilate on the subject of the Europa School, Culham, but if there are colleagues who do not feel motivated to do so—unaccountable though I find that—I trust that they will leave the Chamber quickly and quietly, so that those of us who remain, including the occupant of the Chair, can listen with our customary rapt attention to the hon. Gentleman.

## Europa School

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—(*Amanda Milling.*)

7.24 pm

**John Howell** (Henley) (Con): I am grateful for the Minister's attendance. He and I have talked about the Europa School at some length on a number of occasions, and he was, of course, responsible for the reply from the Department for Education to a petition that I presented in the Chamber not so long ago. My purpose this evening is first to highlight the importance and the unique history of the approach to languages that is demonstrated at the school, secondly to highlight the approach to providing the European baccalaureate as the final qualification for those leaving it, and thirdly to ask some questions and make some comments arising from the Department's response to my petition.

The background to all this is, of course, the situation in which we find ourselves as a country in the context of our relationship with the European Union. I am sure we all feel the need to end the current uncertainty as soon as possible, but that is felt nowhere more keenly than at this school, where the educational future of children is at stake.

The Europa School is one of the free schools created as a result of this Government's initiative. It is in Culham, in my constituency, but it serves a wide area, mostly in Oxfordshire and in the surrounding areas of neighbouring counties. Under the terms of the free school, parents have agreed to the provision of a certain type of education that I will describe in more detail shortly, but let me first say something about the school's importance and its unique history.

The initial meeting to discuss the establishment of a free school in Culham took place in 2011 with the then schools Minister, my noble Friend Lord Hill. The meeting was sponsored by me and attended by representatives of parents and educationalists who wished to speak in favour of the proposal. The aim was to meet three demands. First, residents of the county had given the clearest possible support for the new school; secondly, its founders wanted to bring a new form of education into the state school system; and thirdly, we all wished to build on a secure and well-established foundation of education in the European Schools curriculum, which leads eventually to the European baccalaureate.

At its core—this is the first of my major points—was a proposal to offer something that had not been offered before in the UK state system, and, indeed, had not previously been offered in the whole of the European School system. The proposers offered a complete, thoroughgoing commitment to full bilingual education from reception class onwards. Pupils would not simply learn the other language, but would learn through that language. They would learn the linguistic rhythm of that language. This was planned to be truly deep language learning, not just the acquisition of a second language overlaid on the first.

The Europa School was set up as a free school because that is what the parents wanted, which is a key component of the free school movement. The parents wanted that particular type of education to continue through the free school. It was a way of approaching subjects in languages. The pupils were taught subjects

through all those languages, so they could end up learning history in German or geography in Spanish, and so on. That is a valuable way of teaching. The parents wanted that system to continue in the school, and it is being continued.

During Education questions, I asked the Minister whether he accepted that the school was proving popular with parents of all types, including those from the UK, and that it was a good model of language teaching to follow. He replied that he shared my admiration for the Europa School, and I want to build on that today. I understand that we are anticipating an Ofsted report. I believe that everyone expects the school to have done rather well out of it, and I hope that that expectation is fulfilled. However, this approach needs to be set in the context of Brexit, and the difficulties of negotiating a Brexit that does not see the school become a casualty.

The European School, Culham—not the Europa School—had for some time been destined for closure, as the resourcing for such a school at Culham could not be justified within the European Commission's budget for European Schools. A closure date of 2017 for the European School had already been announced. A plan was therefore advanced for the new free school to grow year by year as the European School diminished, and for the two schools to share the use of the Culham site on an agreed basis. An important aspect of this is that the free school was oversubscribed by some 30% at its opening in September 2012 and it has remained significantly oversubscribed at every subsequent admissions round since that date.

What promises and commitments has the school made? First, it sought to open multilingual education to all the residents of Oxfordshire. Secondly, it determined that the new school would have an important commitment to sciences and mathematics, particularly when the plans for the secondary school came into play. The school started with two stream languages, German and French, each joined with English, but it has recently added Spanish as a third stream language.

Critically, the freedom offered by the free schools programme to allow free schools to set their own curriculum has been essential. The founders of the Europa School adopted the European Schools' curriculum, modified by the mandatory elements of the English national curriculum. Thus, by the time of the all-important interview at the Department for Education, there was a distinctive offering to support the bid for pre-opening status. From the deep educational theory came the view that giving a child a second language from their earliest schooling was like giving them a second life—that is, an alternative cultural world in which they could immerse themselves. From the practical world came the view that multilingualism is in no way elitist: what the taxi drivers of many European cities achieve linguistically must be within the reach of schoolchildren, given the right environment and experiences.

**Robert Courts** (Witney) (Con): My hon. Friend is making a fascinating speech extolling the virtues of the Europa School in his constituency. I have had correspondence from constituents expressing their admiration for the school and I would like to associate myself with those comments. Does he agree with me on two brief points? First, does not the success of the Europa School show the success of the free schools



programme? Secondly, does that success not also illustrate that, while Britain may be withdrawing from the political structures of the European Union, she remains an enthusiastic participant in the culture, friendships and co-operation of Europe?

**John Howell:** I agree with both my hon. Friend's points. The school's success shows the importance of the free school movement and our commitment to continuing our co-operation in Europe. I thank him for making those points.

I was particularly proud when the Europa School was specifically mentioned here in 2011 when the then Secretary of State for Education announced that the school was to open as a bilingual free school in 2012. That was not the first time that the residents of Oxfordshire had reason to be grateful for the support of the House in determining the educational provision available to their children. The quality of education at Culham through the European Schools programme had long been held in high regard. David Cameron had supported the unique educational offer provided at Culham, seeking to preserve and enhance it.

I should like to praise the system of education offered under the free schools programme. We must not forget that in this case the school was principally set up to deal with parents of mainland European origin in the area. However, the approach to teaching languages has proved immensely successful—so successful that we are now in a situation where British parents are keen for their children to enter the school and be taught in that way. I ask the Minister to acknowledge this and to confirm that he will do all he can to encourage the continuation of this form of education.

Moving on to the question of the European baccalaureate, the Europa School became an accredited European School in 2014. This means that the school has approval to continue offering the European baccalaureate and to teach the European curriculum. This accreditation was confirmed at a more recent inspection in 2018 by the European Commission. No money flows from Brussels to the school as a consequence of that status; it is simply a validation of the quality of teaching and assessment in the school.

What is so valuable about that accreditation and affiliation? The European baccalaureate uniquely obliges all candidates to take written and oral examinations in at least two languages. The examinations do not just test competence in the additional stream language; the students, as I have pointed out, actually study history and geography through those languages, and use the stream languages as the mode of learning and assessment. As a result, students have a linguistic competence in their stream language on leaving similar to the linguistic competence of university undergraduates. At the same time, all students must study mathematics and at least once science subject to an advanced level. That outcome is not delivered by the UK A-level system. This free school also requires a leaving qualification that properly recognises the numerous years of education that are involved in becoming bilingual and studying diverse school subjects in two languages.

As a responsible step in school governance, the principal and governing body of the school have explored whether the international baccalaureate could be adopted as an alternative qualification. However, there are significant

limitations: examination and study of subjects through two languages is not mandatory; support for the English and German stream combination is weak; the middle years syllabus differs in significant ways; and, most of all, there is a risk of losing expertise among the teaching staff.

The school wants to be able to continue offering the European curriculum and to offer the European baccalaureate as its qualification for school leavers, and I support it most strongly in that aim. In conversation, the Minister likened the situation to the owners of a copyright. In this case, the copyright is owned by the European Commission, not by the Department for Education. I understand from the Minister that the Department is happy for the school to continue teaching the European baccalaureate, but the problem lies in the attitude of the European Commission. In this situation, I would like to ask the Minister to ensure that the Department for Education can continue to be a friend to this free school, to negotiate strongly on its behalf, and to offer a no-holds-barred assessment of how the school can continue even if the UK is not a member of the EU. I urge the Minister to explore every avenue as a matter separate from Brexit. I hope that this excellent educational establishment may continue its development in the direction that the founders of the free school have planned.

Finally, let me turn to the Department's response to my petition. I was glad that the Government were successful in securing a provision in the withdrawal agreement that allows for Europa School's continued accreditation as a European school until the end of August 2021. Beyond the withdrawal agreement, accreditation to deliver the European baccalaureate is available only to schools located in an EU member state. Continuing to deliver the European baccalaureate beyond that depends on a decision by European Union member states and the European Commission, through the European Schools board of governors, to change the rules on accredited schools. What are the Government doing to help the school talk to the European Schools board to try to get an agreement to include the school within its ambit after 2021? The Minister said:

"At present that seems highly unlikely."—[*Official Report*, 20 December 2018; Vol. 651, c. 16P.]

This may be a lawyer's view, but I note the term "at present" in his statement, so I ask him to set out the full position and the likely changes he expects, so as to provide the school with the degree of certainty it requires.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Robert Courts) pointed out, there is something special about free schools, particularly in what they can teach and the way that they can teach it. The Europa School illustrates that above all, which is why I have spent the last few minutes telling Members about it. It is a good example of how free schools work, how they can take the attitudes of parents and make them a reality, and how they can, in this case, through the European baccalaureate, continue to offer something of enormous benefit to children. I would like to see the extent to which we can provide support for the school at this time.

7.39 pm

**The Minister for School Standards (Nick Gibb):** I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell) on securing this important debate. I pay

[Nick Gibb]

tribute to him for his assiduousness in championing the Europa School not just today but over many years. He has acted to secure the best interests of parents, pupils and teachers at the school, particularly in his dealings with Ministers and with the Department for Education.

As I said in response to my hon. Friend's question in the House on 17 December, I share his admiration for the Europa School and its very high academic standards. As continued accreditation as a European school depends on decisions by the European Schools board of governors, I recognise that the school and its community of pupils, parents and staff are facing a period of considerable change and uncertainty as the UK prepares to leave the EU. I assure the school and my hon. Friend of my ongoing support during this period, and I will work closely with him in making sure that the school receives that support.

The Europa School, as my hon. Friend said, opened as a free school in 2012. Its creation was driven by a group of parents who wished to continue to offer a European Schools-style multilingual education following the decision to close the European school in Culham in 2007. That decision was taken by the then Education Secretary in the last Labour Government as there were no longer sufficient numbers of pupils who were the children of EU officials employed at the Culham centre for fusion energy to justify its continuation as a European school.

As my hon. Friend said, the Europa School is the only accredited European school in the UK, and it teaches the European baccalaureate, which comprises the last two years of secondary education in a European school or at a school accredited by the European Schools board of governors. Pupils follow a combination of language, humanities and scientific subjects, with subjects taught through more than one language.

The Europa School has a thriving community, and it is held in high regard by parents, pupils and the local community. As of 1 January, there are 442 open free schools across the country, and the schools will provide around 250,000 places when at capacity. As my hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Robert Courts) said in his intervention, free schools like the Europa School are creating thousands of high-quality school places, as well as bringing innovation to the wider education system and diversity to local provision.

Ofsted's latest information shows that 85% of all free schools with inspection reports published by the end of November 2018 are rated good or outstanding, and secondary free schools are among some of the highest performing state-funded schools in the country. I congratulate the Europa School on being one of eight European schools to have achieved a 100% pass rate for students who completed the European baccalaureate in 2018, which is a particularly impressive achievement given that 2018 was the first year of pupils at the free school taking the qualification.

Within the primary phase, I am pleased to note that the school has achieved an improvement in its key stage 2 results, with the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in reading, writing and maths increasing from 68% in 2017 to 69% in 2018. That places the school above the national average of 64%.

I note that the school had two inspections last term, with an inspection from the European Schools system in early September followed by Ofsted in December. The Ofsted report will be published shortly. The European Schools inspection will inform the European Schools board of governors decision to grant accreditation from 2019 to August 2021.

The defining feature of the European Schools curriculum is, of course, its focus on foreign languages, which this Government strongly support. I very much welcome the Europa School's success, and boosting language teaching is central to this Government's ambition. Having a command of foreign languages is more important than ever as we leave the European Union and forge a new relationship with our European friends and global partners. Languages provide an insight into other cultures and can open the door to travel and employment opportunities. Languages can also broaden a pupil's horizons, helping them to navigate and succeed in new environments.

The Europa School is an accredited European school. Accreditation to deliver the European baccalaureate is available only to schools located in an EU member state, which means that, in addition to the exemption it receives from the Department for Education to deliver this qualification, the school must also receive accreditation from the European Schools board of governors, consisting of all member states of the EU and the European Commission.

The withdrawal agreement with the EU contains a provision that the UK will remain covered by the European schools convention during the implementation period after we leave the EU, but that would not have been enough to allow Europa to retain its accreditation during this period. That is why the UK negotiators sought, and were successful in securing in the withdrawal agreement, the inclusion of the regulations on accredited European schools. That allows for the continued accreditation for Europa to offer the European baccalaureate until the summer of 2021. I am very pleased that we were able to secure that transition period for Europa as part of the separation provisions in the withdrawal agreement. It will allow the school sufficient time to transition to a new curriculum.

The accreditation to 2021 is subject to renewal of accreditation by the European Schools board of governors, which will take place in April 2019, and we expect that to be granted, given the clear intention of the withdrawal agreement and the strong performance of the school. I would like to assure my hon. Friend the Member for Henley that officials in the Department have been working closely with the Europa School to prepare for its future after we leave the EU and it is clearly for Europa and its board of trustees to determine the right curriculum to enable the school to continue after the implementation period ends. The implementation period will allow time for the school to complete this transition.

I am pleased to hear that the school has recently been successful in its candidacy application to be able to teach the international baccalaureate diploma from September 2020. That will allow the school to continue its focus on language teaching, and to operate with an international focus and ethos. All international baccalaureate students learn to express themselves confidently in more than one language, and this qualification will allow the school to retain its advanced language teaching and a unique offer of education to pupils.

Once the accreditation process is complete, the Europa School will join 138 other international baccalaureate world schools operating in the UK.

This Government have been clear that we do not want or expect a no-deal scenario. The UK and the EU have agreed the terms of the UK's smooth and orderly exit from the EU in the form of the withdrawal agreement and a detailed political declaration on the terms of our future relationship. Nevertheless, the Government will continue to do the responsible thing and prepare for all eventualities. I welcome the fact that the Europa School is also taking a responsible approach and preparing for the UK exiting the EU without a deal.

I am pleased to say that, with the Department for Education's support, the European Schools board of governors agreed at its December meeting to maintain Europa's accreditation until the end of this academic year, even in the event of a no-deal exit. That will enable the 32 pupils currently in year 13—S7, as it is referred to at the Europa School—to complete their sixth-form studies and take their exams. In addition, the school and DFE officials are working with the European Schools system to secure arrangements for the 47 year 12 pupils, who are due to sit their European baccalaureate exams in summer 2020.

The European Schools system has been clear that its rules require accredited schools to be in an EU member state, and therefore accreditation would not be available beyond 2019, but I am pleased that it is working with Europa and DFE to consider alternatives for the pupils due to sit their baccalaureate in 2020. It has been proposed that Europa could operate in partnership with another European school to deliver the baccalaureate in 2020. I thank the principal of Europa and the director of the European School in Bergen for their work to put the arrangements in place.

While we are optimistic that we will secure the necessary support for this arrangement, it is dependent on further legal consideration by the European Schools system and a vote in the board of governors' meeting in April. The Department will, of course, continue to make a very strong case for this agreement to be adopted for 2020. I do need to make it clear, though, that the European Schools system views this partnership arrangement as a "one-off" arrangement for the current year 12 pupils only. It is not considering a similar arrangement for 2021 in a no-deal scenario. Our current understanding is that it will not apply to those pupils currently in year 11. I recognise the difficult position in which that leaves the school and its pupils.

I very much welcome the fact that Lynn Wood, the principal of Europa School UK, and Professor Andrew Parker, the chair of the board of governors, have taken a responsible approach in being open and honest with

affected pupils and their families. I understand that Ms Wood and Professor Parker have written to the parents of the 54 pupils currently in year 11 so that they can make appropriate choices about their sixth-form education and ensure that arrangements are in place in the unlikely event that we leave without a deal. I also understand that Europa is investigating whether the school could be exceptionally authorised by the International Baccalaureate Organization to start teaching the international baccalaureate as early as September, as an emergency measure, should the need arise.

I assure the Europa School UK community that the Department is committed to supporting the school and its pupils and will work closely with the school as the future position becomes clear. I will work closely with my hon. Friend, who will monitor the situation very closely himself.

My hon. Friend raised the question of the future position of the Europa School as an accredited European school beyond the provisions set out in the withdrawal agreement. I recognise that the wish of the Europa School is to continue to deliver the European curriculum and baccalaureate once the UK has left the European Union. The Government are not in a position to allow or not allow the school to offer the European baccalaureate to its students as an equivalent A-level after 2021; that is a matter solely for the board of the European Schools system.

Although the system also allows for accredited European schools operating in national education systems, the European schools regulation on accredited schools is clear: only schools in EU member states can be accredited as European schools. It does not provide for accreditation in non-EU countries. That is why it was important that we secured a transitional period for Europa through the withdrawal agreement. The school must therefore continue to prepare to transition to a new curriculum, and I am pleased that it is making good progress on that.

I am grateful for my hon. Friend's support for this issue and appreciate the difficult position that the school finds itself in. I thank the pupils, staff and wider school community for supporting the school through these uncertain times. I am sure that the school will continue to be highly successful in offering a strong, quality education through the delivery of a broad curriculum with a focus on language teaching. Europa pupils will continue to be well placed to succeed in a global economy, and the Department for Education will continue to support the school to prepare for its future.

*Question put and agreed to.*

7.52 pm

*House adjourned.*





# House of Commons

*Friday 11 January 2019*

*The House met at half-past Nine o'clock*

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## Points of Order

**Luciana Berger** (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I wonder whether you or your good offices have been informed by the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions that she might make a statement to this House this morning. I understand from numerous reports in the newspapers that the Secretary of State is giving a speech this morning—it is being trailed in the media—to confirm that the very unpopular two-child limit in universal credit for children who are older than 24 months is due to be scrapped, and that the managed migration of claimants to universal credit will slow down. Given that we are sitting today and there are many Members here on both sides of the Chamber, this would be an opportune and, in fact, appropriate moment for the Secretary of State to come to the House. Do you know whether that is going to happen?

**Mr Speaker:** I am very grateful to the hon. Lady for her point of order. The short answer is that I have not been informed of any intention on the part of the Secretary of State to deliver an oral statement to the House today. I have just been advised from the Table that there is to be a written ministerial statement today. However, as the hon. Lady, who is a keen student of parliamentary procedure, will know from her own experience, the proffering of a written ministerial statement does not preclude the possibility of oral exchanges. While such exchanges do not seem set to take place today, there is every possibility that they can and will take place on a subsequent day, and the hon. Lady can look forward to that possibility with eager anticipation.

**Mike Gapes** (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. I heard the Secretary of State speaking on the radio this morning about these issues. Is it not discourteous that she spoke on the radio before coming to this House to announce a change of Government policy?

**Mr Speaker:** I did not hear the interview. There has been considerable focus this week on Parliament and how matters should be handled. Let me say, for the avoidance of doubt, in terms so clear as to brook of no misunderstanding, that if a change in Government policy is to be announced, especially on a major matter that has been the subject of considerable controversy, it is proper for that announcement of a change first to be made to the House. A statement, of course, is a form of speech, but it is then customarily followed by substantial interrogation. If somebody can make a speech outside the House, it is perfectly open to that person to make a statement in the House. Respect for the House, and in

particular for the Chamber, is a matter of the highest importance as far as I am concerned, and it should be so far as all Governments are concerned.

**Neil Coyle** (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. The Select Committee on Work and Pensions has today published a report calling for this exact change of policy. The Secretary of State has given multiple interviews this morning, well before any written statement has been put before the House. What measures does the House have to hold the Secretary of State to account for a clear breach of how such an announcement should be made? It looks very much like a Government attempt to remove negative headlines in order to get some positive press coverage.

**Mr Speaker:** Nothing can be done immediately. There is, as far as I can see, no scope for bringing the Secretary of State to the Chamber today, unless she were to offer to come later in our proceedings. That request could be entertained, but otherwise I think the hon. Gentleman will have to content himself with the likely prospect of exchanges early next week.

**Christian Matheson** (City of Chester) (Lab): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. It seems to be an all too regular occurrence that announcements by this Government are made outside this House. Of course, it is open to hon. Members to seek your permission to ask an urgent question when such announcements are not made to the House. When considering such a request, would your office take into account the fact that the Government have not offered hon. Members an opportunity to ask oral questions, even though the issue might not be deemed urgent having been dealt with in a written statement a couple of days earlier?

**Mr Speaker:** I am extraordinarily grateful to the hon. Gentleman for gently advising me on these matters. The short answer is yes, it certainly would be taken into account. The Clerk of the House has just swivelled around to say to me that he thinks my record on this subject is pretty clear. What I would say to the hon. Gentleman, who is also a keen student of parliamentary procedure, is this: context is all. The context of the situation is of the highest importance. The fact that there might have been some days' coverage of the issue—in some people's minds rendering a parliamentary treatment less urgent—is not the only consideration. The question is: was the House informed? Does the House wish to air the issue? Is there an appetite to question the Minister? The Speaker takes all those considerations into account, and I do not think that the hon. Gentleman need feel any anxiety on that front.

**Layla Moran** (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I seek your guidance on how I can best explain to my constituents why we are here for a sixth day of debate, when we were meant to have a vote in early December—on 11 December—on a deal that has largely not changed since. It is now 11 January, and there are 77 days to go until exit day, so I seek advice from you on how we can solicit a vote today, so that we can get on with rejecting this doomed deal and start looking at other options such as a people's vote.

**Mr Speaker:** I am very sorry to disappoint the hon. Lady, but she inquires how a vote can be forced today, and the answer is that there is not scope to do so. The Business of the House motion was passed as amended on Wednesday, and if the hon. Lady can contain herself—I do understand her frustration and irritation on this matter—she should have an opportunity to vote on Tuesday. Meanwhile she can always communicate to her constituents, as I rather imagine that she will, that she was present and correct and in her place seeking to contribute today, and reminding the House of the sequence of events that has recently unfolded. I am sorry that I cannot offer any better prospect to the hon. Lady than votes on Tuesday, but I think that the rest is history.

## European Union (Withdrawal) Act

[7TH ALLOTTED DAY]

*Debate resumed (Orders, 4 December and 9 January).*

*Question again proposed,*

That this House approves for the purposes of section 13(1)(b) of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, the negotiated withdrawal agreement laid before the House on Monday 26 November 2018 with the title ‘Agreement on the withdrawal of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland from the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community’ and the framework for the future relationship laid before the House on Monday 26 November 2018 with the title ‘Political Declaration setting out the framework for the future relationship between the European Union and the United Kingdom’.

9.41 am

**The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Sajid Javid):** Next week, this House will be asked to make one of the most momentous parliamentary decisions. We will be asked to support my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister’s Brexit deal. Each and every one of us will have to make a choice—a choice that will determine the future of the United Kingdom. I am clear that the deal on the table is the best option available for ensuring an orderly exit from the European Union and the best option for delivering the Brexit that people voted for in the referendum.

The deal will have a significant impact on the UK’s immigration system, and it will protect EU citizens’ rights. Concern over uncontrolled immigration from the EU was a major factor in the decision to leave the EU. People wanted control over immigration. They wanted future decisions on UK immigration policy to be taken in this country and by this Parliament, and they wanted immigration brought down to sustainable levels, and that is what this deal delivers.

Just before Christmas I published the immigration White Paper, which set out the Government’s plans in more detail. It drew heavily on the advice of the independent Migration Advisory Committee, to which I repeat my thanks for its thorough and comprehensive analysis.

**Several hon. Members rose—**

**Sajid Javid:** I will take a couple of interventions.

**Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP):** I am grateful to the Home Secretary for giving way and for beginning his remarks by confirming that a major factor in the referendum was immigration. He will be aware that yesterday, when my hon. Friend the Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) stood almost exactly here and said exactly the same thing, it was hurled down by protest from Conservative Back Benchers, some of whom are still here today. Does he have any indication of why they accept it when it comes from the Secretary of State, but when the same truth is told by the Scottish National party it gets hurled down in protest? Is it that they only like to hear things from themselves and they cannot face accepting the truth from anybody else?

**Sajid Javid:** I was here in the Chamber yesterday at the moment to which the hon. Gentleman refers, and I do not recognise that description at all. What I do recognise is that over a number of years in this House, there have been debates on immigration. One of the issues that hon. Members have reflected from their



constituencies is a concern over increasing levels of immigration and a need to take more control, and that is exactly what this deal delivers.

**Ian Murray** (Edinburgh South) (Lab): I am very grateful to the Home Secretary for giving way so early in his speech. The No.1 priority for most countries, particularly in Asia, when doing a trade deal will be to loosen the UK Government's immigration policies so that they can get more people working and living in this country. Given that he has confirmed that the Government stand by their policy of cutting net migration to tens of thousands, how does he propose reconciling that number with trade deals with other countries?

**Sajid Javid:** What the hon. Gentleman has highlighted is that, because we are leaving the EU, we can actually contemplate for the first time having our own trade deals with other countries, in Asia or elsewhere in the world. When such trade deals are struck, there are clearly deals to be made on services and on the trade of goods, and each time we strike such deals, we will look carefully at them and do whatever it takes for them to work in the British national interest.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Sajid Javid:** I want to make some progress.

**Mike Gapes** (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op) *rose*—

**Sajid Javid:** I will give way to the hon. Gentleman, but then I will make some progress.

**Mike Gapes:** I am grateful to the Secretary of State. Will he take this opportunity to condemn the leaflet put out by Vote Leave during the campaign, saying that 75 million Turks would be coming into our country over the next few years?

**Sajid Javid:** That particular information was completely incorrect. People who were members of Vote Leave at the time have also spoken against that leaflet. We do not want to rerun the debate, but I am happy to say that of course that information was wrong.

I referred to the report and advice from the independent Migration Advisory Committee. The MAC looked in detail at the impact of European migration on the UK's economy and society and produced recommendations based on its analysis.

The White Paper was also informed by my own discussions with right hon. and hon. Members, as well as with businesses and civil society groups up and down the country. The White Paper outlined our intention to build a new immigration system founded on the principle that entry to the UK should be on the basis of skill rather than of nationality, and that the existing automatic preference for EU citizens will end. Alongside that, I introduced the Immigration Bill. The Bill is a key step to ending free movement once and for all. For the first time in more than 40 years, we will have full control over our borders; the decisions over who comes to the UK will be firmly in our hands. We will ensure that all people coming into this country will need to have permission to do so.

But control over immigration does not mean closing our door or turning our back on immigration, far from it. Our country is far stronger because of immigration: it is stronger economically, culturally and socially. It is stronger in every way because of immigration, and I am determined to continue to have an immigration system that welcomes the very best talent from across the world, helping us to build an open, welcoming and outward looking post-Brexit Britain.

**Nigel Huddleston** (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): I thank the Home Secretary for giving way. He will be well aware of the immense contribution of citizens from around the world, but particularly those from the EU who make an immense contribution to the local economy in Worcestershire. Does he agree that the deal on the table gives them reassurance and comfort that they have the right to stay and that they are welcome, which is the best way of giving them peace of mind?

**Sajid Javid:** Of course I agree absolutely with my hon. Friend, especially when it comes to Worcestershire, our home county. I will turn to that specific point in a few minutes.

**Luciana Berger** (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): I listened very closely to what the Secretary of State just said about the benefits of immigration. He will know that there are many pressures on our public services, particularly our national health service, up and down the country. It is already difficult, particularly for GP surgeries, for example, to recruit people from beyond Europe. The concerns of those surgeries are that, post 29 March, they will have to pay an inordinate amount and spend an incredible amount of time processing documents in order to get the doctors we so desperately need because we have a shortage of GPs and many other healthcare professionals. We have a vacancy rate of 10% in our national health service.

**Sajid Javid:** The hon. Lady is absolutely right to talk about the benefits to our public services of immigration, such as doctors and nurses in the health service. That was partly recognised in the change I made last year to remove nurses and doctors from the tier 2 cap. The new immigration system set out in the White Paper, which refers specifically to benefits for the public sector, is perfectly compatible with the needs of the public sector.

The White Paper sets out proposals for a secure and streamlined border. EU visitors will be able to come to the UK without a visa and will continue to be able to use e-gates. In keeping with our position that the EU should not automatically receive preferential treatment, we announced at the end of last year that the use of e-gates would be extended later this year to nationals of Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, Singapore, South Korea and the United States. That is evidence that the UK is open for business and committed to ensuring the swiftest possible entry for visitors.

In line with the advice of the Migration Advisory Committee, our future immigration system will contain a route for skilled workers. We will expand the definition of skilled workers to encompass those in mid-skilled occupations. The route will be uncapped, and we are removing the resident labour market test for highly skilled workers. The Migration Advisory Committee

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argued that it burdened businesses with unnecessary bureaucracy and was ineffective. Both those changes will greatly assist businesses and speed up processes.

We will retain the protections that exist for British workers, such as the skills charge. For intermediate-skilled jobs, we will engage with employers and businesses to consider whether a form of the resident labour market test would still be appropriate.

**Matt Western** (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for giving way; he is being very generous with his time. How does he envisage his approach working with someone like Steve Jobs's dad, who came from Syria? How would such people come into this country and contribute to the prosperity and wealth of this nation?

**Sajid Javid:** If the hon. Gentleman bears with me, I think he will see as I progress with my remarks what routes of entry we have for those who bring talent and skills to our country.

The Migration Advisory Committee has recommended that the salary threshold for the skilled worker route be £30,000. There has, of course, been a lively debate on that point already. We will run a 12-month process of engagement with business, employers, universities and others. Only at the conclusion of that work will we determine the level at which the threshold should be set. In any case, we will retain the shortage occupation list, which allows for a lower threshold in jobs such as nursing where there are shortages.

There will also be a new route for workers at any skill level, but it will be for only a temporary period. That will allow businesses to have the staff they need as we move to the new immigration system. It also gives them a clear incentive to invest more in training young British people now. Access to low-skilled labour from abroad should never be a substitute for investment in the skills of British people. Our new system will ensure that it is not.

Members have pointed out that agriculture has a particular reliance on migrant labour. I have listened carefully to those concerns and we will pilot a seasonal agricultural workers scheme in the spring. That announcement has already been well received.

**Layla Moran** (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): What evidence does the Secretary of State have that employers are not already trying to train local talent among young people through apprenticeships and other schemes? For example, people in the construction industry in Oxfordshire tell me that they are desperate to do so, but that they cannot do it with the local population alone. What evidence does he have that employers are not training young people from this country and trying to do both?

**Sajid Javid:** The hon. Lady asks about evidence. At the start of my remarks I referred to the Migration Advisory Committee, an independent body that went out and did a lot of research on the impact of European migration. That is one point of evidence. Its report was published in September, and it sounds like she has not read it. I suggest that she does so, as it contains a lot of

evidence on these issues. It is also self-evident that for some employers it is all too easy to reach out and get labour from abroad when they could look at domestic labour and invest in skills. That investment is not happening at the scale we want to see, and the new immigration system will encourage it.

The White Paper sets out that the UK will continue to be open and welcoming to international students. The numbers of international students in our universities are at record levels. I reiterate that there will be no cap on the number of international students we accept. That means that more students will get the opportunity to enjoy the world-class education our universities have to offer. To help our universities compete for the best talent around the world and to help our economy, we are increasing the period for which international students in higher education can remain in the UK at the end of their studies, giving them greater opportunities to find skilled work.

**Neil Coyle** (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab): On the availability of alternative British workers, what does the Home Secretary say to UK Hospitality, which points out that there are not enough unemployed young Londoners to fill the posts if just 15% of the current hotel workforce is not available because of visa restrictions or because of our leaving the European Union? To give an example from rural areas, what does he say to farmers who are desperate for a large low-skilled fruit picking workforce that simply is not available in the local community?

**Sajid Javid:** I say to the hospitality industry and others who have concerns about the end of freedom of movement that it is perfectly possible to have our own independent immigration policy without freedom of movement, as many other countries with successful hospitality sectors do, while catering for the needs of all sectors. That is what this balanced immigration package achieves. We have been speaking to many different industrial sectors, including that sector, and we will continue to listen, but I believe that what we have set out will absolutely meet their needs.

**Jo Stevens** (Cardiff Central) (Lab): The Secretary of State has just said that there will be no cap on international students, yet the Government include international students in their migration targets. How will he square that circle?

**Sajid Javid:** First, the decision about what is included in immigration statistics and what is not is an independent decision for the Office for National Statistics. I have discussed the issue with it and last year we asked the Migration Advisory Committee to look into it. Its recommendation was to keep the number in the statistics, reflecting the fact that, although most students leave the country, there is an impact on infrastructure and public services. I am very sympathetic to the issue the hon. Lady raises, but I remind her that it is an independent decision for the Office for National Statistics.

**Ian Murray:** Will the Home Secretary give way?

**Sajid Javid:** On this point.

**Ian Murray:** I am very grateful to the Home Secretary; he is being incredibly generous. In the last few minutes, he has said that there will be no cap on international students, that the hospitality sector will be fine, that agriculture will be fine and that trade deals will be fine, despite the No. 1 priority for most countries in a trade deal being to loosen up the visa regime. How can any of that—be honest with the public, because it is about time the Government started being honest with the public—be compatible with cutting net migration to the tens of thousands? It is a lie, isn't it?

**Mr Speaker:** Order. For the avoidance of doubt, the hon. Gentleman is not suggesting for one moment that a Minister would lie in this Chamber.

**Ian Murray:** No, Mr Speaker. The manifesto pledge to cut net migration to the tens of thousands seems, on the basis of the answers, to be the lie; it is not the Secretary of State himself. He can clarify that when he comes back to the Dispatch Box.

**Mr Speaker:** I am sure that he can clarify the situation, but there is no allegation of personal dishonour against the Home Secretary.

**Ian Murray:** Not at all.

**Mr Speaker:** We are grateful. I call the Home Secretary.

**Sajid Javid:** By focusing on high-skilled migration and not low-skilled migration, this package is perfectly capable of reducing immigration. Indeed, I believe it will reduce it to much lower, much more sustainable levels.

Another very important aspect of our future immigration system is that it is designed to meet the needs of the entire United Kingdom. Immigration is a reserved matter, but it is important that we take into account the particular circumstances of different parts of the UK. That is why we will continue with our shortage occupation list policy to meet the needs of Scotland, and we will also consider similar measures for Wales. In recognition of Northern Ireland's position as the only part of the UK that will have a land border with the EU, we are asking the MAC to compile a separate shortage occupation list for Northern Ireland.

I want to take this opportunity to reaffirm the importance of our relationship with the Republic of Ireland. We are long-standing friends, allies and partners, and we will preserve the common travel area, as well as the rights that Irish citizens enjoy. There is an unbreakable bond between the people of the UK and the Republic of Ireland, and that will never change.

Together, these changes will deliver a system that backs employers, giving them access to highly skilled workers, while also ensuring that they can drive up productivity and wages. It will also support the public services we all rely on, giving them access to the skilled workers they need.

**Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con):** The Home Secretary has said he could never contemplate anything that put Northern Ireland in a different position. Why then does the withdrawal agreement, in the backstop proposals, specifically do that and create a border down the Irish sea? The Government have pledged repeatedly

that they would not even contemplate such a thing, but it is now in the agreement—in black and white—in the Ireland-Northern Ireland protocol.

**Sajid Javid:** My right hon. Friend makes an observation about the withdrawal agreement. It does of course include the backstop, but the Government's intention is to avoid the backstop altogether. Even if there was such a need—if we had not reached a final agreement within the two-year period, which I believe we absolutely can—there is an option for the Government to extend the implementation period, which would avoid the issue that my right hon. Friend has highlighted.

So far, I have outlined some significant changes to our immigration system, which will be implemented in a phased approach from 2021. However, in some other areas there will be continuity rather than change. EU citizens already living here will continue to be able to live their lives here much as they do now. We value their significant contribution to the UK, and whatever happens, as we have said many times before, we want them to stay. We know how important our EU friends are to our economy, our society, our families, our history and also our future.

We have launched a series of trials of the EU settlement scheme, and I am pleased to say that they have all gone well so far. The scheme will be open to all EU citizens living in the UK by 30 March, and it will be run in the event of deal or no deal. The scheme is designed to be short, simple and user-friendly, and we need everyone to participate.

Some right hon. and hon. Members have questioned why we need such a scheme in the first place. One of the reasons is to have a clear picture of who is in the country. I saw at first hand with Windrush the problems of not having a comprehensive registration scheme, and we cannot allow something like that ever to happen again. The decision made many decades ago not to have a suitable registration scheme for Commonwealth citizens in the UK was in hindsight a huge mistake, and I will not repeat it on my watch. There will be a proper, easy-to-use scheme in place for our EU friends so that their rights are protected. We will have to communicate it clearly to ensure the scheme is fully used, but our message to EU citizens throughout is absolutely clear: "Deal or no deal, we want you to stay".

Although we have made it very clear that, after Brexit, EU citizens will be able to continue their lives much as before, not all EU member states have made a similar commitment to British citizens living in their countries. In fact, a number of countries have given no public assurances about the status of British nationals in the event of no deal. I think that is unacceptable, and I urge them to do so without any further delay.

I have outlined today what this deal means for immigration. For the first time in a generation, we will be able to build an immigration system that is designed in Britain, is made in Britain and serves only our national interest. The deal protects not only EU citizens living in the UK, but UK nationals living in the EU. It also goes much further. It is about protecting our economy and our security, and creating an immigration system over which we have full control.

Yes, the deal is a compromise—no one is claiming that it is perfect—but it is the only deal on offer that provides an orderly exit from the EU. The fact is that



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the clock is ticking. Now is the time for everyone to get behind this deal. It is in our hands to decide if we want this deal, no deal or, indeed, no Brexit at all. I know which option I prefer, and I urge all right hon. and hon. Members to join me in supporting this deal.

10.5 am

**Ms Diane Abbott** (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): I thank the Home Secretary for his remarks. This is probably the most important debate that the House of Commons will engage in in this generation. It is easy to get lost in the parliamentary tactics and the technocratic detail, but this is actually a debate about the future of this country and what sort of Britain we want to be. It has become an excessively polarised debate, particularly in recent weeks, so I want to stress, for Opposition Members, that we are committed to honouring the referendum vote and, more than that, that we understand what moved so many millions of our fellow citizens to vote for Brexit. I just make the point that we should not be excessively polarised.

**Mike Gapes:** My right hon. Friend says that we are committed to honouring the referendum vote. Does she mean that we will support Brexit even if it damages the very communities that we as Labour Members of Parliament represent?

**Ms Abbott:** I would like to thank my hon. Friend for his helpful intervention. Actually, the position of the Labour party was set out in the manifesto on which both he and I campaigned, and we are committed to a jobs-first Brexit that will not harm our economy. I repeat: we want to honour the referendum vote.

I remind the House that I will not take lectures from the Home Secretary on the iniquities of the EU. I have an immaculate record of voting against all measures of further EU integration. In fact, I remember very clearly voting against the vital clauses in the Maastricht treaty. The reason why I remember it is that at that time both Front Benches were in support of the Maastricht treaty, and those of us who wanted to vote against it had to stay up to the middle of the night to cast our votes, so I remember it very clearly. He should not lecture this side on what is problematic about the EU.

We campaigned in the referendum on remain and reform, and we do not resile from the fact that there are aspects of the EU that needed reform. Opposition Members do not want to see an excessively polarised debate. However, we are now resuming the debate after the longest parliamentary interruption in modern times, and Government Members ought to be a little embarrassed about this long interregnum in the debate and the fact that, even at this late stage, it seems that they will have great difficulty in getting their deal through.

I will deal with the issues that the Home Secretary has raised, but first I want to deal with issues of safety and security, because there is an argument that there is no more important a responsibility for the Government of the day than securing the safety and security of the United Kingdom. The Home Secretary will be aware that just this week two former MI6 and defence chiefs went on the record urging Conservative MPs to vote

against this deal because it threatens national security. I put it to the Home Secretary that ex-heads of MI6 and ex-defence chiefs might know a little bit more about security than the Home Secretary or even myself.

**Peter Heaton-Jones** (North Devon) (Con): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

**Ms Abbott:** I want to make some progress with this part of my speech but I will give way in due course.

We believe that this deal treats the issue of safety and security with a degree of recklessness. As it stands, this deal would potentially abolish the complex and highly effective co-operation that has been established between this country and other members of the EU in the areas of freedom, justice and security. It will constitute an ultra-hard Brexit in each of these areas, and could have severely negative consequences in all of them.

A long list of vital security and policing tools will be lost under this agreement. As matters stand, the European arrest warrant will go, along with real-time access to the Europol database. There is as yet nothing to allow access to Schengen Information System II or the existing Eurojust co-operation to continue. There is also no agreement to ensure that this country's systems will be regarded as adequate for data protection, which would block mutual database access. On migration, there is a continuing lack of clarity about the extent to which the UK will continue to co-operate with the EU on the common European asylum system, which is relevant because future co-operation will now need to go beyond tackling only irregular migration. All these failures will have severe consequences for policing, security co-operation, and key areas of freedom and justice.

Currently, our police and security agencies across Europe can access one another's data in real time to monitor the movement of drug and people traffickers, organised criminals and terrorists. The serial failings of this Government mean that large parts of this arrangement may well go if we vote for this deal.

**Sir Bernard Jenkin** (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): Near the beginning of her remarks the right hon. Lady prayed in aid the former head of MI6, Sir Richard Dearlove, and the former Chief of the Defence Staff, Lord Guthrie. But they want to leave the European Union without this agreement. They do not support what she is saying, but she seemed to be linking their names with what she is saying. That would be misleading if it were her intention, but I am sure that it was not.

**Ms Abbott:** I am sorry if the hon. Gentleman does not think that I was clear. I agree with what Sir Richard Dearlove and Lord Guthrie have said about security. I am not attempting to link their views to anything else I may say in this speech.

**Peter Heaton-Jones:** Unfortunately, not everybody does agree with that viewpoint. In fact, Lord Ricketts—the former national security adviser—has said on Twitter in the last few minutes:

“The claims in this letter are nonsense. Our intelligence links with the US have nothing to do with the EU and we'd be unaffected by the deal.”

I think I would rather believe Lord Ricketts than the right hon. Lady.

**Ms Abbott:** I am not asking the House to believe me. I am simply drawing to the attention of the House what former heads of MI6 and defence chiefs have said. It is for the House to weigh up what value it gives to the opinion of those gentlemen.

**Sajid Javid:** Perhaps it would help if I responded to that remark as well. I have a great deal of respect for Lord Guthrie and Sir Richard Dearlove, but on the particular issue in this letter, they are wrong. There is nothing in this deal that changes our relationship with NATO, with our US allies as intelligence partners or with our wider “Five Eyes” partners—nothing at all.

**Ms Abbott:** First, much of that has not been decided; it is part of the future political framework. Furthermore, it is for the House and the public watching this debate to decide what weight they give to the opinions of former heads of MI6 and former defence chiefs. The point I am making is that it seems to me that the Home Secretary has been a little careless in his assurances around security and the safety of the nation, and it is at least debatable whether this deal gives us the assurance we need.

**Nigel Huddleston:** The right hon. Lady mentioned data and adequacy. I am sure that she is well aware that the UK leads the world in this area, and we are highly confident that we will be adequate—in fact, more than adequate—because the EU has followed many of the things we have led, rather than the other way round. Rather than spread fear, perhaps she can have confidence that the UK will lead and continue to lead in these areas.

**Ms Abbott:** I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman is speaking in good faith, but I went to Brussels with colleagues before Christmas, and the key stakeholders on issues of security there were clear that the position that we are in at this point—without a security treaty—is highly problematic. It may be that we lead the world on data security at this point, but we have to give the type of assurances that the EU will accept if we are to have any chance of continuing co-operation in the future.

Many of the operational treaty functions in these areas—security and the safety of the realm—derive solely from our membership of the European Union. Labour believes that it is the height of irresponsibility to abandon these arrangements without any plan or, in some cases, any possibility of replacing them. Much of this problem arises from the Prime Minister’s own red lines—for example, her insistence on removing the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice without providing an alternative. Any warrant needs oversight and the possibility of judicial appeal. The Prime Minister must have known that when she made it a red line; she was irresponsible if she did not know that.

All along Labour has upheld six tests that any deal would have to meet in order for us to vote for it. The fifth of these tests is: does it protect national security and our capacity to tackle cross-border crime? I put it to the Treasury Bench that, on the basis of what we know, this deal will not necessarily protect national security and our capacity to tackle cross-border crime. On those grounds alone, we believe that the Prime Minister has failed to meet this test. This deal is not even close. The Prime Minister and this Government

have delivered only a hard Brexit on security, justice, police and freedom. On that basis, Labour will not be voting for it.

I turn to the question of immigration because all the polling shows that concerns about migration were an important factor for people voting to leave, so it is very important as we go forward in negotiating Brexit that we deal with these issues coherently and fairly, in a way that is not designed to excite public passions and that, above all, is in the best interests of society, the economy, jobs and business. I am afraid that Labour Members do not believe that that is what the Government are currently doing.

The Government have finally produced an immigration Bill of sorts—the Immigration and Social Security Co-ordination (EU Withdrawal) Bill—but what does it say? Actually, it says very little. Front and centre of this Bill is a declaration that freedom of movement will be ending, but the Government have not told us what will replace it. This matters, because, as I have said, immigration is a key issue. It was an important issue before, during and after the June 2016 referendum. Those on the Treasury Bench may not think that, but millions of our constituents do, and millions of our constituents are anxious that we get this issue right.

Beyond the purely declaratory ending of freedom of movement—which, under the Government’s plan, ends anyway—is it true that the promised clampdown on net migration is really coming? The reality is that the White Paper offers no such promise. Instead it is replete with assurances that businesses large and small will be able to maintain, or even increase, their access to labour from overseas. There are literally dozens of these assurances, so there is a possibility that all those who voted leave to reduce or even end net migration will be disappointed.

When we debate the Bill next week, we will have a number of questions for the Home Secretary.

**Neil Coyle:** Does my right hon. Friend agree that when the Government say that people voted on the basis of immigration, actually for many people immigration was a proxy for the pressure that eight years of austerity measures—six years at that point—had put on public services? People felt that they could not get to see a GP on time or get into hospital due to pressure on the NHS. Does she agree that that is why people felt that somehow immigration was a cause of concern for them and their families?

**Ms Abbott:** I do agree. Very often, when people raise concerns about migration, it is a proxy for other concerns. None the less, the Government have a responsibility to make proposals on migration that are good for society, good for business, and good for our economy.

On the question of EU citizens, the Home Secretary has given a number of assurances, but we have not heard so much about EU citizens and their families. There can be no question but that the process of registering over 3 million EU citizens could well be problematic. On the basis of the immigration and nationality directorate’s record in the past, there must be some concern.

**Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con):** The right hon. Lady said that there has been a lack of clarity in respect of EU nationals’ families, but actually there have been a number of statements by Government

[*Luke Graham*]

that have clarified the rights that people have to go back to their families to Europe and to bring their spouses and children over. It is not a lack of clarity but merely a lack of reading by the right hon. Lady.

**Ms Abbott:** It is that tone that has done so much to damage people's good faith on where the Government are going on this issue. I have met lawyers who specialise in these issues and EU nationals who have concerns around these issues. There is no question but that very many EU nationals still have very real concerns about the process and about their families and dependants. Rather than adopting that tone, the hon. Gentleman would be better advised to speak to EU nationals and find out their concerns for himself.

**Luke Graham:** I am sorry, but I have spoken to a number of my constituents who are EU nationals. I have fought to get them passports. I have made sure that their rights are heard. I hear them every single week. I have had people in tears in my office. Because of the clarity of the information given, I can help those constituents, fight for their rights, and secure their place in the United Kingdom. I want a quality debate, and so do our constituents, so let us stick to the facts, not the fiction.

**Ms Abbott:** I am glad that the hon. Gentleman is keeping up with his casework. However, if he talked to organisations that represent EU nationals as a whole and to lawyers nationally who deal with these issues, he would know that there is still too much that is not resolved—above all, the capacity of the immigration and nationality directorate to process over 3 million EU nationals effectively.

**The Minister for Immigration (Caroline Nokes):** I want to reassure the right hon. Lady on this. As she will know, the EU settled status scheme has been in its pilot beta testing. We have completed both phase 1 and phase 2, and phase 3 will open on 21 January. That is absolutely because we want to make sure that it works for these individuals and that we can give them the reassurance they need before we require to have the system open. In every major IT programme, as she will know only too well, it is much better to go through a testing process than to launch it straightaway. I want to reassure her, in case she had missed it, that that is exactly what we are doing.

**Ms Abbott:** I am aware of the testing process. I am aware of the issues that have arisen. I am also aware that the testing process has involved people who are volunteers taking part. The challenge will arise when the mass of EU migrants choose to go through that process. I will remind the right hon. Lady, in the months to come, about her complacency about her system.

**Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab):** I am most grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way. Can I just assure her that I will speak to her with respect and not the patronising tone used by the Minister? Further to what has been said, and particularly to the comments of the hon. Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Luke Graham), every single statement that

the Government made on the way that their proposal was to be implemented was contradicted by a further statement from the Government either in this House or outside in the press. If there was any confusion in the minds of EU citizens, was not the problem caused by Ministers contradicting themselves?

**Ms Abbott:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend. Yes, one of the problems was Ministers contradicting themselves. I repeat that in the months to come, I will be reminding the Minister about her complacency about this system. I would remind her also that this is not just a matter of to-ing and fro-ing in the House of Commons—it is about people's lives, people's families, and people's security. It is also about businesses concerned about what is going to happen to valued employees. We need to move beyond point-scoring and address the people who will suffer if this system does not function—[*Interruption.*]

**Neil Coyle rose—**

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Before the right hon. Lady takes the intervention, let me say that there is quite a lot of chuntering from a sedentary position going on. The hon. Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare), who has been here for three and a half years, and I know regularly auditions for the status of senior Member of this House—[*Interruption.*] Well, he can shake his head, but I am telling him what his behaviour conveys to me. He is normally a good-natured fellow, but he is chuntering too much. His role—he is a PPS, I think?—is to fetch and carry notes and to nod in the appropriate places; he should remain silent.

**Neil Coyle:** On the people affected, is it not true that there is already a 300,000 backlog at the Home Office of people waiting for decisions even before EU citizens are added to that queue? Is it not a fact that the Prime Minister accused EU citizens working in and contributing to our country of queue-jumping? In cheerleading the end of freedom of movement, are not the Government sticking two fingers up at the 60 million British people who wish to travel and work in the 27 other EU member states and who will lose out under this Government's plans?

**Ms Abbott:** I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. As he says, there is already a backlog of people wishing to test this system. If I were on the Treasury Bench, I would be a little more humble about the possibilities of that system. This is about real people's lives, and businesses have concerns about how it will work.

In my lifetime, the thinking and public debate about migration has largely moved forward. It says something about that forward movement that the two people who face each other across the Dispatch Box this morning are both the children of migrants, even if they come from diametrically opposed political positions. The concern with the heated and toxic debate around Brexit and migration is that that general debate might go backwards, not forwards. Indeed, people who have seen the scenes outside the House of Commons this week and in the past would do well to be concerned about the possibility of that debate going backwards. We have seen unpleasant scenes and attacks on Members of Parliament going about their business, on journalists, and even a black policeman was abused by those Brexit campaigners. We



must be mindful to have a debate that moves forward and does not look back or excite passions, and that at all times acknowledges the important role that migration has played—and hopefully will continue to play—in building this country. In its efforts to pander to certain elements of the British electorate, the House at least must maintain a respectful and serious debate about migration.

On EU migrants, I repeat that from what we know about the immigration and nationality directorate from advice surgeries and individual case loads, there must be doubt about its capacity to process more than 3 million people speedily and efficiently. I remind the House of the concerns about security and the safety of the realm among stakeholders such as the former heads of MI6 and defence chiefs, and those in Brussels. I do not know whether Conservative Members have had occasion to go to Brussels and talk to stakeholders and commissioners, but if they have done so they will be aware of the very real concerns.

Whether on migration, EU migrants, or safety and security, Labour does not believe that this deal meets the tests we have set out. We regret that there has been such a huge break in this debate, but it has now resumed and Labour Members are saying that we will not be voting for the deal. It is wholly dishonest to say that the choice is between this deal or nothing—wholly dishonest. We will not vote for this deal. We believe that the country deserves better, and that the deal does not engage with the serious issues of security and migration that it needs to address. We will go through the Lobby to vote down this deal, and I only hope that those on the Treasury Bench have a plan B.

10.34 am

**Sir Nicholas Soames** (Mid Sussex) (Con): I agree very strongly with the right hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) in what she said about the tone of this debate, and I propose to say something about that. I also agree that this debate takes place as we approach a sombre and important moment in the history of our country. I must, however, take issue with her, respectfully, about the disappointingly inept intervention of Sir Richard Dearlove and Lord Guthrie on the question of security. I have taken careful advice on what they said, and looked into it extremely carefully, and I believe that their intervention is not only incorrect, but also inappropriate. I deeply regret it.

We have known many worse times in this country, and some more dangerous times, but as the right hon. Lady rightly said, not since the war have this House and this Parliament faced a more important moment. It is incumbent on us, and it is our duty, to recover our sense of proportion, and restore some dignity, reason and calm to this debate, both inside and outside the House. I very strongly sense that the country is fed up with this debate and desperate for us to come to an agreement, and for their Parliament finally to rise to the occasion and see the country right. In my speech to this House on 6 December I made plain, and I do so again, that I was a staunch remainer, and I believe that our wonderful country has made an historically bad decision. I also believe very strongly that the decision that was made in the referendum of 2016 to leave the European Union must be honoured.

I am genuinely proud to speak in this debate as a Member of Parliament for 35 years, a Privy Counsellor, a former officer in the British Army, and a loyal servant and subject of the Queen. I say that because, like many other Members, I hate being regularly called a “traitor” in correspondence and elsewhere. It is necessary for the language surrounding this debate to calm down, and for more respect and dignity to govern our debate, not necessarily in this House, which should be, and is, robust, but particularly outside where, as the right hon. Lady rightly said, we have seen the most disgraceful behaviour towards Members of Parliament, journalists and especially—because we can take it—towards members of the public.

What we are discussing is but the beginning of a long journey. As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster said in a very good speech to wind up the debate the other night:

“The withdrawal agreement is the unavoidable gateway whether to a Canadian, a Norwegian or a Chequers destination”.—[*Official Report*, 9 January 2019; Vol. 652, c. 500.]

It is therefore essential that Parliament is not so wet and timid and lacking in will that it cannot find a sufficient consensus to move forward on this first step, and create the architecture and footings for future negotiations once we have become a third country.

I believe it would be quite wrong to postpone the article 50 deadline, and that the House must be prepared to earn the undying contempt of the country if it simply does not have the collective will, discipline and sense of duty to come to an agreement. The House has before it a sensible compromise agreement. Inevitably, it is not to everyone’s taste, but it has been drafted with the greatest care and agreed between all members of the European Union, in order to manage Britain’s exit from the EU with the least possible disruption, while allowing progress and further steps down the road to the good neighbourly relations that we all want in the very different future that lies ahead.

In my judgment, the outcome is plain and clear and staring us in the face, whatever might be our favourite solution. If the House votes against the one compromise proposal on the table, it will with absolute certainty be voting for chaos, with the outcome very likely to be the precise opposite of what it intended. I remind the House that this compromise is the only agreement on offer, and to try to reopen it risks losing even that. I therefore urge the House to take into account that our exit from the EU will take a long time, and I think we should be clearer and franker with the public. We cannot expect arrangements and institutions that have grown together side by side in the interests of all over 45 years, to be separated at one go without grievous damage to each side. It therefore remains my view that the Prime Minister’s plan has carefully and cleverly managed to try to separate Britain from the European Union—45 years of earnest combined endeavour and legislation—with, miraculously, minimal damage to both sides. We must keep it that way, for it is, if only we can grasp it, a golden prize given the circumstances. I must say to my right hon. and hon. Friends and to my many friends on the other side of the House that it would be extremely ill-judged to throw it away. It would, above all, be totally contrary to our national interest.

My late father, a former Member of this House and for a time the Leader of the other place, once said of these debates that if politics is the art of the possible,

[Sir Nicholas Soames]

the art of the statesman must be to make possible that which is necessary. It is my judgment from talking to colleagues on both sides of the House that the real national consensus is for the deal on the table, warts and all, if only we can get there. We should realise that this really should no longer be a party political matter. The public rightly expect us to work together across party lines to achieve a conclusion to this massive problem. Members should be able to see that this is a prospect toward which there can be a gradual advance, with the current compromise deal a good first step.

I conclude by saying again that I am deeply and genuinely sad that our extraordinary country has reached this sorry pass. I feel very strongly that we must not reject this agreement and thus descend into constitutional and, I am afraid, administrative chaos. I am very strongly against what would be a divisive, poisonous and hateful second referendum campaign, and I believe Parliament must do its duty here and now, and come to an agreement.

Let us agree among ourselves. This country is not an island on its own; it is a proud nation, whose success has always been derived from the wider world. Our history and geography have given us great advantages. Our language is the way the world communicates. Our capital is one of the greatest cities in the world, and people in every other international and domestic forum listen to the views of this country because of our great experience and expertise. We really should have the confidence to press on, to cease this appalling and pointless arguing, much of it on the head of a pin, and to preserve and enhance the cohesion, unity and stability of our country. We are a humane, liberal-minded, tolerant, moderate nation, so let us now push on with the task at hand and show our electors and the world the kind of spirit and judgment they rightly expect from us.

10.43 am

**Peter Grant** (Glenrothes) (SNP): I am grateful finally to get the chance to contribute to this debate. I am in a bit of an unusual position—I think I am speaking on day six of a five-day debate, which is a privilege not granted to many.

I appreciate the chance to remind the House of some of the reasons—only some of them, because we have only four hours left and others want to speak—why Scotland cannot and will not accept this deal or anything closely resembling it. For me and a great many of my fellow Scots, probably the most damaging and pernicious feature of this entire deal is the very thing the Prime Minister chose to list as its single biggest benefit. When she emailed all 650 MPs ahead of the original withdrawal agreement debate, what did she choose to put right at the top of her list of reasons for supporting the agreement? The fact that it would mean an end to the free movement of people.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department confirmed that today. Despite his protestations, there were howls of protest from Conservative Back Benchers when my hon. Friend the Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) made the same point yesterday. I find it astonishing that, given the Environment Secretary's comments yesterday, the party in government seems more concerned about the welfare and free movement

of racehorses than about the welfare and free movement of people. The Conservative party believes that ending the free movement of people is the best aspect of this deal. I beg to differ.

In fact, if end the free movement of people were all the agreement did, that in itself would be more than sufficient reason to consign it to the dustbin. I see young parents in my constituency in tears because the Scotland they have come to know and love as their home—the Scotland that made them so welcome—will not be allowed to give the same welcome to their families. I see our precious health and social care services, on which members of my family rely right now, plunged into crisis because the British Government are deliberately making it harder for them to recruit the staff they need. I see my home country, which is known throughout the world as one of the most welcoming and hospitable on the planet, being dragged into a mire of xenophobic, small-minded isolationism by a governing party that has been resoundingly rejected in every election my country has seen during my 58 years on planet Earth. When I see those things, the only response I can give with any kind of conscience is that I will resist the agreement with every cell in my body and for every second that I am granted to remain in this life.

If our people had been told the truth in 2014—if they had been told that the price of continuing to be governed from London would be being part of this vile policy—there would be 59 fewer Members of this Parliament and the national Parliament of Scotland would be exercising full sovereignty as a full partner member of the European Union family.

Members on both sides of the House should look themselves in the mirror and examine their consciences carefully. Is it not utterly despicable that some people set out in 2014 deliberately to target EU nationals, who had the right to vote in our referendum because that was the right thing to do, and say, “You’ve got to vote to be ruled by Westminster because otherwise your future as EU citizens in Scotland could be under threat,” but those EU nationals then saw the rights they enjoyed and expected their families to enjoy taken away from them as a result of a decision their home country voted against in a referendum they were banned from taking part in? I really wonder how some people in this place can sleep peacefully at night.

**Luke Graham:** The hon. Gentleman makes a very valid point about the 2014 referendum. It is despicable when EU nationals’ rights are played with as a bargaining chip, so can he speak to the comment by the then Deputy First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, that 160,000 EU nationals in Scotland would be stripped of their right to remain in Scotland if it did not get access to the European Union? There was no unilateral guarantee like the one the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary have provided from Nicola Sturgeon then. Why is it okay for the Scottish National party to use EU nationals as bargaining chips but despicable of us to guarantee their rights?

**Peter Grant:** I say first to the hon. Gentleman that his Government refused point blank to give the immediate unilateral guarantees the Scottish Government asked for the day after the—[*Interruption.*] No, they refused point blank to do it. Nicola Sturgeon was pointing out to EU nationals in Scotland the danger of continuing to

have an immigration policy that was reserved to this place. She was not stating what would happen in the event that Scotland became independent; she was warning what might happen in the event that we did not. The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that the fears being expressed now by tens of thousands of people in Scotland are exactly the fears they were warned about by the then Deputy First Minister.

Let me remind the House of one of the boasts the hon. Gentleman made when he intervened on the shadow Home Secretary. Unless I am very mistaken, he boasted that he had fought to get his constituents passports. The Conservative party is proud of the fact that people who came here to live, work and contribute as a matter of right now have to seek the services of a Member of Parliament to fight to be given the passport that should be theirs as a matter of right. If the Conservatives think that is something to be proud of, that demonstrates once again how far their moral compass is from anything that could ever be accepted in Scotland.

That is only when we consider the moral and humanitarian arguments against what the British Government are seeking to impose on us. It would be bad enough for them to embark on such a regressive, socially divisive path if they thought that it would make us better off, but every one of their own analyses, of which there are quite a few—in fact, just about every credible analysis ever made of the economic impact of free movement of people—tells us that it is good for the host nations, and good for the peoples of the host nations.

The Government's own analysis shows that, no matter what Brexit scenario we end up with, ending free movement and slashing the rights of immigrants to come here on anything like the scale that they intend will damage our economy. So even if we subscribed to the Thatcherite gospel that there is no such thing as society, but just a collection of individuals—even if we followed that creed of “Let us look after ourselves, and to hell with everyone else”—ending free movement of people would still be the wrong thing to do. To subscribe to this Government's anti-immigration and anti-immigrant philosophy, we would not just need to be selfish; we would need to be out of our flaming heids.

On 19 December, during the final Prime Minister's Question Time of the year, I asked the Prime Minister to name one single tangible benefit that would compensate my constituents for the social and economic damage that we know ending free movement of people would cause. She could not give a single example. If the Home Secretary wants to listen, I will give him a chance to stand up and name one benefit to my constituents of ending free movement, but even if he were interested enough to listen, he would not be able to do so.

In fact, I will happily give way to any Conservative Member who wants to take the opportunity to answer the question that the Prime Minister dodged. None of them wants to do so. No Conservative Member can identify a single tangible benefit that my constituents will see. By their silence, the Conservatives are telling me that I cannot vote for this deal. By their silence, they are telling me that ending free movement of people is not good for my constituents—so how dare they ask me to support it?

The Prime Minister dodged the question, just as she and a succession of Ministers have dodged every difficult question that they have ever been asked during the

Brexit process. Indeed, the ongoing debacle over parliamentary scrutiny of this shambles demonstrates that we have not only a Prime Minister and a Government who have lost control, but a Prime Minister and a Government who will cynically play the card of parliamentary sovereignty when it suits them, but will use every trick in the book—and quite a few tricks that are not in the book—to try and stop us doing the job that we were elected to do. They spout their creed of parliamentary sovereignty sometimes, and at other times they do everything possible to undermine it.

They Government went to court to try to prevent Parliament from having any say in the triggering of article 50. They have whipped their own MPs—although not successfully in every case—to vote against allowing this debate even to happen. I have noted on every day of the debate that those who claim that allowing it to take place was an act of treason have not exactly been backward in coming forward and asking to join in at every opportunity. The Government abuse their privileged position in respect of setting parliamentary business to try to strip the meaningful vote of any actual meaning. Like bad-loser, spoilt-brat football managers the world over, they have even resorted to ganging up on the referee to complain and accuse him of cheating every time he gives an offside decision against them—and not just during the 90 regulation minutes of points of order on Wednesday; the Leader of the House even tried to do it again during a wee bit of penalty time yesterday morning.

The Government are mounting an intense campaign of what can only be described as misinformation to frighten Parliament, to frighten our citizens, to frighten businesses, to frighten everyone, into believing that they must accept this deal because it is the only possible deal and the only alternative is no deal. That is simply and palpably not true, and the Prime Minister knows it is not true. How can I be sure that the Prime Minister knows it is not true? Because she has said so herself on at least half a dozen occasions that I can trace. She has said it at the Dispatch Box, and she has said it in television interviews. She has told us that it is not a simple choice between her deal and no deal.

In an attempt to scare the no deal brigade in her own party, the Prime Minister was forced to admit that if her deal failed, Brexit might not have to happen. When I first saw that reported on the BBC website, I thought it must be a mistake, but if it was, it is a mistake that the Prime Minister has made nearly every day since then. Her clearly stated position is that we are not faced with a simple binary choice between her deal and no deal. We still have the option of keeping the deal that we already have. Staying where we are is always an option. The status quo is always available. The best of all possible deals is the deal that we have right now, and I must say to my colleagues and good friends on the Labour Benches that it is the only possible deal that meets their six tests of an acceptable Brexit. If they could only get their act together and accept that, between us we could stop this madness with absolute certainty.

Earlier this week, the Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, the hon. Member for Daventry (Chris Heaton-Harris), in what I have to say was the most shambolic appearance before a Select Committee that I have ever seen, managed to walk into a trap and make an admission that he had been trying



[Peter Grant]

to avoid making throughout the meeting. It was a trap set—presumably by mistake—by one of his own fellow hardline Brexiteers. He was asked:

“Minister, would you agree that, by taking no deal off the table, it weakens our hand in negotiations with the EU?”

His reply was “I would, yes.” Members should think about that for a minute—apart from the slight technical point that there are no negotiations with the EU, because the deal has been done and the negotiations have finished.

Not only the Minister, but one of those hardline Brexiteers in the European Research Group, has admitted that the Government have it in their power to take no deal off the table. Why would they leave it on the table when they know, and everyone knows, that it is the worst possible outcome? Why would they try to force a situation in which it is the only alternative, which is what they want us to believe? Why, in recent weeks, have they spent so much time and money telling businesses, trade unions, voluntary organisations and everyone else something that they know is not true?

Only the Government could answer those questions, but when it is put in the context of all the other shenanigans that they have been up to, it seems obvious what they are doing. They know that the Prime Minister’s deal has absolutely no chance of getting through the House on its own merits. In fact, I think most Ministers have known for months that as soon as the Prime Minister set her stupid red lines, there was no possibility of an acceptable deal that complied with those red lines, but instead of doing the right thing—instead of persuading the Prime Minister that she had to change her approach—they set out to try and pauchle the whole process. They were determined that the only vote we would ever have—the vote, remember, that they do not want us to have at all—would be rigged. They knew that the only good thing about the Prime Minister’s deal was that it was not quite as bad as no deal, so they set out to fabricate a situation in which they tried to tell us that no deal was the only alternative. That is why we have seen the Prime Minister’s almost Damascene conversion, virtually overnight, from “No deal is better than a bad deal”—which, by the way, is in the Conservative manifesto—to “Any bad deal is better than no deal”.

That is just one example of the hypocrisy and the double standards that we have seen from this Government, but perhaps the most brazen example of their double standards—and that is saying something—appeared in a tweet earlier this week.

**Ian Murray:** May I intervene briefly on the subject of double standards? The hon. Gentleman is advancing a powerful argument, and the right argument, that it is in Scotland’s interests to remain a member of the European Union, but will he please explain to the House—and to my constituents, and to the people who are watching the debate in Scotland—how he can advance that argument while at the same time advancing the opposite argument that Scotland should pull itself out of its closest and most important Union?

**Peter Grant:** I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman wants a debate on independence. I suggest that he should be patient, because that debate is coming, not because I want it and not because he wants it, but

because the people of Scotland are demanding it. The simple answer to his question, however, is that the nature of Scotland’s union with this place is fundamentally different from the nature of the partnership of the EU.

As I was saying, earlier this week, Glenn Campbell of the BBC—not Glen Campbell the Rhinestone Cowboy, in case Members are wondering—tweeted, after interviewing the Secretary of State for Scotland:

“Scottish secretary @DavidMundellDCT says if PM’s #Brexit deal is voted down he doesn’t see why MPs shouldn’t be asked to vote on it again once they’ve had time to reflect.”

The Secretary of State for Scotland does not see why, having asked MPs to vote on the deal once, the Government should not come back and try again once we have had time to reflect. So it is okay for Conservative MPs—that is who he is talking about—to be allowed to change their minds about the Prime Minister’s deal, and it is okay for Conservative MPs, as the Standing Orders allow them to do, at the end of this year to change their minds and have another go at removing the Prime Minister through another vote of no confidence, but it is not acceptable to allow the people to confirm whether they have changed their minds.

Returning to the intervention of the hon. Member for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray), at the same time that this Parliament and these nations are being presented with a choice of at least two futures, the people of Scotland are faced with a choice of two futures as well. It is not a choice that they wanted to be forced into and it is not a choice that we wanted them to be forced into: there was a majority vote to stay in the Union of the United Kingdom but there was a significantly bigger percentage majority vote to stay in the union of the EU. Through no fault of the people of Scotland, and against the expressed wishes of the people of Scotland and our national Parliament, we are being forced into a position where it is no longer possible to respect the results of both referendums, so the people of Scotland are going to have to decide which future they want: which of these two unions is more important to us?

Is it to be a true partnership of equals, which, as our friends in Ireland have seen, sees all other members show solidarity and support even for relatively small members of that partnership; or is it to be the so-called partnership where the powers of our Parliament are already being stripped back unilaterally by the British Government, as confirmed by Britain’s own Supreme Court? Do they value more a union that was forged by the desire of former mortal enemies to work together to sustain peace and prosperity across a continent, or a Union that was forged through bribery and corruption for—[*Interruption.*] Or a Union that was forged through bribery and corruption for the sole purpose of sustaining sectarian bigotry in the appointment of high offices of state? Do they give most importance to a union that has at its core the fundamental belief that the exchange of the free movement of people, the free exchange of talents and the free exchange of ideas benefits us all or one that denounces its citizens as queue jumpers and chooses to exploit them as bargaining chips? The exploitation of migrants as bargaining chips was not the policy of the Scottish Government; it was the stated policy of the colleague of the hon. Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Luke Graham) in the United Kingdom Government.

This Parliament faces a choice next week, and it must be a choice not between the Prime Minister's deal or no deal, but between the Prime Minister's Brexit or no Brexit. That is the choice this Parliament deserves and demands; that is the choice the people of these islands deserve and demand. The time is coming—and I think it will come a lot sooner than most in here expect—when at least one of the partners of this Union, and possibly more, will see a demand from its citizens to be given a further choice: do we want to remain part of a Union that tramples on the rights of our citizens and which treats us as a second-class nation, not as a partner, at every opportunity, or do we want to remain part of the most successful trading partnership and one of the most successful partnerships for peace—a partnership that even now has numerous other candidate members desperate to get into it? Again, I will give way if anyone on either side of the House—*[Interruption.]* We have a lot of countries trying to get into the EU, but nobody that has left the empire of the UK has ever asked to come back—nobody that has won their independence has ever asked to come back. I wonder why that might be.

We will be opposing this rotten deal next week not because we think no deal is an option, but because we want, and we demand, the alternative: to give Parliament the choice to say, “Is this the Brexit we expected?” and if not, “Don't do it.” We have to give that right to the people of these islands as well.

Nobody was elected to this Parliament in 2017 on a no-deal Brexit manifesto. Nobody voted for a no-deal Brexit in the referendum; that was not one of the options. This Parliament and this Government do not have the right to do anything that creates the danger of a no-deal Brexit without the explicit approval for such a course of action from the people of these islands. A Government who claim to respect the democracy of the people or the democracy of Parliament must not attempt to force the issue by effectively giving us a choice between “Would you like to voluntarily give us your money?” or “Would you like me to shoot you?” That is not an acceptable choice; it is anti-democratic. It is fundamentally wrong for the Government to seek to turn this into a choice between doing what the Prime Minister tells us or leaving without a deal.

Not leaving is still an option, and not leaving must continue to be an option, and we will continue to press the case to allow the people to decide whether they want to accept the Prime Minister's Brexit or, having seen what it really means—having seen the disastrous impact of the deal the Prime Minister has achieved—they want to decide that the best deal we can ever get is the deal we already have.

11.5 am

**Sir Bernard Jenkin** (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): I cannot help but reflect on the fact that the speech of the hon. Member for Glenrothes (Peter Grant) followed that of my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex (Sir Nicholas Soames), who called for calm and moderation in this debate. I am afraid that some of the language the hon. Gentleman used rather failed to rise to that challenge. For him now to call for a people's vote when he never for an instant accepted the result of the people's vote we have already had underlines the point about double standards raised by the hon. Member for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray).

**Peter Grant** rose—

**Sir Bernard Jenkin:** No, I am not giving way; the hon. Gentleman spoke for a long time. But I will say this: like him, I believe in the sovereignty of the people, and in fact I believe in the sovereignty of the Scottish people, and the Scottish people spoke in 2014 and voted to be part of the United Kingdom. And then the Scottish people, as the British people, took part in the 2016 United Kingdom referendum and the British people spoke, and I believe in their sovereign right to be respected.

So I will rise to the hon. Gentleman's challenge and say that the benefits the Scottish people are getting from leaving the EU are that they are taking control of their own laws and money, and—something dear to his heart, I imagine—that the Scottish Parliament is going to have more power as a result of us leaving the EU. He seems to be very quiet about that.

In the emergency debate on Tuesday 11 December I emphasised the democratic legitimacy of the referendum vote. The Commons voted to give the decision to remain or leave to the voters by 544 votes to 53, and then we accepted that decision and invoked article 50 by 494 votes to 122.

Nobody could possibly question the courteous determination and sincerity of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, who has striven so hard to secure an agreement acceptable to this House from our EU partners, but it now looks most unlikely that this draft agreement will be approved, because it would leave the UK in a less certain and more invidious position than we are prepared to accept.

Nevertheless, the EU withdrawal Act, which sets the exit date as 29 March 2019, did pass this House. It could have included an amendment that the Act should not come into force without an article 50 withdrawal agreement, but we approved that Act, which provides for leaving the EU without a withdrawal agreement—I think even my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex voted for that Act. Parliament has now spoken. The Act makes provision for the so-called “meaningful vote”, but not for any kind of vote in this House to prevent Brexit without a withdrawal agreement. Democracy has been served.

For some MPs now to complain that they did not intend to vote for what the Act provides for is rather lame. They may have held a different hope or expectation, but the Government gave no grounds for that. The Government always said, and still say, that no deal is better than a bad deal. Parliament has approved the law and set the date. There is no democratic case for changing it, nor could that be in the national interest.

The right hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) reminded us of some of the less pleasant elements on the spectrum of British politics, but elsewhere in the EU, extremism is becoming far more entrenched than here, with AFD in Germany and the gilets jaunes on the streets of Paris, as well as Lega Nord, which has actually taken power in Italy. Popular revolt against the immovability of the established EU consensus in the rest of the EU cannot be blamed on Brexit. On the contrary, our broad and largely two-party democracy has proved to be the most durable and resistant to extremism because we absorb and reflect the effects of political and economic shocks.

[Sir Bernard Jenkin]

UKIP died at the 2017 general election because both the main parties pledged to implement the referendum decision without qualification.

But what are some in this House trying to achieve now? What would be the consequences for the stability and security of our democracy if the Government let the politicians turn on the majority of their own voters and say, “The politicians are taking back control, not for Parliament but to keep the EU in control”? The voters did not vote to accept whatever deal the EU was prepared to offer. They voted to leave, whether or not the EU gave us permission. Ruling out leaving without a withdrawal agreement is not a democratic option. They did not vote to remain as the only alternative to a bad deal, they did not vote for the EU to hold the UK hostage, nor did they vote for a second referendum.

Of course, a second referendum is what the EU really wants, which is why it will not give the UK a good deal. It is shameful that so many leading political figures from our country have been shipping themselves over to Brussels to tell the EU not to make concessions in the negotiations with their own Government, in order to try to get a second referendum. The EU is a profoundly undemocratic and unaccountable institution, whose biggest project, the euro, has inflicted far worse disaster on businesses, individuals and families in many countries than even the direst Treasury forecasts for the UK. The economic and political storm clouds are still just gathering over the EU. It is the EU that is on the cliff edge of disaster, not the UK. In the years to come, in the words of Mervyn King, the former Governor of the Bank of England:

“If you give people a chart of British GDP and ask them to point to where we left the EU, they won’t be able to see it.”

Our domestic policies, as well as our trade with the rest of the world, have already become far more important than our present trading relationship with the EU. We will have the freedom to develop them more quickly. Our EU membership does not just cost the net contribution of £10 billion per year and rising, which does no more than avoid some £5.3 billion of tariffs, but it has locked the UK into an EU trading advantage, leaving the UK with an EU trade deficit of £90 billion a year. Why are we trying to preserve such a disadvantageous trading relationship?

Even if we leave without a withdrawal agreement, there will be immediate benefits. WTO is a safer haven than the backstop. Far from crashing out, we would be cashing in. We would keep £39 billion, which would immediately improve our balance of payments and could be invested in public services, distributed in tax cuts or used to speed up economic adaptation. That would boost GDP by 2% over the next few years. We would end uncertainty; the draft agreement would perpetuate it.

Business needs clarity about trading conditions with the EU from day one. Jamie Dimon of J. P. Morgan campaigned for remain, side by side with George Osborne, the then Chancellor of the Exchequer. J. P. Morgan now says that extending article 50 is the “worst case scenario” because it does

“not see what it provides us in reaching a clear, final outcome that provides certainty for businesses”.

It adds that paralysis is

“not good for the economy”,

yet that is what the article 50 extenders are arguing for. We will not be caught in any backstop if we leave without a withdrawal agreement, nor will there be a hard border in Ireland. Even Leo Varadkar has said that

“under no circumstances will there be a border. Full stop.”

The EU and the UK Government have said the same.

All of the more ludicrous scare stories are being disproved. There will be no queues at Dover or Calais. The president of Port Boulogne Calais could not have been more emphatic—[*Laughter.*] Labour Members laugh, because they do not want to hear the truth. The president of Port Boulogne Calais said:

“We have been preparing for No Deal for a year... We will be ready... We will not check trucks more than we are doing today... We will not stop and ask more than we are doing today”.

He added that the new special area for sanitary and phytosanitary checks was somewhere else, and would “not influence the traffic in Dover.”

The Government and the pharma companies say that they can guarantee supplies of medicines, and the EU Commission has proposed visa-free travel for UK citizens in the EU for up to six months of the year. The EU statement of 19 December already proposes its own transition period of up to nine months, including no disruption of central bank clearing, a new air services agreement, access to the EU for UK road haulage operators and special regulations on customs declarations.

Leaving on WTO terms is far preferable to the protracted uncertainty of either extending article 50 or this unacceptable withdrawal agreement. The leadership of this country—that includes the Government and the Opposition—should stop reinforcing weakness and start talking up our strengths and building up our confidence. History has proved that our country can always rise to the challenge, and our people will never forgive the politicians who allow the EU to inflict defeat. It saddens me greatly that even some in my own party are promoting such a defeat.

**Jim Fitzpatrick** (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. My apologies for interrupting, but I wonder whether you could indicate whether you are likely to introduce a time limit on speeches during the course of today’s proceedings, and tell us what it might be. That would allow us to start thinking about how to contain our speeches.

**Mr Speaker:** The short answer is that I will be imposing a time limit very soon. I am making a judgment about it, but it is likely to be of the order of six minutes.

11.16 am

**Luciana Berger** (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): Few debates in this House have ever had such an impact on the people of Liverpool Wavertree and on the country as the one we are conducting this week. Every home, every business and every citizen in Liverpool will feel the impact of Brexit. The stakes could not be higher for jobs, the price of our goods, wages, the cost of mortgages, businesses large and small, our economy and our standing in the world. It is hard to see what has changed since the Prime Minister delayed the meaningful vote in such a discourteous fashion before the Christmas recess. The only tangible change is that the hands of the clock have



moved ever closer to the Brexit deadline, with the Prime Minister presenting her false choice of her deal or no deal. She should tread carefully.

There are those who wish to see Britain crash out of the EU without a deal in place, as the final act in their anti-EU drama. No responsible Government should even entertain the prospect of a no deal Brexit, and it is beyond belief that that option has not been ruled out, given the uncertainty that it is creating across our country and the billions being spent in preparation for that possibility. We should be crystal clear about what a no-deal Brexit would mean for our constituents and the country, including for our food prices given that 30% of our food supplies come from the European Union. Our gas and electricity prices would also increase disproportionately, having an impact on the poorest and most vulnerable, as about 5% of our electricity and as much as 12% of our gas is imported from the EU.

With no alternative currently in place, our constituents will no longer be covered by the European health insurance card, and will need to pay for health insurance when they go abroad. The manufacturing sector that I represent in my constituency will be hard hit, with firms relying on just-in-time production unable to properly guarantee their production. I have heard from many of my constituents, including Rob, the owner of a small chemicals business, who would struggle to source raw materials or maintain the same level of sales. He is an employer, and many of my constituents rely on jobs in his firm.

Worst of all, our public services, including the national health service and social care, would suffer as we would be unable to recruit from countries within the EU. In the Select Committee on Health and Social Care, we heard that there is a real threat to medical supplies. The permanent secretary at the Department for Health and Social Care told us that he was having sleepless nights over the continuation of imports of vital medical supplies, and that the issue was very complex.

In Liverpool, we are proud of our universities, and we have welcomed students and academics from across the EU. Our university leaders tell us that crashing out of the EU is one of the biggest threats to our higher education sector. The Russell Group reported just last week that postgraduate student enrolment from EU countries has already fallen by 9% this academic year, starving our universities of cash. More than 100 universities have warned of an academic, cultural and scientific setback from which it would take decades to recover, because a no-deal Brexit would isolate and hobble Britain's universities.

Those are the things that we can predict with confidence, but the real threat comes from the unintended consequences—the 1,001 things that we cannot foresee that will have a negative impact on our citizens' lives. The bottom line is that things will be worse for most of the people we represent. That is the reality that we are contemplating in this debate. Our politics is broken and our system has failed, and neither the Prime Minister's deal nor the no-deal scenario has the support of a majority in this House. Our Parliament is in a state of gridlock, so how can we break it? The Prime Minister could draw a magical rabbit from the hat—a political masterstroke of some kind—that breaks the logjam and enables Parliament to move ahead beyond the current paralysis. While we live in hope, the chances of that happening appear incredibly slim.

The opposition to the Prime Minister's deal is about more than the backstop on the Northern Ireland border, critical though that is. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Peter Kyle) for analysing the debate that was abruptly brought to a close before Christmas. He found that Members from across the House had many concerns about security, migration, citizens' rights, and trade and the economy, which was the No. 1 issue. However, the backstop, on which we are told this whole debate rests, came fourth.

**Mike Gapes:** As somebody who was involved in negotiating the Good Friday agreement, I regard the backstop as an essential guarantee of that agreement and of long-term stability in Ireland. Although I disagree with the Government's position for the reasons that my hon. Friend is setting out, the backstop is not the problem. The problem is with the future framework and other things.

**Luciana Berger:** I thank my hon. Friend for articulating clearly that, although the nub of the issue has rested on this point, there are actually many other issues. For many colleagues on both sides of the House, the backstop is not the issue that is consuming them. In *The Daily Telegraph* this morning, an unnamed Minister said that the Prime Minister is likely to lose by 200 votes next week because the situation will not be resolved by addressing the backstop alone. If the vote is lost next Tuesday, a motion of no confidence in this Government should be brought immediately, and we should see whether there is a majority in Parliament for a general election. With fewer than 80 days to go until we are due to leave the EU—around 40 sitting days—time is pressing.

If the vote falls next week, we will break the gridlock only by giving the country a final say with a people's vote, but that does not mean a rerun of the 2016 referendum. The world is a different place nearly three years on. Some 1.4 million young people who are eligible to vote today were too young to have their say in 2016, and the most recent analysis shows that 72.5% of my constituents now support remaining in the European Union, with 74% of people wanting a people's vote. Those percentages are hardly surprising, because Liverpool is proudly a European city. We were the European city of culture in 2008—a year that generated an economic impact of £753 million. In just the past five years, European structural and investment funds have provided Liverpool with nearly £200 million, which has allowed us to invest in hundreds of local enterprises and jobs. People understand the enormous benefits that EU membership has afforded us for decades, and it is regrettable that the Government will not even confirm that funds that the European Union has already committed to Liverpool to the tune of millions of pounds will be guaranteed post Brexit.

Young people, whose lives will be most affected by the decisions taken in this place, should be allowed a say on their future. New facts have come to light. The lies of the leave campaign have been exposed, including, as the House heard earlier from the Home Secretary, the leaflets and Facebook advertising that people were bombarded with telling them that millions of people would come here from Turkey. That was just not true. We have heard strong suggestions of Russian influence in our referendum in line with Russia's desire to disrupt and weaken the

[Luciana Berger]

western allies, and it is deplorable that we have not yet seen a full and proper criminal investigation. Rather than the unicorns and rainbows that too many of the public were sold, we now have a much clearer sense of what Brexit actually means for our economy, for jobs, for our public services and for businesses, and public opinion has shifted based on the harsh realities rather than the false, shiny promises on the side of a bus or threats of a Turkish invasion.

Let the people have a say with a people's vote. Let us be open and honest with the country: there is no better Brexit. There will be no Brexit dividend, just Brexit chaos and misery. There is no better deal than the one we have already. On every analysis, Government receipts will be lower than if we had remained in the European Union. Of course, we could choose to spend money differently, but that is not a dividend. The decision will affect us for decades to come, and it is in the national interest and for the sake of the people of Liverpool, Wavertree, who sent me to this Parliament, that I will vote against the Government's motion next week.

11.25 am

**Mr Mark Francois** (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for calling me to speak in this historically important debate. While there are many varying and strongly held views on both sides of the House about the Prime Minister's proposed deal, all right hon. and hon. Members can agree that the votes we will cast next Tuesday will in all probability be the most important votes that any of us will ever cast in our political lifetime.

On a personal note, I have known my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex (Sir Nicholas Soames) for some 20 years. He and I come at this issue from utterly different perspectives. I was an infantryman and he was a cavalryman, and anyone who would call him a traitor has clearly never met him. In fact, the idea that Churchill's grandson could be such a thing is clearly ludicrous. I say to anyone who would be foolish enough to repeat that ridiculous assertion that, in the immortal words of our Defence Secretary, they should go away and shut up.

I entered this House some 18 years ago. I made my maiden speech on 4 July 2001, and I spoke against the treaty of Nice on the principle that I might as well start as I mean to go on. While I cannot claim anything like the 40-year record of my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash), I can at least say that I have been fairly consistent on European matters stretching back nearly two decades. In 2008, I served as shadow Europe Minister, reporting to the shadow Foreign Secretary, William Hague, when we debated the Lisbon treaty. As his number two, it was my duty to debate much of the hard detail of that 300-page treaty. I remember it well as we spent 40 nights doing it. Despite that extensive debate, night after night, it soon became apparent that the House of Commons could not change so much as a single punctuation mark in the treaty. The Commons had effectively been completely neutered, and it is that experience that finally convinced me that we would one day have to leave the European Union.

Next Tuesday, we will be voting on two documents. The first is the political declaration. It is full of warm words but, as we are all aware, it is completely meaningless

legally and has no force whatsoever in international law. It is the equivalent of, "I promise I will respect you in the morning," but it is in no way enforceable. In stark contrast, the withdrawal agreement is a 585-page draft international treaty which, if this House were to approve it, would become binding on this country in international law. I read the Lisbon treaty cover to cover, and I can assure the House that I have read the withdrawal agreement, too. Having done so, and knowing what is in it, I am utterly determined to vote against it, so I will briefly explain why.

First, we will not take back control of our money. Under the proposed agreement, the UK has agreed to pay the EU approximately £39 billion. The methodology for this is laid out in part 5 of the agreement, on financial provisions, specifically articles 133 to 157. In short, we will pay that £39 billion without any guarantees in return. With this country having just been through a period of considerable austerity I cannot justify to my constituents paying such a huge sum of money without at least some binding guarantees about the nature of the future relationship we would get in return. This is all in stark contrast to Margaret Thatcher at Fontainebleau in 1984, when rather than give up £39 billion for nothing, she famously said, "I want my money back". And she got it when she won the so-called British rebate, which has saved this country tens of billions of pounds ever since. Would that we had negotiated with equal resolve in this instance!

Secondly, we are not taking back control of our laws. Under the draft agreement, the UK would remain bound by EU laws in several critical areas, such as social policy, employment policy, environmental policy and customs. We would effectively become a rule taker, which means we would have to continue to obey EU laws in these areas, having surrendered any influence over how they are drafted.

Thirdly, we could be locked into a customs union without the ability to leave. This is the so-called Irish backstop, contained in the Ireland-Northern Ireland protocol on pages 301 to 475 of the agreement. In short, if we enter the backstop, we enter a customs union, despite having clearly pledged in our manifesto not to do so, and that would materially constrain our ability to sign international trade deals with other countries, including the United States, our single largest trading partner in the world.

Moreover, as the Attorney General's legal advice has made crystal clear, having entered the backstop, we could leave only with the consent of the EU. This has often been referred to in the House as the "Hotel California" dilemma—in other words, you can check out, but you can never leave.

**Stephen Pound** (Ealing North) (Lab): Check in.

**Mr Francois**: No, check out.

I have seen the amendment tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Sir Hugo Swire), but unfortunately it in no way affects the wording of the withdrawal agreement, which, as a treaty, would override it, so the provisions in his well-intentioned amendment are unfortunately, in practice, legally naive.

Fourthly, we risk undermining the integrity of the UK. The Government have told us repeatedly that they would never even contemplate creating a border down

the Irish sea. Despite this, not only have they contemplated it; they have legislated for it in writing, because the agreement in the protocol creates internal borders within the UK, whereby Northern Ireland would become a rule taker in further areas, such as goods, agricultural products and VAT. This is one of the most compelling reasons why the DUP have said repeatedly that they will vote against this toxic withdrawal agreement, and I am 100% with them.

We should also remember that treating Northern Ireland differently threatens to break up the integrity of the UK. We know, from the excellent article written recently by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelsea and Fulham (Greg Hands), that the secretary-general of the European Commission, Martin Selmayr, has said that losing Northern Ireland is “the price of Brexit”. I cannot possibly pay that price or contemplate the break-up of the UK or anything that would encourage further separatism in Scotland. For that reason, too, I will vote against the deal.

Lastly, the agreement would ultimately be overseen by the European Court of Justice. Article 174 of the agreement, on page 286, envisages a situation in which both sides cannot agree on aspects of its implementation. In this case, they would create an arbitration panel to resolve the dispute, and the article clearly states that the European Court of Justice, where the matter affects Union law, which is very wide-ranging, would be the ultimate arbiter. It would decide the question and its rulings

“shall be binding on the arbitration panel.”

That would override this Parliament and our Supreme Court.

It has often been argued that my colleagues and I on the European Research Group do not want a deal. That is not true. We want a deal, but not this deal. What we want is often referred to as the super-Canada option, because it takes an existing EU-Canada free trade agreement, signed by the EU in 2016, and amends it into a more comprehensive free trade agreement by which we could trade equitably with the EU but outside the single market, the customs union and the ECJ. Under such an arrangement, we would really have left the EU. I want to make it absolutely clear that that, and not no deal, is our desired end state.

In summary, I hope that everyone who votes on this agreement on Tuesday night will be able to look their constituents firmly in the eye and say they have read it. It seems to me that as professional legislators that is the least we can do. The British people voted in a referendum to leave the EU by a majority of more than 1 million votes, and I believe that we as parliamentarians have a moral obligation to follow their instruction, but this agreement does not do that. It would leave us in effect hanging half in, half out of the EU, which is something that the Prime Minister specifically warned against in her excellent speech at Lancaster House in 2017.

Moreover, the agreement, if we were to approve it, would involve us giving up £39 billion for nothing, leave us as a rule taker, potentially lead us into a backstop from which there is no escape, threaten the break-up of the UK, and still leave us under the suzerainty of the ECJ. We would be a vassal state. This country has never bowed the knee to anyone in almost 1,000 years and I do not believe we should start now. I have read this.

This is the best deal since Munich. This House of Commons has been told by *The Telegraph* and *The Sun* that this is a surrender document. It is. We in this House have never surrendered to anyone, and we never ever will, including next Tuesday night.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. As foreshadowed some moments ago in my response to the point of order from the hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick), I can now announce the imposition, with immediate effect, of a six-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches.

11.37 am

**Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck** (South Shields) (Lab): I do not recall a time when the fractured state of our politics so accurately mirrored that of our nation. Brexit demanded so much more of us in this place. It was brand-new territory, and for it we needed a brand-new approach to how we did our debating and politics, but these proposals for consensus building across party boundaries were rejected by the Government. The vacuum left in British politics, as MPs and parties have struggled to respond, has been filled by a racist and divisive rhetoric that is creating an inward, nationalist and isolationist environment.

We have been left with an angry country. People are angry because we are leaving the EU or because they want out and it is taking too long, but most of all they are angry with us, even though, in large part, regardless of what political party we are in, whether we are leavers or remainers, we are genuinely trying to do the right thing by our constituents and our country. I campaigned for remain, believing it to be in the best interests of my constituents and my country, but neither agreed with me. In the initial aftermath, I was in denial. I fell into the trap of repeating the mantra that people did not know what they were voting for, they were lied to and they misunderstood the implications of their decisions. While there was some element of truth in that, it was far more nuanced, because complex decisions and human motivation are never so simplistic.

I knew that from people such as my dad—a decent, kind and hard-working man, a retired welder from the shipyards. He and his mates were not angry at economic migrants who had crossed the channel from Europe to work alongside them; they were angry with the Government and institutions that exploited those migrants by allowing the undercutting of wages. That led to him and thousands of others losing their jobs. None of us should ever underestimate the impact that unemployment on this scale can have on individuals, their families and their communities. These scars are irrevocable. That was when disillusion set in. Freedom of movement and the single market were not problems for my dad and his mates. It was about Governments that allowed unemployment to shatter families and communities, Governments that used the EU as a handy repository for blame whenever they failed people; Governments that for decades made no effort to tell anybody the ways in which the EU was a “good thing” and then wondered why they could not get across the message in a few weeks; and Governments that left people behind and created chasms in our communities. These are the people constituents such as mine had in mind when they voted to leave.



[Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck]

I trust the people who sent me to Parliament. In a representative democracy, it is my job to do what I think is best for the people who elected me, unless they have already made their opinions on the subject perfectly plain. They have and over the past two years they have not changed their minds about leaving, so it is now up to me to see that they get what they want. It is my job to thrash these things out in Parliament. That is why I voted to trigger article 50 and why I stood on a manifesto that promised to respect the outcome. We should leave, but I do not want us to leave in this way—not with this deal. I am not convinced that a second referendum would solve the impasse. My constituents tell me that they find it a strange concept: a democratic way of overturning a previous and also democratic decision, which in turn supplanted the democratic decision taken 40 years earlier. I also fear that such a referendum will delay the inevitable and we will be right back to where we are now, trying to find a deal that works for all. I do not accept that the choices on offer are as binary as accepting this deal or crashing out. There is another option: an extension to article 50, giving us the space, albeit a small timeframe, to do our politics differently, to restore our country's faith in this place and to show people that we really are working together. Crucially, for that to happen there needs to be a marked difference in the rhetoric and actions coming from this Government and the Prime Minister. If we continue to fail to deliver the mandate we have been given by the British people, what little trust remains in politics and politicians will surely evaporate.

11.42 am

**Sir David Amess** (Southend West) (Con): I very much agree with colleagues who have made remarks about the tone of the national debate. I was stalked by a woman of mature years in the last general election and it got so bad that it was only through police intervention that my campaign, such as it was, was not totally derailed. She did not like my views, which the House is about to hear.

When the result of the referendum was announced, I was elated and surprised. I never wanted us to join the European Union in the first place; I felt that de Gaulle had done us a favour in originally refusing our membership. When we eventually joined, I thought we were always on the back foot. I voted accordingly in the first referendum, when my personal view was roundly defeated. The result of the 2016 referendum was a dream come true and a moment of liberation, shared by the majority of my constituents. Two years on, I am heartily sick of the word “Brexit”—who invented it? I am also less than pleased with the way we have gone about the process of leaving the EU. Like all of us in this Chamber, I love my country—the United Kingdom. There are a number of reasons why I cannot support this agreement, one of which being that it threatens the integrity of the UK.

I am not interested in what happens on the Opposition Benches, but I am very interested in what goes on in my party, so I shall address my remarks to those on my side of the House. I cannot express forcefully enough how disappointed and even angry I am at the whole process and the way it has been handled in the past two years. A former Prime Minister, David Cameron, gave us the opportunity to vote in the referendum in the first place

and he should have seen it through to the end. We ended up with a new leader, and it has transpired that the three senior members of the Government were all on the remain side, which is not an ideal situation. We then called a general election. I have been a candidate 10 or 11 times, and this was the worst general election campaign I have ever been involved in. It resulted in 33 of our colleagues losing their seats and the Conservative party losing our majority—again, that is not an ideal situation to have halfway through the negotiation process.

I, in common with most Members of the House, have had no input into the terms of the negotiations. We were told at the outset that no running commentary would be given, but there certainly has been and I have been hugely excluded from this process. This agreement is not a political solution; it has been put together and agreed by unelected people, and the resignation of not one but two Brexit Secretaries says it all. I was particularly struck by the strictures of my right hon. Friend the Member for Esher and Walton (Dominic Raab) on leaving office, when he said:

“I cannot reconcile the terms of the proposed deal with the promises we made to the country in our manifesto at the last election.”

We should never have agreed the terms of the negotiation in the first place; fancy giving away £39 billion before we have actually started the process.

The continent of Europe confronts a growing crisis which could yet cause the collapse of the EU. In this country, unemployment stands at 4.1%, its lowest level since 1975, which contrasts with the position in Spain and Italy. Italy's national debt is €2.5 trillion and the country is heading towards bankruptcy. Greece's membership of the eurozone has wiped out businesses, jobs and entire industries there. In Malta, someone was murdered because they were investigating corruption. In Romania and Bulgaria, corruption flourishes. If we look at France, we see that 10 people have been murdered there. In Germany, social democracy is on the wane. In Belgium, the Prime Minister resigned before Christmas because of chronic unemployment. If colleagues want to know more about this, they should read the excellent article by Peter Osborne.

A recent report by my former colleague Lord Lilley and his co-author, the general secretary of Labour Leave, made 30 points about leaving on WTO terms. I believe the points dealt more than adequately with Project Fear and I absolutely support what they said. As Sir Rocco Forte said in a recent article,

“inward investment into the UK in the first half of 2018 was the second highest in the world after China, but ahead of the US and Germany.”

For me, the vote to leave was fundamentally about opportunity: the opportunity to set our own laws; the opportunity to embrace global free trade; and the opportunity to forge our own path in the world once again. From the start, the Government have not fully embraced those opportunities or attempted to understand them, and this agreement reflects that failure. This so-called “deal” most certainly does not match up to the expectations of the millions who voted to leave the EU, and I cannot and will not support it. But regardless of what decision this House comes to in the vote at the end of the debate, I will be leaving the European Union at 11 pm on 29 March, and I am delighted to be doing so.

11.47 am

**Jo Stevens** (Cardiff Central) (Lab): I will be voting against this deal. Based on the substantial number of my constituents who have contacted me about this vote, it seems I will be doing so with their overwhelming support—nearly 95% of them have urged me to vote against. We are now a month on from when this vote should have taken place—a month that has achieved nothing, much like the last 932 days since the narrow outcome of the referendum. It was an advisory referendum, not a binding one. It was a referendum that disenfranchised more than 4 million people, one in which no 16 or 17-year-old was allowed to vote and no EU citizens living here and working here—they are part of the fabric of this country and society—were allowed to vote. The ballot asked just one question—whether to remain or leave. It did not ask how we should leave, nor what should happen afterwards.

And 932 days on, we now know, because we have facts, that the referendum was drenched in illegality by both the Vote Leave and the Leave.EU campaigns. We know that electoral law was broken, that campaign spending limits were breached and that impermissible foreign donations came through online platforms. We have those facts from the Electoral Commission and the Information Commissioner, and, following the work of those regulators, investigative journalists and our Select Committee on Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, which has spent a year painstakingly investigating widespread evidence, the National Crime Agency is investigating Arron Banks, the largest political donor in UK history, and senior figures of the Leave.EU campaign, because there are reasonable grounds to suspect that Banks was not the true source of £8 million in funding to the Leave.EU campaign. That is important—it should not be dismissed as sour grapes—because it raises really serious concerns, which this Government have deliberately chosen to ignore, about the legality and the validity of the referendum outcome.

I voted against triggering article 50. In my speech in that debate, I said that the former Prime Minister, David Cameron, had behaved recklessly in his approach to the reform negotiations at the EU, and that he was “a man who put himself and his party before the national interest, and who gambled our country’s safety, future prosperity and long-standing European and wider international relationships to save his party and his premiership from imploding”.—[*Official Report*, 31 January 2017; Vol. 620, c. 895.]

He failed miserably.

Two years on, I regret to say that those words, and those actions, can equally be applied to the current Prime Minister. This whole period has been an exercise in how not to negotiate. Of all the ironies, yesterday’s desperate phone calls by the Prime Minister to some trade union leaders—who are professional, expert negotiators from whom she could have learned so much—were the first contact she has made with them.

**Ms Abbott:** Does my hon. Friend share my surprise that it has taken two and a half years for this Government to reach out to trade unionists and other key stakeholders?

**Jo Stevens:** I absolutely agree with my right hon. Friend: it is astonishing. The refusal to work not just with the TUC and the unions but with Opposition Members to develop a negotiating strategy that would

secure a deal in the interests of the whole of the UK and each of our four constituent nations has been grossly negligent. The strategy has not been one of strong leadership. Stubbornness and failure to listen and to engage are the hallmarks of weak leadership, and they have led this country into this complete mess.

The best course of action for the country’s future stability, economy and security would, of course, be to revoke article 50. I suspect that there are very many colleagues across the House who would privately accept that but who do not feel that they could openly commit to supporting revocation at the moment. However, there is no majority in this House or the country for no deal. In the absence of that, or a general election and change of Government, the right course of action must be to ask the electorate what they now think. I know that is what the majority of my constituents want, in the absence of revoking article 50. Nearly 90% of those who have contacted me have told me that. I know this because I have been asking them for their views since 2016, and they have been giving them to me. Every published poll in the past six months also confirms that.

People are allowed to change their minds. The referendum result in 2016 was not a result in perpetuity. In the words of one of the Government’s former Brexit Ministers: “It’s not a democracy if you can’t change your mind.” In Wales, we would never have had devolution and the creation of the National Assembly had we not had a second referendum, in which people did change their minds.

I will finish on this point. All the irresponsible, dangerous and inflammatory talk that we have heard in recent months about civil unrest, riots and treachery if we vote down this deal next week and have a people’s vote has to stop. Every time I come into this Chamber, I look at Jo’s shield and think of her bravery and determination during her time here, and what she must have faced in those final moments confronted by extreme right-wing violence. We cannot allow a small minority of fascist thugs to undermine our democracy. They are using Brexit for the advancement of their far-right ideology, and we all have to oppose it.

In the vote next week, each of us will make our own judgment as to what is right in the interests of our constituents and our country. I am very clear about what I feel is right, and I will vote against this deal.

11.54 am

**Sir Paul Beresford** (Mole Valley) (Con): I certainly support the hon. Lady on one thing and that is on thugs. Throughout my political career, both in the House and in local government, there have been right and left-wing thugs, and some of them are beyond imagination, especially in the dark corners of some of the inner-city areas in which I have worked.

For further safety, I need to declare a number of interests: I am a very part-time dentist, a member of the National Farmers Union, and an ethnic minority immigrant holding dual nationality. Unlike those on the Front Benches, I am the immigrant.

In the referendum, I voted to remain in spite of growing discomfort over the EU’s progressive political integration, but I have changed. As the negotiations have gone on, the EU appears to have moved closer to unity. It was a great relief to me that we did not join

[Sir Paul Beresford]

the euro. That was brought home to me by someone who had visited the visitors' centre at the European Parliament and informed me that there was a plaque that said:

"National sovereignty is the root cause of the most crying evils of our times."

It then goes on to say:

"The only final remedy for this evil is the federal union of the peoples."

Marx lives.

As I have said, I voted remain and lost. I accept the vote and am fully committed to the UK leaving the EU with a reasonable compromise deal. I say that because, having been a Minister many years ago who negotiated with the Europeans, I can say that they are tough negotiators, but then, too, so are we. We always ended up, to some measure, with a compromise. Those colleagues who say that we should go back and demand this or that are really away with the pixies. I expect a response from my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess) with whom I agree to disagree on many things, including on this particular issue. The thought that the EU and the 27 will roll over to the demand of colleagues on either side of the House after two and a half years of tough negotiations beggars belief.

Like all colleagues, I listened and talked to my constituents, or, rather, mostly, they talked to me. They have moved, too, especially the business people. They are saying, "Get on with it. What are you doing in the House of Commons? Stop it and get on with it."

As I have mentioned, I belong to the NFU. Over the past few weeks, my local NFU members, in classic farmer speak—and there is a classic farmer speak—have been asking, "What are you lot mucking about with in Westminster?" Some of these families have farms here and in France. Many, if not most, export their agricultural products to Europe. All whom I have spoken to want us to take this deal and move on. Their livelihoods depend on trade, as do those of my Mole Valley manufacturers.

An additional factor raised by manufacturers and farmers is the relief that is felt over the new attitude appearing on immigration. I arrived in the UK under a work permit as a needed professional and spent a considerable time working in London in the national health service. Many of my doctor and dentist colleagues from New Zealand and Australia did the same, but when we went into the EU, or the Common Market, that flow stopped. The importance of that was brought home to me a couple of years ago when I ran an Otago University alumni dinner—Otago is my old university—in the Members' Dining Room. About 30 medical, dental and other distinguished academics from the university flew over from the United States and Canada. They pointed out to me that huge numbers of New Zealand and Australian academics, doctors and dentists in America would have preferred to come here, and they may do so in the future if these new immigration approaches happen. But, as ever, one of my farmers had the last word. He said that, in recognising skills, we need to accept the many forms. Considering my background—I left a very large sheep farm in New Zealand, which now, after lambing, has 50,000 sheep—it is clear why I was caught

and amused by his remark. He said to me that we used to like New Zealand and Australian sheep shearers coming to this country to shear our sheep. Does sheep shearing, I ask the Home Secretary, count as a skill?

I am backing this deal. I hope that we will wake up, grab the deal next week and move forward, because we have spent too long negotiating and too long waiting for it to happen.

11.59 am

**Layla Moran** (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): It will come as no surprise to anyone, I am sure, to hear that I will not support the deal. I am determined to do everything I can to secure a people's vote, with the option to stay in the EU and exit from Brexit. After all, that is what I was elected to do when I overturned a Tory majority of nearly 10,000 with the help of a progressive alliance of voters from across the entire political spectrum. I am still regularly stopped in the streets by constituents who just want an end to this mess. One lady said to me the other day, "I didn't vote for this Brexit. Please make it stop!" Is not that the refrain we are hearing from everyone—"Make it stop"?

That is my issue with the deal. The Prime Minister's deal has only 26 pages about what comes next. It will take years to get that right. Meanwhile, the fact that the air has been sucked out of this Government and the economy will continue to suffocate society. The very causes of Brexit—inequality, injustice, the incomprehension of parents that their children's future will not be as bright as theirs—will continue to be ignored until this is over. We have to be honest with people: Brexit will not solve any of those issues.

There is only one way to make this stop, and that is a democratic exit from Brexit. Support for that, as much as many in this House are trying to ignore it, is growing. Poll after poll shows that the will of the people has changed since 2016. Add to that Russian interference, Cambridge Analytica, the leave campaign being fined for breaking electoral law and dodgy DUP donations, and is it any wonder that people are dismayed? Does that surprise us at all? In a democracy, as has been said, people should be able to change their mind. If they want to vote for this deal, let them, but if they want an exit from it and to keep the deal we already have, let them have that.

One group that Brexit affects more than anyone else is EU citizens in the UK. These people are our friends. They have built relationships and careers in this country. They deserve so much better than this shambles. Is it not shameful that they are being asked to pay £65 to continue to live in their own homes and stay in their jobs? Although I welcome the announcements of Oxford University and my local NHS trusts that they will pay the fee for their staff, it beggars belief that they even have to offer. How much public taxpayer money has been offered to overcome the charge? That suggests to me that the Government should scrap it now.

Furthermore, what of British citizens who live in the EU? We have to think of them too. Above all, this affects young people—people like my younger brother and sister, who both live in Berlin. One is a scientist and the other an artist. They grew up understanding that they would be able to seek jobs elsewhere. That is being snatched from them by leaving.



On our NHS, 21% of the nurses and health visitors in Oxfordshire are EU citizens. My constituent, Jill, emailed me to say:

“Nobody voted for Brexit to have fewer nurses on our wards, fewer doctors in our surgeries.”

We know from our trusts that that is already happening. I agree with Jill. We would be far better off staying in and welcoming those workers with open arms.

I have two universities in my constituency, at least partially: Oxford University and Oxford Brookes. Both have expressed serious concerns about the impact of Brexit. Stuart, a professor at one of those universities, emailed me to say:

“In this department, we have been advertising lecturing jobs for the first time since the Brexit referendum. We were hoping to attract a French mathematician to one of these jobs, but when we contacted her, she made it clear that it wasn’t even an option, because she didn’t want to leave the EU.”

Instead of feeling welcome in our university towns and cities, some of the most saleable people in the world are being put off. While Brexiters may well have had enough of experts, Oxford West and Abingdon most certainly has not.

MPs across this House must now ask themselves if the deal brought forward by the Prime Minister is better than the deal we already have. If they vote for it, they have to be able to look each and every constituent in the eye and say that that is true, and if they cannot do so, they need to give them that choice. The EU has been utterly clear that this deal is the only deal on the table—let us not make that mistake—and it should be up to the people to decide whether or not they want to accept that deal.

We should recognise, however, that this is about much more than that. It is about Britain’s place in the world—our outlook and our identity as individuals and communities. I support a people’s vote because I support an open Britain that wants to engage with the world more, not one that closes itself off.

12.6 pm

**David Tredinnick** (Bosworth) (Con): Mr Speaker, thank you for calling me. I have sat through nearly 12 hours of debate in the past two days, and I have to say that I think yesterday there was a decisive shift in the mood of the Chamber overall.

I was a marginal remainder, but when I told my constituents that—this is perhaps illustrative of the influence I have had in the past 30 years—they voted 60:40 out. Having done that, I said, “I am absolutely with you. It is my duty to get you out.” I feel very strongly that we must respect what our constituents have told us; we cannot have it any other way. Some colleagues who do not do so will find themselves in some difficulty when their finance and general purposes committees or associations look at them as we approach the next general election. I see myself as a delegate, not a representative, on this.

Mr Speaker, you and the Prime Minister have at least one thing in common—stamina. You have been in the Chair for the whole time this debate has gone so, which is 16 hours this week up to today, and the Prime Minister has been at the Dispatch Box for a very long time on Brexit issues, too.

I should declare an interest that I most definitely do not have: I do not want a job. However, I have to tell the House that I am a long-standing supporter of the Prime Minister. I respect her for her integrity and determination. She was a very good Home Secretary—that Department is a bed of nails—as well as a good Minister before that and a good councillor in Morden before that. She got a better deal than I expected. I am not sure I expected her to come back with an end of free movement, our money and laws back, and zero tariffs. I think that she has satisfied the requirements of my constituency, and I also think it is perfectly reasonable to have some red lines.

Yesterday, I listened to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs demolish the Opposition’s case, with their 16 different positions, and my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford) explained that the European Union institutions will stop functioning in March because of the electoral cycle. We are therefore really faced with two options: we either take the deal on offer or we fall out of the EU. The pun is intended, because we will drop right out. As my hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Sir Paul Beresford) said, a lot of people are saying, “Get on with it”; they want us to do it.

In his speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull (Julian Knight), who has 9,000 car workers, explained the problems of the supply chain, as did my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell). I have to tell the House that in my Hinckley and Bosworth constituency we make things. It has the largest supplier of tractors worldwide, Caterpillar, with sales of \$45 billion—the first UK factory was set up in Hinckley in 1952, and it now has over 1,500 employees—and 72% of its inbound components come from the EU, while 31% of outbound sales go to the EU. JJ Churchill, a supplier of Rolls-Royce, is in my constituency: fans are assembled into engine parts. I am told that there are dire problems if we do not have proper arrangements for leaving. MIRA, with its autonomous vehicles technology, is also in my constituency, as is DPD, the biggest parcel sorting operation in Europe, which has a depot the size of 14 football pitches and ships 80,000 items per hour, 20% of which go to the EU.

We have heard a lot about WTO terms from my hon. Friend the Member for Harwich and North Essex (Sir Bernard Jenkin) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith). They should have been here to listen to the right hon. Member for Twickenham (Sir Vince Cable) demolish the argument for leaving on WTO terms, pointing out that he worked as part of the WTO during the Doha round and has therefore seen for himself the weakness of its dispute resolution process and the way in which the Americans ignore it.

We have three critical problems: the World Trade Organisation option does not work; just-in-time is critical because we do not have warehousing capacity; and agriculture would be ruined with 73% tariffs. Many colleagues support this argument, including the hon. Members for Redcar (Anna Turley) and for Leigh (Jo Platt) and my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall North (Eddie Hughes), who have said that they are worried about the situation.

On the backstop, colleagues should listen to the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon), who is supporting the Government on Brexit. She has warned

[David Tredinnick]

of the dangers facing Northern Ireland's businesses and agriculture, and we know that that is also true for agriculture in England. The Democratic Unionists should be careful what they wish for because there is the possibility of a border poll. The biggest problem for Northern Ireland will not so much be a hard border, which is impossible to construct and enforce but the catastrophic effect on its businesses.

I am supporting this deal, and I believe that there will be conciliation if we do not get it through on Tuesday. The hon. Members for Wolverhampton North East (Emma Reynolds) and for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Gareth Snell), the right hon. Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Richard Benyon) all spoke about conciliation. There will be some form of conciliation and we will get it through in the end.

12.12 pm

**Dr Rupa Huq** (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): Seventy-seven days to go and breaking up is hard to do—disentangling ourselves from 45 years of arrangements that touch every aspect of our lives. This is bigger than any piece of legislation, any Budget and anything that any of us has ever voted on. It is a big deal. This is existential stuff.

I will not be voting for this deal because it is the culmination of a string of calamities. This week I received 373 emails in one day asking me to oppose it. People cannot understand why we had the referendum at all. We then had the triggering of article 50 with no plan. Holding a general election in that timeframe did not work out very well either, did it? The abandoned vote of last year then added another 30 days of wasted time. Now we have this bastardised compromise before us, uniting a whole pile of departed ex-Ministers, every living former Prime Minister, the ideological purists of the ERG and every single Labour Member here today.

Never mind the backstop, my constituents—13,000 outraged EU nationals among them—are worried about their financial passporting rights or their carbon credits when the EU emissions trading scheme ends. We are now told not to make the perfect the enemy of the good. That is a mighty big downgrade from “the easiest deal in history”. It is a bit of a downgrade from, “They need us more than we need them.” But there is plenty of material for any student essay on “Can a minority Government ever behave like an autocracy?”

There are desperate measures from No. 10, including evenings of drinky-poops for Tory MPs and knighthoods for some. A meeting was even offered to the 218 cross-party MPs imploring the PM to rule out a catastrophic no-deal Brexit, which would be like jumping out of a plane with no parachute, without even a safe landing space. That is one in three of us who are concerned about just-in-time supply chains and rules of origin. Indeed, I ended up at that meeting myself. Alas, nothing new came from the Prime Minister—same old, same old. There comes a time when being resolute becomes being pig-headed and stubborn. Meanwhile we see the farcical scenes of a multi-million-pound ferry contract paid to a firm with no vessels. We see the stockpiling of drugs. We have become the biggest buyer of fridges—that is one thing we can revel in.

**Layla Moran:** Does the hon. Lady think it is farcical that it was revealed that we have spent £1 million on these fridges so far?

**Dr Huq:** I absolutely do. In fact, we must think of all the money that this is racking up—never mind the £39 billion just for the split.

We have seen the no-deal notices, one of them recommending that Britons should vary their diets to avoid bananas and tomatoes in future. There are 3,500 troops on standby. Our great nation has descended into a “Dad’s Army”-style farce. “Just getting on with it” is easier said done when all the “it” that we should be getting on with is so interconnected.

Last year, in the sixth-richest country on earth, we saw 600 deaths from homelessness, including one here on our very doorstep. We know from the UN report on extreme poverty that 14 million of our fellow citizens are in extreme poverty. The NHS is haemorrhaging EU staff. Hoarding insulin is now a thing—that never used to be the case. The Home Secretary has left now, but desperate people being washed up in dinghies on our shores underlines the need for international co-operation at a time when we are turning away from our neighbours. We have heard about the coarsened climate of “them and us”, not only “them” as the EU and “us” on this side, but in this debate—the leavers and the remainers.

As the hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran) pointed out, Brexit has cost us dear from the public purse. We have two new Departments, Brexit planning across the entire civil service, and costly experiments creating a dress rehearsal with motorways in Kent. That is even before we get to the £39 billion that perplexes some Conservative Members. Every Government analysis shows that this will contract our economy by 9%. The best deal, obviously, is the one that we already have as existing members with a seat at the table rather than paying out to remain aligned. We know that what was promised was always improbable; now we know that those outlandish policies were undeliverable and the process was illegal.

As D-day looms, we need a plan B to break this logjam, impasse, gridlock, deadlock, cul de sac. We must have the meaningful vote that has been so hard resisted by the Government so as to reassert the sovereignty of Parliament. Thank you, Mr Speaker, for your role in changing the relations between the legislature and the Executive as you have done. We all thank you for that—although it was nothing to do with the Conservatives; they resisted every drop of it.

The last thing we need now is a blackmail Brexit with guns held to our heads. Increasingly, by the end of last year, good will, as well as time, was in decreasing supply. We have all this parliamentary game-playing when the functioning of our country, and people’s lives and livelihoods, is at stake. Given the magnitude of all this, it is time for calm action. We need a fresh assessment of the will of the people. It is 2019 now, not the middle of 2016, when circumstances were so different. Trump had not even been elected then, and it feels like he has been there for 50 years already.

We should extend article 50, given that there is only one deal on the table. As we have heard, “Nous n’allons pas renégocier le deal.” They have said it to us in every language. So that one deal has to be put to the people—to

the electorate—for endorsement as to whether they think it is a good one. What are the Government scared of? We need a people's vote with the option to remain, as we know what that looks like—to remain and reform, because we know it could be better. Now that is what I call taking back control.

12.18 pm

**Nick Herbert** (Arundel and South Downs) (Con): Twenty years ago, the euro came into being. I led the campaign to resist the UK joining the euro. The slogan of the no campaign that we launched was “Europe yes, euro no”. I believed then, and continue to believe, that the UK's best position was to be in the market but outside the eurozone, and indeed the country prospered over that 20-year period.

I was also a very strong supporter of the referendum. I played a leading role in the referendum campaign of Conservatives In, and I worked closely with the then Prime Minister. But immediately after the result came in I accepted it, recognising that it was narrow but nevertheless decisive and that it was our duty to implement and honour the decision. I believe that the Prime Minister's deal does that in a pragmatic manner that recognises that the result was narrow, that the subsequent general election did not produce a decisive result, that the country is divided, and that businesses have significant concerns about the implications of our leaving the EU. I regret that the spirit of pragmatism, which should be embraced by more Members in this House, has become lost in the debate over the past few weeks and months.

**Jim Fitzpatrick:** The right hon. Gentleman said that the general election did not produce a definitive result and the country is divided, but the two main parties both went into the general election saying that they would respect the outcome of the referendum.

**Nick Herbert:** That is absolutely the case, and I strongly agree with the hon. Gentleman. Two groups of Members of this House oppose the withdrawal agreement, and the irony is that they want exactly the opposite things. Both groups cannot be right, and therefore they are both taking a considerable risk. One group wants less Brexit—perhaps a softer Brexit, or even no Brexit at all. Many of those hon. Members support what is revealingly and euphemistically now called the “people's vote”. Perhaps scarred by the experience of the referendum campaign, I strongly reject the idea that a second referendum is the way to settle this argument. Why should people pay any attention to the result of a second referendum if we ignore the first? I think the whole process would cause delay and further division. The worst possible outcome—and it would be very likely—is that we end up with a result that is just as narrow, or narrower in one way or another in favour of either leave or remain than we had before, and the issue would not be settled at all.

Those hon. Members who now seek to delay, dilute or even ditch Brexit voted for the referendum. They voted, mostly, to trigger article 50, and they stood behind their manifestos, as the hon. Gentleman pointed out. That group are taking a significant risk, because in legislating to trigger article 50 the House set the country on a track, a course, and a timetabled process of exit that means that the default position is leaving without a deal. Hon. Members who seek to oppose the withdrawal agreement because they want less Brexit, or no Brexit,

believe that is what they can achieve, but they might not be right. They are therefore risking no deal, and they have crocodile tears in doing so. So many things that are now lamented were foreseeable. The article 50 process was foreseeable and warned of during the referendum campaign. So were the positions of Northern Ireland, Gibraltar and indeed the Union.

The second group of hon. Members who oppose this deal want exactly the opposite thing. They want a harder Brexit, or no deal at all, and they do not believe that it is necessary to have a transition period. I think they are wrong, and that the uncertainty, the potential disruption, and the cost of moving to a World Trade Organisation system would be damaging. Although some of the risks are overstated, I do not think they are risks we should take. I speak as a former police Minister who was involved for a short time in dealing with the potential impact of the fuel protests. That experience was very sobering, just as it sobered my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin) when he was in charge of such matters. I think that group undervalue the importance of striking a deal with our largest single market, with which we do half our trade, and they are oblivious to the fact that leaving with no deal would be a huge act of protectionism. After all, if WTO rules are so good, why seek trade deals with anybody at all?

Importantly, the group who oppose the withdrawal agreement because really they want no deal at all are also taking a risk. As we have seen in recent votes, the Commons could prevent no deal and take control, and we could end up with Brexit being diluted, delayed or even ditched. That group have mounted various attacks on the deal, and provided various rationalisations for opposing it, including most of all the backstop. Those objections are so much more theological than they are practical, and it has become not just a question of whether it is likely that we will be trapped in the backstop, but the fact that we could be becomes the fount of all opposition to the withdrawal agreement. There is a blurring of the withdrawal agreement with the future relationship and the possibility of doing a trade deal. It is that end state we should be concerned about. By then, we will have removed ourselves with a sensible transition period and will be able to control our borders, our laws and our money, yet that end state is often described as if it will mean we are a permanent vassal state.

Campaigners on both sides exacerbate division. The no-deal side does so by fetishising betrayal and telling everybody that they are being let down, there are traitors and so on. The people's vote side does so by encouraging people to believe that this process can be stopped when, less than three years ago, the public voted to leave and, in truth, there has been little movement in public opinion. Opposition has descended mostly to pejorative attack. I say to hon. Members on both sides: “Prepare to climb down, because both of you cannot be right—one of you is not going to get what you want.” The right thing to do is to support a pragmatic exit, which is what the withdrawal agreement offers.

12.25 pm

**Neil Coyle** (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab): I had hoped to speak before Christmas. Given that there is not a scintilla of difference between what we



[Neil Coyle]

have now and what we had then, I am unsure what has been achieved in the meantime. In bringing forward the vote in this way and at this point, the Government have continued the trend that was set in the run-up to and throughout the 2016 referendum campaign. People have talked about improving the tone of debate, but we got to this position through betrayal, deceit and lies writ large on a bus, and through corruption and criminality that is still under investigation.

Since the referendum, we have seen the Government squirm and battle against any and every attempt by the House to uphold its role and scrutinise plans, including by trying to deny us a vote at all by pulling it at the last minute in December. Now, they have made the “meaningful vote” meaningless by presenting a Hobson’s choice of this deal or no deal, both of which the public and employers alike oppose.

Sadly, I have already seen damage in my community since the referendum. I have even shown constituents around this place—most recently Aaron—who have been laid off as a consequence of the result. Southwark has a strong food and drink sector, and strong hotels and hospitality, universities, arts and creative industries, construction and architecture, finance and law, healthcare and public services. All those sectors have alerted me to problems, especially with the retention and recruitment of staff. Locally, not one sector or employer has said anything would get better if the Government won the vote on Tuesday. The Government’s own analysis shows the longer-term national damage that would be caused if Brexit went ahead, which would cost £100 billion.

I am proud to represent Bermondsey and Old Southwark, and I know I speak for local people, 73% of whom voted remain and an estimated 80% of whom now support remaining. I voted against triggering article 50, knowing I did so with the support of the vast majority of my constituents and of local party members, who, sadly, have often felt unrepresented by the national party.

Turning back to the Government, since the Prime Minister published her proposals, two constituents have been in touch to say they back them, and thousands have been in touch to say they oppose them and oppose Brexit. People are sick of the deceit, but it continues. There is the deceit that there is a deal. There is not—nothing is settled. Even if the Government won on Tuesday, the only certainty would be more uncertainty. There is the deceit that this is a meaningful vote, despite our not knowing what the deal will deliver or even when, if ever, it will finally be agreed. It could take years to finalise trade arrangements, with more employers moving investment, staff and assets outside the UK in the interim, as we have already seen, including in my constituency.

There was deceit in Brexiteers promising the “exact same benefits” of EU membership, which they have utterly failed to deliver. They now more openly admit opposing freedom of movement. They take pride in insulting the 11,000 people who live in, work in and contribute to my vibrant community but were born in other EU member states, whom they accuse of somehow jumping a queue. They also ignore the 100,000-plus other constituents I have who want the chance to live, work, study and holiday across the EU for free but now

face losing out. UK citizens face a £300 million bill to continue travelling as they do to countries that are currently free to enter. And there was deceit in our being told that everything would be fully negotiated and other trade deals would be arranged ahead of our departure. It is not, and they have not been.

We need to inject honesty into this debate and be honest with the electorate. The UK has the most flexible membership package in the EU, with no Schengen membership, a rebate and no euro. The cost of our full membership, per capita and as a percentage of GDP, is among the lowest of all member states and less than some non-members, such as Norway, contribute for less control and fewer benefits. We must return to honest debate.

People are rightly fed up of the lies and deceit, including the idea that the Government’s arrangements uphold their commitment fully to protect the integrity of the UK. In fact, they put our country’s very future at risk and thoroughly undermine our international standing, with the empty rhetoric of “global Britain” pleasing only Putin and Trump, who have no interest in a strong and unified United Kingdom.

Finally, it is a fundamental falsehood, deceit and insult to present no deal as the only outcome if the Government are defeated. It is not. For years people were told that they could not have the things that they need: a police service able to investigate and solve crime, a national health service that did not involve 20-week waits for standard appointments, and a solution to the housing crisis. The Government’s response was that there was no money and no deal. Now they find billions to waste on the no-deal Brexit, while people still suffer “neglexit” on housing, policing and the NHS. With this fundamentally fraudulent claim, the Prime Minister is playing Russian roulette with people’s livelihoods and jobs. The UK can and should revoke article 50, and I urge the Government to take that approach.

In 2016, when she was Home Secretary, the Prime Minister wrote that

“it is clearly in our national interest to remain”

in the European Union, on economic and security grounds. Now she claims the exact opposite. The public see through that bluff, and the question that they are left with is this: what kind of leader attempts to downgrade their own country’s economy and security? My community was attacked in June 2017 at London Bridge and Borough market, and in no circumstances will I support the downgrading of security. Furthermore, what kind of leader throws away the country’s relationship with the strongest and wealthiest trade bloc on the planet, which covers half our trade and dominates vast swathes of our economy, especially services?

I was elected to this place in 2015 on a promise that I would never vote for anything that would harm my community. Brexit has done, can do, and will only do that. so I will keep my promise: I will oppose this limbo wish list, and support a new people’s vote. The truth is that we should all be bold enough to do our job. None of us were elected to downgrade our constituents’ prospects, to downgrade our country or its security, or to downgrade opportunities for the people whom we serve. We should all have the courage to end the deceit and dump this dismal downgrade.

12.31 pm

**Andrew Rosindell** (Romford) (Con): Let me return the House to the heart of this debate, which I believe is about our British democracy.

I remember being handed a badge saying “Keep Britain in Europe” way back in 1975, at the time of the referendum called by the then Prime Minister, Harold Wilson. I am sure you will recall, Mr Speaker, that his “new deal” led our nation to vote to remain in what was then believed to be a “common market”. The generation of the time, including my own parents, genuinely thought that it would promote trade and prosperity, while bringing peoples and nations of a troubled continent together in peace and co-operation. To most people it all sounded perfectly reasonable, and given that many had lived through the war years and then faced the prospect of a cold war with Soviet Russia, I can see exactly why they chose to stay in the Common Market.

Ever since then, however—ever since 5 June 1975—as each day has passed, the scales have surely dropped from the eyes of the British people as they have witnessed power being gradually drained from the sovereign nations of Europe by one treaty after another. They saw the Single European Act and then Maastricht, followed by Amsterdam, Nice and Lisbon, all slowly but surely transferring power and authority to the institutions of the European Union.

It cannot be denied that the British people have a fine instinct. We can see when something is not right. However passive we may seem, eventually the people of these islands always wake up to the truth, and having done so, we have never flinched and capitulated throughout our entire history. Instead, we have stood our ground, raised the banner high and defended what is ours, and in the referendum on 23 June 2016, 41 years after the original referendum, the British people did exactly that.

The people of this nation are not unreasonable folk. They gave the Common Market and the European Union a chance, they truly did. They gave the EU a chance to prove itself to be an organisation where we, an island people with an unparalleled history as an independent, seafaring, trading nation, with a global outreach like no other and with nearly 1,000 years of being the masters of our own destiny, could feel at home; but it was not to be.

It wasn't like we didn't try. We were not in the EU for just a few months or a few years; we have been fully part of it for nearly half a century, and after all that time our people—the people whom we owe so much as their elected representatives here in this House—decided that they no longer trusted this EU institution and freely chose to get out. They chose to leave and to take charge of their own destiny again. Moreover, they did so with the greatest democratic vote the nation has ever seen, with the winning leave side securing wins in about two thirds of the constituencies of this very House in which we sit.

It was this Parliament that gave the British people the right to make the decision; it was this Parliament that voted through the referendum Act, which delegated this decision to the British people themselves. We said it was a once-in-a-generation decision, and that we would respect their vote and it would be final. So I say to colleagues in all parts of the Chamber and to everyone, both leave and remain, that if this Parliament now fails

to follow through on the solemn promise we gave—if we fail to truly uphold and respect the will of the British people, and if we show contempt for British democracy and break faith with our electors—I fear we shall be unleashing a collapse of trust in our democracy the like of which we have not seen in our political lifetimes. Our duty must surely be to our nation and its people. In my constituency almost 70% of the people of Romford voted to exit the European Union, and I can tell the House that they have not changed their minds and will not change their minds.

I truly believe our nation is up for this, and whatever the challenges we may face—whatever Chicken Licken-style panic occurs and despite all the fearful threats of doom and gloom just around the corner—the British people have the strength and resilience that will see us through, and nothing will tempt us to adopt the kind of retreat that some are sadly and shamefully advocating, try as they might.

I can do no better than quote the words of the late, great parliamentarian Peter Shore, who said:

“When the people feel they are being made subject to laws in which they have played no part and taxes to which they have never consented, respect for both law and government is undermined. Our tradition for order and peaceful change is based not only on the character of our own people but on an enduring, if tacit, bargain between Government and governed that the former will play fair”.—[*Official Report*, 15 February 1972; Vol. 831, c. 301.]

We must play fair with the British people and deliver a Brexit.

12.37 pm

**Matt Western** (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell).

As elsewhere, the people of Warwick and Leamington remain extremely concerned about this crisis the country now faces. Like others, I came into Parliament to work to make our society more equal and to make lives better through a stronger economy. I therefore cannot vote for any deal that will lead to people being worse off, and I have to say this deal would lead to that.

We were told over a year ago by the Prime Minister that nothing had changed. Certainly in the past month nothing has changed. The Prime Minister is still in place, despite the efforts of a great many in this House. A month on from when I was due to make my speech before the vote on 11 December, nothing has changed: there are no reassurances, and no re-reassurances; there is nothing in writing and no changes to the Prime Minister's deal—and let us be clear, it is the Prime Minister's deal.

Two and a half years on from the referendum, we learn that the Prime Minister has made her first phone calls to union leaders. We heard on Wednesday that my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) had not once in the last two and a half years had contact from the Prime Minister, and nor had the Leader of the Opposition. It has also been revealed that, disappointingly, there has been a Government strategy to marginalise Parliament, first by claiming that analysis did not exist and then by limiting MPs' access to the Government's economic impact studies showing the economic damage that would be wrought not just by no deal but all other deals.

[*Matt Western*]

The process of Brexit has also shown that for nearly all this time the Prime Minister has worked as some kind of rogue negotiator in parallel to the Brexit Secretary of the day. Evidence of that came to light with the Chequers deal, which the Prime Minister shared with her Cabinet colleagues just hours beforehand—apparently the Brexit Secretary was blissfully unaware of the details. There was also evidence of that in the Prime Minister's disastrous general election campaign when she failed to collaborate with Cabinet colleagues. We are now witnessing once more her autocratic tendencies.

These past few months have seen Parliament being subjected to what can only be described as relentless verbal waterboarding. The Prime Minister tells us all that it is either her deal or no deal. This week's Brexit Secretary tells us it is her deal or no deal, and so it goes on. This is not debate, and it is not leadership either. Sadly, it is the Prime Minister's failure to utilise the talents on her own Benches or to engage those of us across the Floor that has caused this impasse. That was brought into sharp focus on Tuesday evening when the Prime Minister finally met MPs of all parties to hear our views on why no deal was not an option. I thank her for meeting us, but why did she not consider doing that 18 months ago?

Two months ago, I attended an event here hosted by the Japanese embassy. The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the Secretary of State for Transport were also in attendance, along with many others. If anyone here was present that evening, they will recall the speech made by the chair of the Japanese chamber of commerce. His words were chilling. He said that his member companies would act with purpose to protect their investments. That is natural, but let this country be under no illusion: there are 1,000 Japanese companies with major investments here in the UK employing 150,000 people. They are here because they sought and want continued open access to the European market and European talent.

The Government are playing the ultimate game of brinkmanship, running down the clock and seeking to force Parliament to accept the deal. We are not seeing the Government taking back control. The harsh reality of the global economy is that many UK companies own foreign businesses and vice versa. Just yesterday, we heard from Ford and Jaguar Land Rover about the pressures that they face from the downturn in the global economy.

I mention that because I fear more than anything the social and economic damage that will be caused by leaving the EU's customs union and the single market, neither of which is covered by the withdrawal agreement. If businesses needed any reason to divest from the UK, Brexit and particularly a no-deal outcome will provide it. Since the referendum was called, international companies will have been actively reviewing their UK investments and evaluating the risks. Now, this is all being brought into sharp focus by what is happening globally, primarily as a result of the downturn in the Chinese economy. As I said, job cuts at Jaguar Land Rover were announced just yesterday.

The "Project Fear" of 2016 was misdirected. I am talking about what I see as "Project Reality" and how Brexit will ultimately impact on UK manufacturing—not

today, this year or in the next five years, but certainly in the next 10. It is worth reminding people of the statement made by the economic liberal Professor Patrick Minford, who claims that any loss of manufacturing in the UK will be a price worth paying for leaving Europe. Universities, too, will be hard hit. We are seeing a decline in the number of EU students applying for graduate and PhD courses in the UK; it is down 9% on last year.

Had the situation not been so serious—this is surely a national crisis—and had the Government not been in the death throes of their final negotiation with Europe, there is no doubt that the Prime Minister would be no longer. Two days after she pulled the meaningful vote, she was facing a leadership contest. We are running out of time. That is why I was pleased to support the amendment tabled by the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve) to accelerate the next steps of the process. We have to move on from the vote next week and consider all the other options. The clock is ticking, and the Prime Minister knows it. Autocratic government is not what is needed in a time of crisis. Her deal must be voted down. As an exercise in negotiation—including drawing up red lines right at the beginning declaring what she did not want out of the deal—it has been an abject failure. We must let Parliament take back control of this process and ensure that the people are represented and all options are urgently considered, then let the best deal be put to the public against the option of remaining in Europe. But let us also be clear that no deal is absolutely not an option.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. After the next speaker, the time limit will have to be reduced to five minutes.

12.43 pm

**James Duddridge** (Rochford and Southend East) (Con): I agree with my comrade the hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington (Matt Western) that this deal must be voted down, although I am slightly surprised that he described the 2017 general election as disastrous, given that he came into the House as a result of it.

Despite this debate, I am positive about Brexit. The process of delivering it has been an unmitigated disaster, but as a consequence of the vote, I think it will ultimately be a very positive thing. I might be opening myself up to ridicule by comparing Brexit with the year 2000 debate and all the furore surrounding the possibility of aeroplanes crashing out of the skies and the world stopping rotating. There are echoes of that—we will remember the complexity of the process, but I do not believe that we will look back and see Brexit and what occurs thereafter as a disaster.

The Prime Minister repeatedly says, "Nothing is agreed until everything is agreed." It therefore follows that if everything has not been agreed, nothing has been agreed. The past two years have, been at best, frittered away and, at worst, a monumental waste of time—a distraction from a clean Brexit. I feel let down by Parliament, by the Government and by the Prime Minister. The roots of the problem predate the Parliaments of 2015 and 2017, dating back to the '70s and the 1975 referendum. Parliament chose to go down the referendum route again because we collectively abdicated responsibility for making the decision. However, now that the public



have made a decision, we say that we want to dabble with it. There are two conflicting mandates: that of the referendum and that of the majority of Members in this House. Parliament cannot have its cake and eat it. It cannot ask the public for a view and then ignore it. It cannot abdicate responsibility for providing leadership on a question and then question the result. It cannot fail to provide the arguments behind a referendum and then say that the referendum failed to provide the arguments and a plan.

There appears to be a settled view in this House that the Prime Minister's plan is fundamentally flawed, but there is no single plan that this House would approve. The agreement is so fundamentally flawed that it is unamendable. The backstop must go, European Court of Justice involvement must go, we must be able to agree new trade deals, and we certainly do not want to hand over £39 billion. To be frank, I have lost trust in the Prime Minister's ability to negotiate a good deal—one that respects the vote of the people. The default position on leaving has always been to move to WTO rules. While not my preferred option, it is a better option than what the Prime Minister has negotiated.

Colleagues will have taken soundings on Brexit, and I have been surprised at how supportive my constituents have been. Indeed, that has led me to question what other colleagues say, because few people support the plan. I carried out an online poll—indicative, not representative—and only 14% of my constituents support the Prime Minister's plan. When I spoke to my local Conservative members, one or two supported the deal, but the clear majority did not. However, we may underestimate the situation, because some people go quiet. People with supportive views may come forward, but those with unsupportive views do not.

However, in blocking the deal by voting against it I feel that I am representing my constituents. I was heckled earlier by my right hon. Friend the Member for Hemel Hempstead (Sir Mike Penning), who said, in a menacing tone, "Your predecessor is looking down on you." The late Sir Teddy Taylor would have wanted the result to be respected on 29 March, and we should look with great admiration at his career and those of others who have followed him. We should stand firm on what they knew they were campaigning for and on what the British public knew they were voting for. We can be an independent nation state again. Let us not get too bogged down in the short-term detail and process. The outcome can be a great one: the United Kingdom as an independent nation state.

12.48 pm

**Jim Fitzpatrick** (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend East (James Duddridge). I recognise the sincerity of his remarks even though I disagree with his conclusions. To be clear, I campaigned for and voted remain, and the remain vote in my borough of Tower Hamlets was 67%. I have received many emails since the vote. Some call for no deal, and some support the Prime Minister's deal, but the majority are for another referendum, which of course is code for reversing the original decision. Some colleagues on my side have said that nothing has changed since the Government pulled the vote in December. I disagree. If they had pressed the vote last month, I suspect I would have voted against, but now I am not so

sure, for a number of reasons. First, time is running out. Yes, the Prime Minister has run down the clock; there is no denying that. Secondly, amendments have been tabled such as amendment (p) on workers' rights, consumer protection and environmental standards, submitted by several of my right hon. and hon. Friends, which I have signed. Thirdly, I supported new clause 7 to the Finance Bill on Tuesday, and having demonstrated that I did not want a no-deal conclusion, I feel I should address what I do want, not just what I am against.

My party's policy is to call for a general election, and if and when there is a vote of no confidence, I will support it, but our first problem will be drafting a united manifesto. We would also need to delay article 50 and restart negotiations. This could mean months or years in Brussels followed by what? Another referendum perhaps. The amount of time, energy and money we have already spent on Brexit could be duplicated. What has happened this week, outside on College Green and inside this Chamber on Wednesday during points of order, shows just how toxic this issue has become, and it has to end.

We need to make a decision, move the country on and move forward. The impact of the doldrums and uncertainty is undermining business and the economy. Many colleagues have quoted dire forecasts for one course or another, but doing nothing could be just as bad. I have had real disagreements on this at home with family, friends, members of my party and constituents. Labour's six tests were useful as a challenge, but they, like Gordon Brown's five tests for the euro, were never meant to be met, in my view. Those judgments are fully subjective.

On the Northern Ireland question, I listened carefully to the intervention from the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) on Wednesday, as I am sure did other colleagues, in support of the Good Friday agreement and the Prime Minister's deal. It is very easy to use hindsight to point out that which might have been done better. After the referendum, and especially post the 2017 general election, the Government might have detoxified some of this issue if they had constructed a cross-party approach to the negotiations. Part of Wednesday's debate focused on cross-party co-operation. There must be scope for a cross-party approach, as so powerfully argued for by the right hon. Member for Mid Sussex (Sir Nicholas Soames) earlier this morning.

Our separation from the EU has been described as a divorce after nearly 50 years. Divorces are horrible. I have been through one. There is pain and there are costs. Then we have the playground politics of those who thought—and still think—this would be easy and pain-free. They are deluded, as the Father of the House described on Wednesday. Over 17 million people voted leave, and it was a national referendum, not a referendum in Poplar and Limehouse, not in Tower Hamlets, not even London. The Labour manifesto in 2017, which my constituents voted for, said we respected the outcome of the referendum. The Leader of the Opposition yesterday repeated that Labour would negotiate a better Brexit deal but that we would be leaving.

In conclusion, colleagues may have discerned from my comments that I am talking myself into supporting the Prime Minister's deal next Tuesday, against no deal and against further delay. I am not quite there yet, but I am not far away. It seems the House is not yet there at

[*Jim Fitzpatrick*]

all, but at some point we need to recognise that the danger of no deal is still there and that the only real alternative on the table is the Prime Minister's deal.

12.52 pm

**Mrs Kemi Badenoch** (Saffron Walden) (Con): It is an honour to speak after the hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse (*Jim Fitzpatrick*), who has been on a journey similar to mine, but from a different direction and a much longer one. If there is anything I can say to convince him to cross over the line and completely support the agreement, I hope I can say it in this debate.

I rise to speak in support of the withdrawal agreement, and it has been a journey for me. I was not here when the House voted for the referendum, I was not here when it voted to trigger article 50 and I did not campaign for either side during the referendum, but I did vote leave, and I knew what I was doing. Contrary to what Opposition Members have said, I was not misled or confused, and I disagree with some of those on my side who feel that this deal is not what the 17.4 million voted for. I am one of the 17.4 million. I agree with the Prime Minister that no deal is better than a bad deal, but this is not a bad deal.

In my maiden speech, I said that democracy was messy. Of course it is. I never expected a perfect deal, and I also knew there would be concessions. Had this deal been on the ballot paper in the 2016 referendum, I would have voted for it as better than remaining. I have received thousands of wholly irreconcilable opinions from my constituents asking me to do things that are mutually exclusive. I have looked at what the best option is to satisfy as many as possible, and I believe this deal respects the referendum while looking after those who have concerns about the significant change we are making in our relationship with the EU. So I am supporting this deal, not because it is perfect or it is exactly what I wanted, and not just because I think it is good for the 52%, but because it is also good for the 48%.

Why do I think that? Why do I think this is a good deal? There are several reasons for that. I like the fact that it avoids a cliff edge, because of the transition period. I like the fact that it gives us full control on services, which are 80% of our economy. I am a free marketeer and, much as I feel we can do well on our own, I like the compromises on state aid and monopoly law—those are good restrictions to prevent our descending into a wholly socialist state. I like the fact that we are leaving the ECJ's jurisdiction and that we are ending free movement. Even the backstop, which does give concerns, has great advantages, not least that we will not be paying any money to the EU despite having access, via Northern Ireland and in other areas, to the EU market. I represent a farming constituency, and the tariff-free and quota-free access negotiated in this agreement are most welcome. More importantly—this is the reason I chose to speak today—this deal gives guarantees on citizens' rights, not just to EU citizens in the UK, but to UK citizens in the EU. There are those who want to vote against this deal and speak about the loss of citizens' rights, but I ask how they can do that, knowing full well that no deal would mean that those people, especially British citizens living abroad, who had no chance to vote in the referendum, would suddenly lose their rights.

People have talked about other options, such as revoking article 50. That is a terrible idea, one that comes from people who think they can wipe away the referendum and pretend it was all a bad dream. That cannot happen and they should think carefully about the consequences. What would we be saying if we, the UK, the fifth largest economy—it certainly was in 2016—with the same population as 15 members of the EU, cannot leave? If we cannot leave, who can? If we do not leave, why would the EU ever reform? Many Opposition Members talk about wanting to reform the EU, but if we cannot leave, why would it reform, knowing that no one else will leave? We need to leave in order to show that it is not a prison but a co-operative organisation and that if it no longer works for people, they can escape it.

The hon. Member for South Shields (*Mrs Lewell-Buck*), who is not in her place, talked about extending article 50, but I disagree with her on that, as to do that would be to kick the can down the road and just keep us in this limbo even longer. What happens if the EU says no? What happens if it demands concessions? The EU has said that negotiations are over and it is either this deal or no deal or no Brexit. I am not against no deal, although it is not my preferred option, but I am against no Brexit, as are the vast majority of my constituents. I doubt I am going to be able to change the minds of many of my friends on the Conservative Benches. I am thinking of my right hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (*Mr Francois*), and my hon. Friends the Members for Rochford and Southend East (*James Duddridge*), for Berwick-upon-Tweed (*Anne-Marie Trevelyan*), for Hornchurch and Upminster (*Julia Lopez*) and for Mid Dorset and North Poole (*Michael Tomlinson*). I wish we were in the same place, but we are not. However, I am happy that at least the hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse might be coming across. I will take that as a win and hope that many people will think about changing their minds on this.

12.58 pm

**Stephen Pound** (Ealing North) (Lab): When all is said and done, and everything that needs to be said has been said, this House is very good at saying it all over again. Mr Speaker, you could be forgiven for having a slight emotion of ennui, as you have heard these arguments run over and over again. I do not often feel sympathy for the wives of former Conservative Prime Ministers, but Lady Eden said she felt as though the Suez canal was flowing through her withdrawing room and I feel as though the British border on the island of Ireland is flowing through my living room. We have spent so much time on this, but are we any further forward?

Today's debate has tended in some cases—I make no particular comment here—to go in a slightly bellicose, bombastic way; it is almost as though Palmerston had returned to Romford. I felt that the right hon. Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (*Mr Francois*) was rather more channelling Horatio Bottomley than Horatio Nelson, although I think I understand what his emotion was.

We have discussed at great length the Gradgrind utilitarianism of the EU. I was one of those who voted in 1975 to join the European Union, partly having been seduced by Margaret Thatcher—not an expression Members will hear often in this House—but above all because, as a representative of one of the first generations in this island's history not to have fought a European or

continental war, I felt it was crucial that we looked to the European ideal. In all our discussions about trade, customs, barriers and the backstop, I think we are losing sight of that ideal. I am not saying that the European Union was a shining city on the hill, but it did set global standards for decency, inclusion, human rights, freedom of belief, freedom of worship, interdependence, environmental legislation, workers' rights, animal rights and universal suffrage.

When Francis Fukuyama wrote "The End of History?" towards the end of the last century, he said that the whole world would sign up for those emotions. He was wrong. There are many countries in the world that do not recognise those ideals or the European standard. We are Europeans, and those of us who are proud to be members of this community and continent should recognise that we have a duty and a right to set the standards for many other people to at least emulate and learn from.

We are surrounded in a dangerous world. We have Kim Jong-un, Trump and Putin. We have terrifying figures all around the world. Closer to home we have difficulties, certainly, with Viktor Orbán, Kaczyński and some of the Visegrád Group, and yet we are talking about breaking up and walking away from a Union that is not just the most successful economic union but an ideal and an example for the rest of the world. Are we mad? Why on earth would we walk away from it?

I am not one of those who subscribe to the chimera—the false promise—of another referendum, which would inevitably be followed by a further referendum and then a best out of five. However, if, God forbid, we leave the European Union on 29 March, we must not forget to make sure that our European brothers, sisters and cousins know that we still have affection and friendship for them and that there is still support and interdependence. Every single Member of this House has a duty to work with our fellow Europeans, to let them know that, although this country may have made a decision, it does not separate us from the rest of Europe. It is a decision that I regret. Many of us regret it—more people regret it by the day—but we will not stop being Europeans. We owe it to those whom we have fought both against and with to look forward to the future as one people. Let us never, ever forget that, aside from all the discussions about trade deals, the WTO and the backstop, there is an ideal of a better, interdependent world of decent common human standards. That was represented well in Europe and it is represented in this House. Let us never, ever forget the debt we owe to each other.

1.2 pm

**Sir Mike Penning** (Hemel Hempstead) (Con): It is always difficult to follow someone whose oratory is so difficult to follow, especially as someone who was educated in Tottenham and Essex. Most of my friends probably would not have understood a single word the hon. Member for Ealing North (Stephen Pound) said. He is a good friend, however, and I take in good faith his feeling that we should continue to be friends with Europe. Actually, I think that they have learned an awful lot from us, especially about universal suffrage, which we were doing long before we joined the European Union.

You might hear me refer to you, Mr Speaker, as I tell the history of my involvement in this particular subject. I started Conservatives Against a Federal Europe, which

damaged my career enormously—it prevented me from coming into this House for many years—because my party was not hugely supportive of people like Sir Teddy Taylor, whom my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend East (James Duddridge) referred to. I vividly remember having to hold a fringe meeting about Europe at the Odeon cinema in Blackpool because we were prevented, profoundly, from holding it in the conference area. I asked Michael Prescott, the then political editor of *The Sunday Times*, to chair the meeting, and you might remember, Mr Speaker, that some chap called Norman Tebbit appeared on that platform alongside a young upstart called John Bercow. Talking about oratory, John Bercow made Mr Tebbit look a bit left wing—I think I am absolutely right about that. Following that excellent fringe meeting, which was packed to the gunnels—mostly by Government Whips trying to find out what we were up to—I got a phone call from the then said John Bercow, saying, "Could you make sure that I am on your fringe next year?" I remember that very vividly. It is in my diaries—for future publication.

Mr Speaker, I know that you will not take it the wrong way when I say that I have not been on a journey since then and I am still as Eurosceptic. That is because of my mentor and my beliefs—my mentor was Sir Teddy Taylor and he is the reason why I am in this House today. I did get blocked at parliamentary boards, as Mr Speaker knows, because he was actually at a certain weekend parliamentary board—

**Mr Speaker:** Not by me.

**Sir Mike Penning:** No, Mr Speaker. I was blocked by others in my party who thought that, perhaps, I was not from the correct background. We are all on a journey.

**Stephen Pound:** What happens in the Holiday Inn should stay in the Holiday Inn.

**Sir Mike Penning:** Yes. It is very important for my constituents to understand that, perhaps, we are having a debate in the correct way in this House today. When we had the referendum in 1975, which I was not allowed to take part in because, believe it or not, I was too young, I did not, a year later, lobby my MP to say, "We want to do it again, because I was not allowed to vote as I was too young." We accepted the decision. I was away in the Army at the time, but we accepted it. The reason why I was so proud of this country in the latest referendum is that the British public stuck two fingers up at the political elite and said, "No, this is what we want to do because you haven't got the guts to make that decision in the House of Commons." Many in this House, including my Prime Minister at the time, did not expect them to do that and, partly, neither did I—in the back of my heart I wanted them to, but my mind told me that they would not do it. But they did. The British public said by a large number—I know that it split my constituency—"No, we want to come out."

I would really like to support the deal of this Prime Minister and this Government, but the issue for me is the backstop. I served in Northern Ireland and I lost good colleagues to protect the Union. I will not vote for anything that does not protect the Union. This will be a sovereign country; we cannot have part of this country



[Sir Mike Penning]

outside the Union, so I say to the Prime Minister and to the Treasury Bench, “Go back, do a deal”—I have done deals with Europe before as a Minister in several different Departments—“sort out the backstop, give us our sovereignty, and you will get this Bill through the House and we will leave the European Union.”

1.7 pm

**Ian Murray** (Edinburgh South) (Lab): May I say that I am really looking forward to reading the diaries of the right hon. Member for Hemel Hempstead (Sir Mike Penning)—[*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker:** I am not sure that I am.

**Ian Murray:** May I wish you, Mr Speaker, and every Member of this House, a very merry Christmas? Or that is indeed what I would have done had I made this speech back in December when we were supposed to have concluded this debate. We have done nothing over the past month apart from give the Government an opportunity to ramp up the rhetoric of no deal, which even the Foreign Secretary admitted this morning may not be an advisable choice for this country.

Never in the recent history of this Parliament has the next few days been so important to this country and, indeed, to my constituents. Many in this House forget that they were sent here for two reasons: the first and most important one is to represent their constituents, but the second is to look after the best interests of the country. There has been lots of debate and argument, but never has the sound of the Division bell been held in such significance as it will be on Tuesday as we find out which direction this country will take.

I say to those across this House who know they want to do the right thing, but whom the rules of the game of this House preclude from so doing, that they should do the right thing for the country. Brave politicians break the rules. Brave politicians smash the rules and do what is in the best interests of the country. This Government certainly want to smash the rules. They are in danger of being the first Government in history to wilfully and knowingly make the country poorer. This is the first Government in history who proudly admit that they will make my constituents poorer. Surely that cannot be correct. Surely nobody voted to be poorer. We need to stop this catastrophe now, which means voting against the shoddy, blind, worst-of-all-worlds Brexit deal and putting this back to the people in a public vote. Let us have more democracy, not less.

We are 77 days away—the stakes could not be higher—and all the major questions as to the future are still unanswered. It is time for the Government in particular to start being honest with the country, but the Prime Minister cannot be honest with the country for fear of her own Back Benchers. The Home Secretary today told the House that we can have all the migration we wish for in all the sectors that require it, plus uncapped international student immigration, plus trade deals where migration will be at the top of the agenda, and still cut net migration down to the tens of thousands. That is disingenuous to the people of this country. These deceptions must stop, because they are not in the national interest.

The first thing the Government could do in the national interest is rule out a no-deal scenario. We know that any deal or agreement, in particular no deal and the agreement that is on the table, will make our country much poorer than what we currently enjoy as a member of the EU. That is where the Government’s problem comes in. There are two choices: to leave the EU with no deal or to stick as closely as possible to the EU institutions to reduce the pain, suffering and cost of a no-deal Brexit. What the Prime Minister has done is to set red lines that means she does neither. She has therefore united leavers and remainers in this Chamber against the deal.

Now I come to the vacuous soundbite of taking back control of our borders, laws and money. I wish I had slightly more time, Mr Speaker, because I would like to explain why the deal on the table means that we will cede control of our borders, laws and money more than we have at the moment. The deal does not include the 80% of our economy that is made up by services such as financial services and higher education, which are critical to jobs in my constituency. I say that no unicorns is better than bad unicorns for this country.

This issue goes much wider than the economy. It is about EU citizens; it is about our outlook to the world; it is about driving change in Europe; it is about taking our place in the world as a country that wants to work together with others. We cannot achieve what we want to achieve if we are an isolationist nation. The notion of global Britain—I am glad that a Foreign Office Minister is here—is as empty a slogan as “Take back control.” Let us be bold. Let us take this deal on the table, give it back to the people in a people’s vote and let them decide whether this is the kind of Brexit they wanted. If they want to save the country from the self-harm we are about to inflict on ourselves, they could simply vote remain and keep us in the European Union.

1.12 pm

**Peter Heaton-Jones** (North Devon) (Con): I will support the withdrawal agreement in the vote next Tuesday. In making that decision, I have kept one thing and one thing only uppermost in my mind: how do I best represent the people of North Devon and what is in our best interests? I am thinking only of the people of North Devon and what they put me here to do. They put me here to deliver Brexit. The 2016 referendum result in North Devon was clear: 58% voted leave. In the general election of 2017, I stood on a manifesto that committed to delivering Brexit. The result was clear, and deliver it I will.

I believe that the withdrawal agreement, while not perfect by any means, fulfils those pledges. It is not perfect; it is a compromise. There is some stuff in it that I do not like and there is probably some stuff in it that the EU27 do not like, but that is what a compromise is. I believe that the agreement fundamentally does deliver on Brexit. It gives us control over our borders, our money, our laws and our security. It does enough, in my view, to deliver Brexit, while avoiding the risks inherent in leaving without an agreement. We must avoid doing that.

Some say, mostly colleagues from across the House who are strong leave supporters, that the withdrawal agreement does not represent the Brexit they voted for

and that they would therefore like me to vote against it. I am sorry, but I am not prepared to take that risk. It is simply too great. People will disagree and say, “It’ll all be fine. Of course we can leave without a deal. Of course there won’t be shortages of food and medicines. Of course there won’t be a hard border in Ireland, with all the potential consequences that brings. Of course we’ll be able to trade with the rest of the world in some tariff-free, sunlit upland.” I say to those people, “You might be right, but you might be wrong, and that is not a risk I am prepared to take.”

I want to be clear that I respect those who hold other views. I was much taken with the remarks of my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex (Sir Nicholas Soames), who said we need to be moderate in our language and that, if we disagree, we must do so respectfully. There is one thing I do disagree with, and that is the call for a second referendum or people’s vote. The time limit does not allow me to go into all the reasons why; they run to a page and a half of my speech. Quite simply, there is one thing to say: the real motivation of those who ask for a second referendum is to reverse the result of the first, and that is something up with which we will not put.

I want to say a word about a very important sector of the community and economy of North Devon—agriculture. Farmers are understandably concerned. I want the Government to do more, particularly with the Agriculture Bill. I have met the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on many occasions. Yesterday, there was a significant development when a group of farmers unions issued a very clear statement warning strongly against the risk of a no-deal Brexit and in favour of the Prime Minister’s withdrawal agreement. They have got this right.

I have come to a conclusion that I believe, in my judgment, is the best one for North Devon and the UK. I believe that this withdrawal agreement is just that. Whatever conclusion I come to, a large number of people in my constituency will disagree. It is simply impossible for me or anyone else in this House to please everyone, and it is impossible to reach a decision with which everyone will concur. However, it is my job to reach a judgment that I think is in the best interests of most people, and it is my judgment that there is one thing that most people agree with now, which is that we now just need to get on with it. Businesses, farmers and EU citizens living, working and providing such a valuable input to our economy here, as well as UK citizens living, working or retired in the EU, want certainty. They want to get on with it; I want to get on with it; my constituents in North Devon want to get on with it. This House should get on with it and support this withdrawal agreement.

1.17 pm

**Thangam Debbonaire** (Bristol West) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for North Devon (Peter Heaton-Jones), who is clearly doing his best to represent his constituents in challenging times.

A lot has been said in the past three years about the relationship between the EU referendum and immigration. The National Centre for Social Research has found that people who want the Government to prioritise cutting immigration overwhelmingly voted leave, and those it

describes as “middle class liberals” nearly all voted to remain. It may surprise nobody that in my constituency of Bristol West—hard-core Remainia—I have never been asked to reduce immigration or to do less for refugees. We are proud of the benefits of immigration and of the diverse population that we celebrate in my constituency.

If someone has concerns about immigration or wants it to be cut, that does not mean they are racist, but if they believe people are worth less than others and should have worse treatment because of their race and they act on those beliefs, that makes someone racist. Mixing up the two is unhelpful and insulting—I will not do it—but I think the fear of that has held us back from talking honestly and properly about immigration.

I want an immigration system that remain and leave voters can all believe in and trust, that operates rules efficiently and fairly but honours our international obligations to refugees and respects human rights. In my view, the system the Government are proposing in their long-awaited White Paper and immigration Bill does not achieve this. As a result, I believe nobody is going to be satisfied. This Government have failed to lead a national debate, or even a parliamentary one, about what we all want and need from an immigration system. As a consequence, we do not have a way of talking about immigration, and we should.

I want to talk about immigration. My father was a migrant from India and my mother from a working-class white family from the north. I have lived in parts of the country where absolutely no other brown people had ever lived, as well as very diverse places such as the part of Bristol I now have the honour to represent.

In a sense, we are all migrants—some of us are from families who have lived in the same place for generations, but we all got to where we are now from somewhere else once. We also all have the potential to be migrants, from desire or necessity. In the 1980s, Tory Ministers actually advocated a policy of economic migration when they said to unemployed people, “Get on your bike.” In the last few years, many people—my husband included—have benefited from the opportunities that freedom of movement has provided to live, work and study in countries across the EU. Others have come here to work, filling gaps in our workforce, and they see the benefits of migration.

I want to see an improved response to refugees. Across the country, I believe that this compassionate nation with a strong sense of justice agrees that people should be protected if they are fleeing war, persecution and torture, but I do not think that I have ever come across anyone who thinks that our current system of responding to refugees is working well right now. I will discuss this in more detail on Second Reading of the Immigration and Social Security Co-ordination (EU Withdrawal) Bill.

There are two urgent problems for our immigration policy: the state of our current system and the rise of the far right. The largest category in my case load as an MP has always been immigration, and my experience is of a system in chaos that serves nobody well, wastes public money and treats people very badly. Passports and ID documents get lost, decisions take months, there are long waits for appeals, people are denied the right to be with their families on family occasions when a visit visa is refused, and the Home Office admits that severe staffing shortages have led to a sheer, large backlog

[Thangam Debbonaire]

of rising numbers of claims. There has also been the Windrush scandal, in which people who have the legal right to be here were treated appallingly. And this Government propose to put more people into the same system. I would like to think that this would be a levelling up—a system of high standards for all and fair rules properly applied—but I do not.

I am not surprised that constituents of mine from the EU27 are worried that they will become the next Windrush scandal. I am horrified at how many EU27 citizens are now leaving the UK, leaving behind them staff shortages. I am angry at the uncertainty for British people in the EU27, but I am also sad for people who thought that voting leave would lead to a reformed, fair, reliable immigration system that works in the interests of the whole country, because that does not look likely. On the rise of the far right, I am worried, and we should all be worried, because when we fail to construct an immigration system that everyone can believe, the far right moves into that vacuum. This country is already much divided and I fear that those divisions will get worse.

Next Tuesday, I will vote against the Prime Minister's deal and against her crashing us out with no deal. We will then have to consider rapidly what other options we have. Almost certainly, we will need to consult the people, which is best done through a general election. I want us to celebrate migration. We have the means to do it, so let us do so.

1.22 pm

**Julia Lopez** (Hornchurch and Upminster) (Con): I was fortunate enough to speak in the first attempt at this debate, so I shall try not to repeat myself. None the less, the events of the past week lead me to recall again the terrible sense of dread I felt last summer as I looked upon this Chamber and realised that this House risked finding itself out of step with the wishes of the British people. With hindsight, that instinct was simply an extension of the worry that sat deep in my stomach on election night in 2017, when it became clear that Brexit would have to be delivered by a minority Government in a Parliament that has never fully reconciled itself to leaving the EU, in spite of manifesto promises by both main parties.

The direct democracy of the referendum was going to smash painfully into the representative democracy of our parliamentary system, risking a constitutional crisis that could reverberate across our nation. The votes of the past week may lead some hon. and right hon. Members to suggest that Parliament is simply taking back control of the Brexit process in the face of overweening Government—a noble mission perhaps, if it were not for the fact that this House appeared not to be cleaved along pro-Government or pro-Parliament lines, but to be divided by those who wish to deliver on the referendum and those who do not.

I have every respect for the passion with which parliamentarians hold their personal views. We come to this place to fight for what we believe to be the right path for this precious nation, but I say to those who see Brexit as a mistake to be mitigated or a problem that must be stopped altogether: you must surely now fear that the public will see not the principled flexing of

parliamentary muscle, but the conceit of a political class that was already held in contempt and could soon find itself despised.

Let me turn to the substance of the withdrawal agreement. I was elected on a manifesto that committed us to leaving the EU and, with it, the single market and customs union. To this end, nearly three years on from the referendum, I sorely wish that I could vote for this withdrawal agreement and its many sensible provisions, but as hard as I have tried, I cannot ultimately see it as the product of a mature compromise that delivers Brexit or a sensible start to what was always going to be a long and difficult process.

I am not seeking to defeat the good in some naive quest for the perfect, but I say, without careless dismissal or ideological rancour, that this withdrawal agreement is not the good. Far from providing closure, this agreement merely heralds another two years of political discord and economic indecision as we thrash out our future relationship, in the meantime causing immense damage to faith in our democracy and extending the corrosive limbo into which our businesses have been thrust.

As we open up this next chapter, arguments will begin on what kind of future relationship we want, at which point it will very quickly dawn on us that we have given up all our negotiating leverage. Committed by treaty to the handover of £39 billion, we will be tethered to a default position of a de facto customs union from which we have no unilateral means of exit and from which I can see precious little incentive for the EU to move us. The benefits of Brexit, such as the possibility of an independent global trading strategy, will not be deliverable, while the security co-operation offered in good faith by the Prime Minister could instead see us linked into emerging EU defence frameworks.

Before Christmas, hon. Members will each have received the warnings of former MI6 chief, Sir Richard Dearlove, who could not have been more explicit about the threat posed by the superficially benign security commitments in this deal. The CEO of the European Defence Agency himself confirmed that acceptance of the rule of the common security and defence policy is an unavoidable prerequisite for even ad hoc UK participation in the EU's defence projects, which the political declaration specifically requests. This is no small matter, as binding ourselves to the EU's defence frameworks risks, over time, compromising this nation's defence and relationships with our very closest allies.

We are all tired; the country is tired. Everyone wants resolution in this great battle of ideas. But I implore the House to realise that this withdrawal agreement is not that resolution. It challenges the integrity of our Union rather than protects it. The common rulebook is the EU's rulebook. The flexible framework for defence co-operation is a rigid one. There will be no new trade agreements of any substance. This agreement is a Brexit mirage beyond which lies no oasis, but more division and decidedly less sovereign power to resolve it.

Should this vote be lost, I would ask the Prime Minister to make it clear that the withdrawal agreement cannot get through this House, request the removal of the backstop, move on from the de facto customs territory, and present a framework for a future trade agreement with money staggered according to progress made. I ask her, in the meantime, to step up every



necessary preparation to leave on 29 March, which remains the legislative default unless the Government renege on their desire to deliver Brexit.

Parliamentarians have spent the past two years trying to wish away the political meteor that hit the UK in 2016. There is no land of milk and honey awaiting us after Brexit, only the opportunities that we make for ourselves as a people from our own talents, efforts and energy. Whether we fail or succeed is up to us—and that is surely the point. If we vote through this withdrawal agreement, however, it will be the EU that holds the key to our own destiny.

1.27 pm

**Martin Whitfield** (East Lothian) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Hornchurch and Upminster (Julia Lopez). I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol West (Thangam Debbonaire) for her comments about the state of migration and immigration. She made some very powerful points that should be listened to and addressed by all.

When is a deal not a deal? When is an agreement just a draft agreement? When is a vote not a vote? Two years on from triggering article 50, Parliament is presented with two documents: a 500-plus-page document setting out how we go about leaving the EU and a political declaration on the future. It is almost as if we have a technical drawing of an EU taxi that may or may not have four wheels and that all of us—well, some of us—may be able to get out of, or not. It is all right; we will enjoy it. But the big problem—and it is a very big problem—is that we have barely a napkin sketch of where we are going. There is the stirring of fears, with cries of “no Brexit” and “no deal”. However, this House will not allow no deal. Indeed, after the judgment of the European Court of Justice, we can unilaterally, and without loss of our current arrangements, withdraw the article 50 notice—the danger that is now described as “no Brexit”.

Once upon a time, no deal was better than a bad deal, and Brexit meant Brexit. Once upon a time we were told that we could have a free trade agreement concluded well before March 2019. Once upon a time we were told that we would hold all the cards—it would be quick and easy. Once upon a time, the free trade agreement with Europe was going to be the easiest in human history. Yet we are 77 days from leaving the European Union with a deal that cannot win the support of this House and leaves us facing being put in the perilous position of no deal. It turns out that the statements were mere assertions, possibly of hope and expectation, rather than any achievable goal based on fact.

Countries across the globe are looking at Britain in despair, and saying to the Prime Minister, “Rule out no Brexit.” The vote was not to leave in any way; the vote was based on promises by a leave campaign that have subsequently turned out to be fairy tales. There are now cries of “Respect the vote!” We cannot change our minds, no matter how the facts reveal themselves. There is no disrespect in re-evaluating a position or decision when better information is available. On evidence, we eventually decided that the world is not flat, and that the earth goes round the sun.

The other effect of the deal is to fuel the cry for a second independence referendum in Scotland, and the Tory party, with “Unionist” in its title, is doing more to

fracture the Union of our four nations than anyone else. In December the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) gave a coherent defence of the value of EU membership in cultural, community and economic terms—a defence that simply by replacing “EU” with “UK” becomes even more valid.

Today we are faced with a disingenuous deal—“the best” is described as “it’s better than no deal”, but that is a betrayal of young people in our communities, and of farmers and manufacturers in East Lothian. The Prime Minister and others say “People are sick of Brexit. Let’s get it finished”, but with all due respect, that is rubbish. My constituents are deeply concerned about Brexit, and about this deal and what will follow. They are deeply concerned about the impact of Brexit on their jobs, about security and, most of all, about prospects for future generations.

With Parliament deadlocked, the promises of the leave campaign have proved to be just empty promises. It is time to take the decision back and give it to the people in a people’s vote. Perhaps we cannot depart from the EU on any terms that will not make us poorer, less secure, and put at risk peace in the island of Ireland—political declarations are more akin to the king’s new clothes, with people choosing to see what they want.

Having been elected to represent my constituents of East Lothian, I say no to this deal. I say no to no deal. I do not have this option, but I would say yes to staying in the European Union, or to a people’s vote, and to let my constituents choose on the basis of fact, rather than a once-upon-a-time fairy tale. That way we may all live happily ever after.

1.32 pm

**John Howell** (Henley) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for East Lothian (Martin Whitfield), who is my honourable friend from the Council of Europe. This is only the fourth time that I have spoken in a Brexit-related debate. It is not the fourth time I have spoken in any debate, and it is important to point out that we continue to participate in things that are going on as part of normal business. By speaking only in four Brexit-related debates I have not been ignoring Brexit, but for the reasons set out by my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex (Sir Nicholas Soames), in his fundamentally excellent speech at the beginning of this debate, I have been concerned by the language being used, and by the lack of respect for anyone who puts forward a contrary view, both in this place and outside. We have all seen Twitter feeds that have characterised that lack of respect.

My view on this process has been sorely tested, and a major turnoff for the British people comes from the humiliation of the Prime Minister and the British people by the European Commission. That humiliation followed the treatment of David Cameron when he tried to change the European Union. Are we surprised by that at all? We need only to think back to a Council of Europe meeting at which a pro-remain Member of this House questioned Mr Juncker, who was there as the equivalent of a visiting Head of State, about how he was going to handle the budget for the European Commission. To paraphrase his words, she was told to “mind her own business.” We had to remonstrate with

[John Howell]

him to get him to come back and answer the question. That lack of interest in and that arrogance about the whole matter have sorely tested my faith in the deal.

My approach to the Irish backstop is to look at it in terms of risk. If it is so unwanted by the European Union and we are so sure we will not use it ourselves, one has to ask why it is there in the first place. However, I fully accept, having assessed the risk, that the likelihood of our using it is so remote as to be almost infinitesimal.

Similarly, I do not believe a no-deal Brexit is all about WTO rules. In fact, I do not believe WTO rules are the principal reason for wanting a deal. The principal reason for wanting a deal is to bring to a close the 40-plus years for which we have had a relationship with the European Union—to ensure that we know how to deal with all those things that are hanging over the edge, such as legal cases, charging mechanisms and so on.

The Archbishop of Canterbury may, according to press reports, have changed his view about the need for a people's vote, but I have not. For reasons that have already been set out, I do not think a new people's vote is a good thing. In putting forward an alternative vision of what we need to do beyond Brexit-related issues, I am very keen to ensure that we are still players in Europe. We will do that by giving more credibility to the Council of Europe and our involvement in it. Why should we do that? There is one very good reason: our leaving the EU does not mean a bonfire of workers' rights—they are protected by a 1961 treaty, which the Council of Europe brought in and we signed.

1.37 pm

**Mike Gapes** (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): In the words of Ian Dury, "Reasons to be Cheerful, Part 2". I gave the first part of this speech on 6 December, at column 1171. The additional five minutes I have today is its continuation—hon. Members will judge whether it is "What a Waste" or not.

I do not want to focus on foreign affairs, but I begin by pointing out, in response to the Government's "global Britain" slogan and their assertion that we will be a free and independent country "again", that we are a free and independent country today. We have had a very successful "global Britain" policy for decades. After all, it was Margaret Thatcher who brought in the European single market, which has been of such benefit to our economy, and the Labour Government of Tony Blair that made such an impact on the development of the European Union out of the European Economic Community we joined in 1973.

I want to say some things about the Labour party, and I want to say some things to the Labour party and to Labour voters and Labour party members all over the country. In 1975, as an undergraduate, I was putting out anti-Common Market leaflets on the Arbury estate in Cambridge the day before my final economics exam. I was campaigning for "Cambridge against the market". We decided we would not be with the "Get Britain out" campaign because it included the National Front and racists and, of course, the Communist party. Stalinists are always happy to line up with the far right—the red shirts and the brown shirts. The *Morning Star* is doing the same at this very moment when it supports Brexit—as does that rape cult, the Socialist Workers party.

The Labour party is in a bizarre position, as was confirmed when I intervened on the shadow Home Secretary earlier. We are pursuing a Brexit which, according to a briefing issued by the office of the parliamentary Labour party earlier this week, is a "sensible" Brexit, whatever that is. The reality, as is known all over the country, is that there is no such thing as a "jobs first" Brexit. It is entirely about mitigating the damage.

I have to say that I do not believe any Government would have been able to negotiate anything very different from what the Prime Minister has negotiated with the EU27, because the EU is a rules-based, legally based institution in which the four freedoms are integral. They cannot be cherry-picked. Whether we are talking about a red cake with red cherries or a blue cake with blue cherries, the EU will not allow it. This deal, the backstop and everything else, is an essential part of preserving the integrity of the institutions of the European Union. Why should an organisation that we are proposing to leave give us better terms than it gives its members? That would be unprecedented.

We must therefore face reality. There is no socialist Brexit, there is no "jobs first" Brexit, and there is no better Brexit. The choice that we must face is this. Do we or do we not wish to go into the blindfold Brexit that is being put forward today, whereby we do not know the future terms of the trading relationship? It could be Canadafragilisticexpialidocious, or it could be Norway-plus-plus-plus-plus-plus, but we have no idea. The fact is that once we have passed this motion, if we do—and I am sure that it will go down—we shall be in a very dangerous, uncharted position, in which a right-wing Government in the future could take us into a job-cutting, deflationary or austerity Brexit. That is why I will be voting against it, and voting to stay in the European Union if I can, to revoke article 50 if we get the chance.

1.42 pm

**Michael Tomlinson** (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes), and his "Reasons to be Cheerful Part 2". It sounded as though he might have needed a "Reasons to be Cheerful Part 3" to complete his remarks, and I am very sorry that I missed his "Reasons to be Cheerful Part 1".

That actually relates to my first point: I have been struck by the tone of today's debate. Perhaps it is because today is a Friday, but the tone has been rather measured and constructive. In that regard, I agree entirely with my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex (Sir Nicholas Soames), who made a point that was picked up by my hon. Friends the Members for North Devon (Peter Heaton-Jones) and for Henley (John Howell). Although I disagree with the conclusion reached by all three of them, they were absolutely and fundamentally right about the importance of the language and the tone that we use in this place, and I commend them for that.

I also agree with the comment of the Prime Minister—and I acknowledge her hard work and endeavour in getting us this far—that

"the British people just want us to get on with it."

In that, she is absolutely right. My constituents have been saying the same for a number of months, if not years. I certainly did not come into politics to bang on

about Europe, or to squabble about the EU endlessly. Sadly, however, this proposal does not get on with it. That is my first and fundamental objection, and it relates to the backstop, because we cannot unilaterally get out of it. It is about ceding control and sovereignty, not taking back control. We will be reliant on a co-operative EU in order to exit from it, which is the precise opposite of “getting on with it”. I agree with what my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch and Upminster (Julia Lopez) said in that context.

People say that we will not inevitably end up in the backstop, that we may never get there, that we could extend the implementation period. However, the Father of the House, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), confirmed at Prime Minister’s questions that these negotiations will take years. On the same day, my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Joseph Johnson) cited evidence that it could well be the mid-2020s before a deal is secured. This deal prolongs uncertainty. Businesses are looking for certainty, and it does not give them that. The Attorney General confirmed in his advice that there is a risk of “protracted and repeating rounds of negotiations.”

We cannot get out of this of our own volition; that is my first and fundamental objection to it.

My second objection is to do with the Court of Justice of the European Union. It is technically correct that we will not be subject to the jurisdiction of the CJEU, but under the proposed treaty it will still retain a significant and prominent role in the movement of goods, VAT and excise, agriculture and the environment. Further, under article 174 of the proposed agreement, when any interpretation of EU law is in question the CJEU will be the final arbiter. The decision will be referred to it and will be binding. As we have seen in the recent judgment in relation to revocation of article 50, it is a highly political court, and this proposal does not rid us of its shackles.

Thirdly, and just as importantly, although I will not dwell on it at length, this proposal threatens the integrity of the United Kingdom. I am a Unionist and a member of the Conservative and Unionist party, and the proposal introduces a separate regulatory regime for Northern Ireland. For me, that is a fundamental problem.

I am a serial loyalist; I have never rebelled against the Government in my admittedly very few—three and a half—years in this place, and I do so with a heavy heart, but with a clear head that this is not the right deal.

In the time remaining, I want to make two further points. The Prime Minister has rightly been stepping up plans and preparations for no deal, or for a WTO Brexit—or a clean, global Brexit as I like to call it. So we will be ready; it is not my preferred outcome, but if it happens we will be ready because we have good Ministers—the Foreign Secretary is in his place—and good civil servants who will be ready and prepared. We are an ingenious nation and we will make sure we are ready.

Finally, the Prime Minister is absolutely right to say that we will have no second referendum and there will be no extension beyond 29 March. As other hon. Members have mentioned, she has been firm in that, and she is absolutely right. There is a huge risk that the political trust between politicians and the public will be broken if that is not the case, and the Prime Minister is right to stand firm.

1.47 pm

**Bambos Charalambous** (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): Some 62% of people in my constituency of Enfield, Southgate voted to remain in the EU. I too voted to remain and, like many, I was stunned by the result of the referendum. Many of my constituents found it hard to comprehend. Those who had any relationship with an EU citizen became very anxious and worried about the future.

Some people voted leave because of immigration. I do not believe we had a proper debate about immigration during the referendum, as any reasonable talk of it was drowned out by the noise. The immigration White Paper states that the Government are committed to reducing annual net migration to sustainable levels, but they should be honest about immigration and spell out how it is a good thing for the UK.

EU migrants are net contributors to the UK economy, paying taxes of over £2 billion per year. Contrary to what was being peddled by some on the leave side, immigrants are 43% less likely than native-born UK residents to claim benefits and 7% less likely to live in social housing. The truth is that when people come here, they are not coming here to claim benefits but are coming here to work. When they are working, the whole economy benefits. My constituents who are EU nationals have been working in the UK for many years, contributing to the UK economy. They pay taxes, keep our public services and businesses going, and socially enrich our local community.

Let us face facts: the UK has an aging population. The Office for National Statistics puts the UK median age at 40, with 18% aged over 65, and that figure is increasing. Only workers will secure our future. EU migrants to the UK have tended to be younger and better educated and have the high skills that we need for economic growth. What would it have cost the UK economy to train all those highly educated EU migrants here in the UK? I have no doubt that it would have run into many billions. We are getting the benefit of their education and skills for free because they are choosing to work in the UK.

I am the son of immigrants. My parents came to the UK in the 1960s. They worked hard, paid their taxes, bought their own home and raised a family of three. There were many more like them who made a positive contribution to the UK economy over many years. The Treasury Committee’s report on the UK’s economic relationship with the EU concluded that there will be a significant negative impact on GDP when we leave the EU if there is no free movement of workers.

Conservative Members espouse the idea that leaving the EU would bring freedom from regulatory bureaucracy. The deal actually creates more bureaucracy for business and workers. To recruit a non-UK citizen to work here, an employer would have to make a job offer, pay fees and charges and then hope that the Home Office would process the visa application with lightning speed. It sounds simple, but I am sure all Members know from their casework that visa applications already take months and months. I am not filled with confidence that work visa applications will be dealt with speedily in a vastly under-resourced, understaffed Home Office.

This bureaucracy could lead to a logjam. It will be bad for business, bad for the economy and bad for the people of the UK. Is this what taking back control was



[*Bambos Charalambous*]

meant to mean? This bureaucracy will also apply to doctors, scientists and engineers, to name but a few. Can we really afford any delay when a surgeon is needed to come to the UK to carry out a life-saving operation? And what about the jobs that do not meet the £30,000 salary threshold? We already have a shortage of care workers, teachers, nurses, social workers and other professions that pay less than £30,000 per year. Perhaps the Government are planning on introducing legislation to bring those professions' minimum pay up to £30,000 per year, but I think not.

Rather than setting us free and allowing us to take back control, this deal would tie the UK up in red tape, build a wall around the UK and take up the drawbridge. It fundamentally fails to take account of the reality in the world. I had help in researching the facts for this speech from an intern from my constituency who is British-born and studying at a university in the Netherlands and whose girlfriend is Romanian. This is what the modern world looks like. Supporting this deal would fail to recognise that we are living in an ever evolving, smaller world. The freedoms and opportunities available to young people to work and study abroad are unparalleled. This deal could dash their futures. As the Chancellor said about the referendum, people

“did not vote to become poorer”,

but that is exactly what will happen if we vote for this deal. I cannot and will not support the deal. It will make us worse off, it is wrong for the people of Enfield Southgate, it is wrong for the economy and it is wrong for the UK.

1.52 pm

**Anne-Marie Trevelyan** (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (*Bambos Charalambous*). The question being asked by No. 10 and journalists alike seems to be whether it is possible for a Brexiteer such as myself who is half French—une femme qui adore l'Europe, mais pas tellement l'Union européenne—to support the Prime Minister's withdrawal agreement and political declaration in their current form. I can translate that as “a woman who loves Europe but not so much the European Union”. As a pragmatist, I appreciate that perfection is often the enemy of the good. In fact, I am often heard to say to the perfectionists in my family—of whom there are two—usually in relation to homework and procrastination that “done is better than perfect”. That philosophy holds true for any agreement with the EU to assist as smooth a Brexit as possible.

The Prime Minister's unequivocal determination to ensure the status of EU citizens in the UK—including my mother, as it happens—is absolutely right. It has also been good to see the drip-feed of confirmation over the past three weeks that other EU countries are putting through legislation to ensure mutual status for British citizens living in those countries if we have to leave in a no-deal environment on 29 March. However, as the Home Secretary has had to demonstrate in the last couple of weeks, we face challenges of illegal migration relating to what constitutes a refugee rather than an economic migrant, and of what our policy choices, which are supported by our electorate, are and can be in the future. These questions have all been very much part

of the Brexit debate and conversation. The reason why so many people voted for Brexit was partly to feel that they had a more direct line for their views and voting power to be heard in this policy area. They voted not to close the door but to determine these things for ourselves.

I want to highlight one area of concern beyond the question of the backstop, as mentioned my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole (*Michael Tomlinson*), which is the wider defence and security and canvas. The UK is the leading European military nation in NATO, so I am profoundly concerned that the EU's intention, as outlined elsewhere in the withdrawal agreement and the political declaration, is to reduce our ability as a third country to act independently in the defence arena and to maintain our current position and commitment.

We must look closely at the proposed post-Brexit relationship with the EU that the Prime Minister plans to negotiate and consider whether we should accept what is clearly beneficial to the EU if that would cause significant detriment to the UK's defence industry, our control of our own defence and security forces, and how we can ensure independently and with sovereign capability that we can decide what we do for our economic security and that of our constituents in the decades ahead. I am concerned by the short-termist tone of Ministers and the Government when they say that there must be no disruption to daily life, but the proposals leave us with the long-term risk of not having really Brexited or regained our freedom of choice and, indeed, responsibility for our actions. Brexit means having nowhere to hide and no one else to blame.

The language of the political declaration includes “flexible and scalable co-operation” to protect from threats and close work at bilateral levels and within international organisations, which all sounds good. Then, however, the language refers to combined efforts with the EU. We already have a powerful and effective combined effort framework in NATO, with EU countries wrapped up in that security blanket. The most recent treaty published this week between France and Germany—the underlying reason for the EU being to stop battles between those two nations and to try to maintain peace in Europe after such bruising and destructive wars in the last century—highlights France's continuing need to reassert its position vis-à-vis Germany. Indeed, only yesterday the German Foreign Minister talked again of how an EU army is becoming a reality. That detracts from military effort, financial investment and effective outcomes for all our allies through NATO. We must stand firm in reasserting that NATO can remain the co-operative organisation that provides effective security protection under article 5, and driving through policy to ensure that.

The problems with what the Prime Minister has agreed with the EU risk our ability to protect our defence industry as we believe necessary and beneficial. I remain profoundly concerned that the proposals in the political declaration, off the back of the withdrawal agreement, hold unacceptable risks—although there is always a question of balance of risk—to the United Kingdom's defence and security flexibility and autonomy, and reduce the benefits to UK plc. Having been a global maritime trading nation for the past 400 years, we should be able to bring that back as our focus as we move towards becoming an independent country once again.

1.57 pm

**Luke Graham** (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): Immigration has been a big part of the Brexit debate and one of the most contentious issues in modern political times. The right hon. Member for Mid Sussex (Sir Nicholas Soames) made it clear that the matter should be debated robustly and respectfully, and I hope to do that in my remarks. Like many others, I recognise that immigration stirs passions, and that this House must have the courage to confront an issue that vexes not only our country and our constituents, but the United States and many EU and Asian states. Immigration is an important issue for me. I have been lucky enough to live and work on three separate continents and to experience the immigration regimes of the People's Republic of China, the Kingdom of Thailand and the republic of the United States of America. I have been through their immigration systems and have seen costs and benefits.

The United Kingdom has had a significant amount of immigration over the past two decades. A Migration Advisory Committee report makes it clear that the experience of immigrants and immigration across the United Kingdom has been different, which is reflected in the numbers. England has far more foreign nationals and people born abroad than Scotland—5.5 million versus 358,000, and 16% versus 9%. That shows that the UK as a whole is not the backward, narrow-minded backwater that so many Opposition Members keep trying to suggest, but a booming international country that has welcomed and always will welcome people who want to live and work here.

First, I want to respond to the criticisms made by some Scottish National party Members, because their contributions have been ill-tempered and poorly judged. They talk about the UK and Scotland as though they are one place, but we know that that is not true. Net migration in London was over 88,000 in 2016-17. In Glasgow, it was just over 5,000. In Perth and Kinross, which I share with the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart), it was 148. In Clackmannanshire, which sits entirely within my constituency, the average was 15 a year between 2004 and 2016.

Secondly, other parts of the UK are not hotbeds of anti-immigrant sentiment. According to the British social attitudes survey in 2016, there was a variation of only five to six percentage points between Scotland, Wales and England in terms of opinions on immigration, and that is with Scotland having experienced immigration in the thousands and England and Wales in the millions.

Thirdly, SNP Members make themselves out to be champions of EU nationals, but in 2014 the then Deputy First Minister, now First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, clearly said that EU nationals would be stripped of their right to remain in Scotland if Scotland separated from the UK and therefore the EU. They were used as a bargaining chip. It was despicable then and it is indefensible by the SNP Members now.

**Peter Grant:** While this debate has been taking place, BBC The Social, a wonderful fairly new social media channel based in Glasgow, has posted a video of a young woman called Patrycja who arrived from Poland 12 years ago with £100 in her pocket and is now running a vital charity for vulnerable young women in Scotland.

Does the hon. Gentleman think that the Immigration Bill should be changed to prevent the next Patrycja with £100 in her pocket from coming to Scotland and bringing the benefits that today's Patrycja has brought?

**Luke Graham:** I do not think the hon. Gentleman has ever listened to any of my speeches. I am one of the most liberal and pro-immigration politicians in the House. To those who want to work here, live here and contribute, our door should be open, and Patrycja is a fine example of that. I welcome her, just as I welcome the Syrian refugees who have experienced racism in my own constituency. In the last month, I have had grown men in tears in my constituency office because of the racism they are experiencing in my constituency in modern-day Scotland. That racism must be called out and addressed in Scotland, in England, in Wales—anywhere it appears in the United Kingdom—and it will be.

We as politicians should be engaging with this debate. My hon. Friends have talked about being honest and direct. That is completely right. The Migration Advisory Committee report is very clear that immigrants are net contributors to our economy—they make a beneficial contribution to our country—but it also recognises that, where there have been high concentrations of immigration, public money has not followed. We have to invest in the infrastructure so that the burden of immigration—in terms of numbers and public services—is borne by the Government, not individual constituents trying to integrate and contribute.

In my constituency, we have formal advice from Clackmannanshire Council, which is SNP-run, saying that the SNP-run NHS—I have the letter here and I am happy to put it in the Library—has to be mindful of accepting refugees to the area because of the lack of GPs in Clackmannanshire. This shows that the SNP has not managed public services such that we can welcome people to our country.

The immigration proposals and the opportunity through Brexit to shape our immigration policies are very important. We do not need to get lost in a vicious circle of negative stories about immigration. We can talk about the positives, as Members from across the House have done. We have a fine opportunity to develop new visa schemes and forms of co-operation with other countries, as my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary mentioned earlier when he talked about e-gates. We could use our innovative and entrepreneurial spirit to go one further and consider a US-style green card, which in the past has had cross-party support, although the green might be a problem—I would be happy for it to be blue, if that satisfied other Members.

Let's be honest. When we are discussing immigration, we are not talking about faceless numbers; we are talking about real people who come here, contribute and make our country better. We need to break the vicious circle. We have a chance to develop a more innovative and welcoming immigration system in this country. Immigration is a sign of success, not failure, and I hope it will continue sustainably once we have left the EU.

2.3 pm

**Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): I am conscious that I will need to be quick, given the time, Mr Speaker.

[Kevin Foster]

This is obviously one of the most momentous debates that many of us will ever take part in, although we must remember that for many of our constituents their jobs, their homes, infrastructure and many other issues already decided in this Parliament will be the priority, as was perfectly encapsulated when I was invited to appear on BBC Radio Devon this morning to talk about the key issue in Torbay today: dustbin collections.

It is worth saying that Torbay voted strongly to leave the EU, so I do not see an option of staying in. People across the bay did not vote to leave the EU just because they saw a bus or they had some thoughts on immigration; they did so because they considered the issues carefully and many wanted to see the UK open to the world, continuing trading and looking at a different path. This is not the way they are sometimes painted and it shows why a second referendum—a politicians' vote—is for the birds. Could we imagine any of us on the doorstep saying, "Next Thursday is your chance to decide the outcome. It is your chance to decide whether we leave or remain"? When they then say, "Didn't you ask us to do that three years ago", we would say, "Yes, but this time it really counts." That is nonsense, as is the idea of extending article 50. I do not see what people think that would achieve, aside from kicking the can down the road for another couple of months. If people think article 50 should be revoked and we should stay, they could at least coherently argue that. I passionately disagree with them on that, as it would be a mistake, it would be going back into the EU and it would make us look like fools. As my hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden (Mrs Badenoch) pointed out, if we cannot leave, no one else can, and it would make our future negotiations look daft.

In deciding how to vote on this, I have, as Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, had the chance to speak to him at some length about it. He has been clear that whatever outcome we argue for, be it Norway-plus, Canada or any other of the future relationships, there needs to be a withdrawal agreement. There are going to be three parts to any agreement; one on citizens' rights, one on money and a third on guarantees about the Northern Ireland border—this is known as the backstop. Few of us in this Chamber would argue about the issues on citizens' rights. We have a responsibility for our citizens who live in the EU, and, having a system in which the EU enforces their rights is where we need to be. Relying on 27 individual Governments is not a practical place to be. I would have every confidence in some countries honouring their obligations, but not all. The money aspect is something we would probably need to tolerate, as to get any agreement we would need to look at our existing obligations, but with this deal we would at least not be making large contributions in the future.

That brings me on to the backstop, which, as a Unionist, I find difficult; I do not see Northern Ireland as a third country. I have read with interest the opinions of people such as my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Michael Tomlinson) and my hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Robert Courts), whom I see in his place. The balance here is about what the likely alternative is if we do not go down the path of this deal. I have some sympathy with one amendment

on approving anything other than the deal, but, as I saw on Tuesday, there are those looking to use their arguments against this deal not in the hope of a no-deal Brexit, which the UK could survive and manage, putting policies in place to keep our economy going and revitalise it—some Opposition Members would probably then be too busy trying to shoot those down to make that work—but in respect of what would be the actual outcome in this Parliament. That would probably end up being that people would be hoping for no Brexit. Some are open about that, and I respect it when they are, but others are not. So if I want to see us do things such as implement the referendum result, look to accede to the comprehensive and progressive agreement for a trans-Pacific partnership, and at least have the chance of getting a comprehensive trade deal with the US as an independent nation, this deal, in some form needs to go through.

2.9 pm

**Emily Thornberry** (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): This has been an excellent debate to listen to, even though I have the most astonishing feeling of *déjà vu* about it. Perhaps it is the flu I have been suffering all week, or the massive doses of Lemsip or Berocca I took this morning, but I do feel as though we have been through all this before about five weeks ago and absolutely nothing seems to have changed.

Nevertheless, I am glad to be here and I am delighted to see the Foreign Secretary in his place for the first time this year, safely returned from his recess travels and basking in the success of his new vision for post-Brexit Britain, which he unveiled in Singapore, namely that we are to become the "invisible chain" linking countries across the globe. It is a truly inspiring phrase, but colleagues may not realise that the inspiration has an unlikely source, because the phrase, "The Invisible Chain", first originated as the Spanish language title of the 1943 film, "Lassie Come Home". It is a beloved children's classic: the story of a desperate family who are down to their lowest ebb, with no answers to their problems, but whose fortunes are rescued at the last moment by the return of their beloved dog. Here is the truth: the Cabinet is not waiting for unicorns to come riding over the hill; it is just waiting for Lassie.

It is no wonder that the Foreign Secretary's vision of the invisible chain has been so enthusiastically embraced by his dog-loving Cabinet colleagues, including the Health Secretary, with his invisible Green Paper on social care; the Transport Secretary, with his invisible ferries and invisible traffic jams; and, of course, the Prime Minister running around Europe obtaining invisible concessions on Brexit.

That brings us to the crux of today's debate. Here we are, five weeks after we had the same debate, and so many Members on both sides of the House have pointed out that there is nothing in the withdrawal agreement in relation to home affairs and foreign policy, let alone any other subject, that is in any way different from what we discussed on 5 December.

Let me summarise those contributions that have made that point best. My right hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott), the shadow Home Secretary, demonstrated with absolute clarity that this deal jeopardises all the co-operation



with the European Union that we have come to rely on in the fields of justice, security and policing, and therefore we cannot accept it. My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing North (Stephen Pound) made it clear in his typically enjoyable speech that the issues of the Northern Ireland border remain totally unresolved. My hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray) made the vital point—I have no doubt that many Conservative Members agree with him—that it remains the case that the deal on the table delivers no control of our laws, no control of our borders, and no control of our money. In fact, it cedes control to Europe by giving us no say on those issues.

My hon. Friend the Member for Warwick and Leamington (Matt Western) made it clear that the lack of changes to the Prime Minister's deal means that the economic damage it would do to investment and jobs remains unaltered. That point was echoed by my hon. Friend the Member for Bermondsey and Old Southwark (Neil Coyle), who pointed out the major problems over recruitment and retention across multiple business sectors in his constituency that are reliant on migrant labour. We also heard a powerful and important contribution from my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Bristol West (Thangam Debbonaire) on the hopeless inadequacy of the Government's proposal to deliver a fair system for immigration.

My hon. Friends the Members for Cardiff Central (Jo Stevens), for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq) and for East Lothian (Martin Whitfield) made it clear that wherever people are in this country, and whichever of our nations they live in, our constituents overwhelmingly reject this hopeless deal. Yet, as my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) reminded us, it would be an even greater disaster for our country—from our factories to our universities—if we crash out without a deal.

All of those contributions, and the many others we have heard from colleagues, have laid bare the fact that nothing has been achieved during the five weeks of delay. Nothing has changed in terms of the withdrawal agreement, and nothing of substance or principle has been done to change the mind of any Member, with the possible exception of my hon. Friend the Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick)—[*Interruption.*] Just one Member changing their mind in five weeks is not necessarily a huge contribution; Conservative Members should not get too excited. It is still likely that the agreement will be voted down next week.

We have been told that there will be assurances from the European Union—no changes to the withdrawal agreement, no changes written into law, just a set of assurances. I hope we all remember the words of the Prime Minister's deputy, the Minister for the Cabinet Office, when he spoke from the Dispatch Box in 2015, as the then Minister for Europe, in relation to a similar situation, when David Cameron was supposed to be renegotiating Britain's membership of the European Union. He said that

“we will not ask the House to rely only on the words of Ministers from the Dispatch Box. We have made a commitment to introduce into the Bill changes that give expression to the assurances that we have given.”—[*Official Report*, 16 June 2015; Vol. 597, c. 234.]

This morning we heard the Foreign Secretary say the same thing:

“Theresa May has said she doesn't just want words. She wants something with legal force.”

Based on what he said this morning, and on the position the Government took four years ago, when David Cameron was renegotiating, does the Foreign Secretary accept that the assurances that the Prime Minister is obtaining from other European leaders will not be worth the paper on which they have hastily been written if they are not also written into law? If that is the case, will he confirm that, before next Tuesday, formal amendments will be made to the withdrawal agreement? If he does not accept that and accepts that this will not happen, the Conservative Back Benchers and the DUP will be quite within their rights to reject the withdrawal agreement, just as they planned to do in December, on the grounds that it will remain fatally flawed. However, I am afraid that the Foreign Secretary knows that there will not be legally binding changes to the withdrawal agreement over the next four days, so the only real question at issue is what will happen after next Tuesday once the Prime Minister's deal is rejected. As ever, the Foreign Secretary has given us a multitude of answers on this subject. The problem is that he gives us a different answer depending on what audience he is speaking to. Speaking to the *Sunday Telegraph* before Christmas, he said that if we had to leave without a deal, Britain would “flourish and prosper” in that scenario, but he then told reporters in Singapore that the disruption caused by a no-deal outcome is

“not something that any Government should willingly wish on its people.”

This week, at Cabinet, when the Work and Pensions Secretary said that history would take a “dim view” of a Cabinet that allowed Britain to leave without a deal and the Justice Secretary said that they would need an alternative plan instead, the Foreign Secretary went back to insisting that no deal was the preferred option. And yet here we are three days later with the Foreign Secretary on the “Today” programme saying that no deal will not happen and that the most likely scenario after Tuesday is that Brexit will not happen at all. I ask the Foreign Secretary to give us some clarity today not on what he expects to happen after Tuesday when the Prime Minister's deal is voted down, but on what he believes should happen after that point. In particular, on the most vital issue of all, can he make it clear whether he is prepared to countenance this country leaving the European Union on 31 March without a deal?

**The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Jeremy Hunt):** Let me give the right hon. Lady that clarity, because what I have said has always been completely consistent. I do not want us to leave without a deal—there would be a lot of disruption if we did—but if we were in that situation, I believe that, in the end, this country is strong enough to find a way to flourish and prosper.

**Emily Thornberry:** The trouble is that that does not seem to be what the Foreign Secretary said on the radio this morning. I am just holding him to account. He cannot go round telling all sorts of different people different things and not expect us to be listening. We are listening. We are the Opposition and we will hold you to account and you need to be consistent because you are in government and you are supposed to be in a leadership position. That is the point, and that is the point of this debate. As I say, to give all these accounts and to try to

[Emily Thornberry]

be consistent is what we wish him to do. Should he also not accept this? He said, as I understand it, back in 2016, that we need to negotiate a deal and put it to the British people either in a referendum or through a fresh general election, and he said that

“we will trust the British people to decide on whether or not it is a good deal”.

If he thought that that was the right course of action to pursue in the event of securing a deal, surely the Foreign Secretary accepts that that is the only course of action to pursue if there is no deal at all.

**Mr Hunt:** And we have had that general election, and 80% of voters supported parties that wanted to leave the EU and the single market. As she has mentioned consistency, will she give a straight yes or no answer: does Labour, or does Labour not, want to end free movement?”

**Emily Thornberry:** When we leave the European Union, free movement will end. It is our policy that there should be fair rules and managed migration. We believe that immigration should look after our economy and should look after our communities. That is the answer; it is a full answer, and it has been consistent. If the right hon. Gentleman would like to listen to what the Labour party has said with the consistency with which we will be listening to what he says, he will find that we are consistent and that our policy is clear. Unless he has any other questions on Labour’s policy, I propose to sit down.

**Mr Speaker:** Has the shadow Secretary of State completed her oration?

**Emily Thornberry:** Yes, I have.

2.19 pm

**The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Jeremy Hunt):** What excellent timing, Mr Speaker, because the right hon. Lady has just said—I think—that Labour does want to end free movement, without then explaining how it will deliver frictionless trade with no more barriers than we currently have, which is Labour’s policy, even though she knows the European Union will never accept that. I do not think we will take any lessons on consistency from the Opposition.

We have had an excellent debate today and I commend all hon. Members who have spoken. It is a shame that the shadow Home Secretary is not in her place for the end of the debate. I thank the right hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry) for her reference to one of my favourite childhood films, “Lassie Come Home”. Of course in that story, Lassie was given to a member of the aristocracy, the Duke of Rudling, but Lassie was not happy and she broke free, without any kind of referendum, and came home. There is a lesson for all of us.

Today’s debate has focused on immigration and the central point, made so eloquently by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, is that leaving the EU allows the Government, for the first time in almost 40 years, to respond to public concern by restoring sovereign control over immigration policy. Part of that,

of course, will be to be generous to EU citizens who live among us and contribute so magnificently to our national life.

If the shadow Home Secretary had been here, I would have reassured her, as I do the hon. Members for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq) and for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran) and others who raised the rights of EU citizens in this country. Part two of the withdrawal agreement describes how EU citizens currently living in the UK will enjoy broadly the same rights after we leave. Indeed, if we leave without a deal, the Government have made it clear that our position will be the same. While the shadow Home Secretary was correct to remind us that we are talking about the lives of real people—our friends, colleagues and neighbours—I respectfully suggest that it does not help to say that there is any doubt whatsoever about the status of EU citizens, when in fact there is no doubt. The hon. Member for South Shields (Mrs Lewell-Buck) spoke passionately about the effect of uncontrolled migration on her constituency and how it risked dividing communities. She, along with many Government Members, will therefore understand the significance of restoring parliamentary sovereignty.

We have not talked just about migration today. I commend my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex (Sir Nicholas Soames), my hon. Friend the Member for Harwich and North Essex (Sir Bernard Jenkin), my right hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois) and my hon. Friends the Members for Romford (Andrew Rosindell), for Rochford and Southend East (James Duddridge), for Southend West (Sir David Amess), for Bosworth (David Tredinnick) and for Mole Valley (Sir Paul Beresford) for emphasising the obligation that falls on all of us to honour the referendum decision. Although I did not hear all those speeches, one of the most powerful contributions came from my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch and Upminster (Julia Lopez), who said that if we do not deliver Brexit, it will confirm people’s deepest fears about the conceit of the political class.

To her credit, when the shadow Home Secretary was here, she was clear that we have to honour the referendum vote. What the Government say to Opposition Members is, “If you really do want to honour the vote, stop playing parliamentary games and remember that leave-voting Labour voters will never forgive the Labour party if it uses parliamentary procedures in a way that ends up stopping Brexit.”

I say to the hon. Members for Ealing Central and Acton and for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) and others who called for a second referendum that they risk doing profound damage to the integrity of our political system. It cannot be right to ask the British people to vote again in the hope of producing a different result. They should listen to the wise words of my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Michael Tomlinson), who talked about the breach of trust there would be between politicians and the people who gave them their jobs if we failed to honour the referendum result.

**Jo Stevens:** The Foreign Secretary has spoken about trust and validity. Does he accept that, as I said in my speech, the illegality during the referendum has already caused mistrust? People doubt the validity of the outcome

of the referendum because of the things that went on, which have been found by our regulators, the Information Commissioner and the Electoral Commission.

**Mr Hunt:** This is a matter for the Electoral Commission, but exaggerated claims were made on both sides of that debate, as indeed—I think this is fair to say—they are generally made on both sides in general election campaigns. However, people listened to those claims on both sides, and they came to a democratic decision, and that is the foundation of trust in our country between politicians and the people who give them their jobs.

**Luciana Berger:** Further to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff Central (Jo Stevens), does the Foreign Secretary accept that many points of evidence and facts have come to light that were not available at the time? In 2016, the referendum was on the principle of our leaving; now we know exactly what it looks like in practice. On the basis of what we now know and from listening to what our constituents and the country want—we only have to look at the polling, which is being done almost daily, to know that this country has moved—they now, seeing the reality of it, actually want to have a final say on the Government's exact deal, rather than on the principle, as back in 2016.

**Mr Hunt:** I gently say to the hon. Lady that last year we had a general election in which both parties set out what they thought the shape of the Brexit deal should be, and over 80% of voters voted for parties that wanted to leave the EU and leave the single market.

The task before us is to recast our relationship with our nearest neighbours while preserving the bonds of friendship that all of us in this House prize so highly. We need to go about that task with every confidence in our strengths as a nation, as my hon. Friend the Member for Harwich and North Essex rightly reminded us. My right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex brought home the momentous importance of this task, reminding us, with the sense of history we admire so much, that this is one of the most important decisions the House has taken since the war. As he powerfully said, the moment has come for all Members to come together in the national interest.

On defence and security, my hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Anne-Marie Trevelyan) spoke with passion and eloquence—partly in French—*et je voudrais dire à mon amie, “Ne t’inquiète pas”*. Contrary to Sir Richard Dearlove and Lord Guthrie, that means, “Don't worry”, because there will be absolutely no impact whatsoever from the withdrawal agreement on our relationship with NATO, our intelligence partnership with the United States or, indeed, our membership of the “Five Eyes”.

**Anne-Marie Trevelyan:** Perhaps my right hon. Friend and I will continue in English for everyone else's pleasure. My concern is not what is in the Dearlove and Guthrie letter, but my assessment of the combination of the political declaration and parts of the withdrawal agreement which, put together, give me—in my own simple understanding—real concerns about the future risk. I would be very grateful if he would sit down with me and look through them in detail because they are genuine concerns. They do not come from anyone else; they are my own assessment.

**Mr Hunt:** I would of course be absolutely delighted to do so.

**Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con):** I was concerned to read in the draft withdrawal agreement the phrase that there will be increased intelligence co-operation. I asked the Prime Minister about this on 10 December, and she said there is no problem with the “Five Eyes” agreement—none whatsoever.

**Mr Hunt:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I want to reassure everyone in this House that it is a paramount negotiating objective for the Government to make sure that we maintain an independent foreign and security policy. It always has been, incidentally, and it always will be.

The hon. Member for Glenrothes (Peter Grant) was right to warn about the dangers of xenophobia and small-minded isolationism. No one in this House would think in those terms. However, he is totally wrong, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Luke Graham) said, to suggest that the view of Conservative Members in any way reflects that approach. I can tell the hon. Gentleman that, within the framework of the new immigration policy, there will be no cap on the number of skilled workers who can enter the UK.

The hon. Members for Liverpool, Wavertree and for Oxford West and Abingdon spoke about the impact of leaving the EU on our universities. I can reassure them that the new immigration policy means there will be no limit on the number of international students who can study in our universities. This is very important because our international reputation benefits immensely from the excellence of our universities. We are coming to a close, but one group whose rights we have not talked about is the nearly 1 million Brits living in Europe. The withdrawal agreement protects their rights as well.

In conclusion, as time is marching on and the weekend approaches, we are now in the final stages of leaving a supranational organisation that has been central to our national life for 46 years. We all have deeply held opinions on this issue, but the voters who sent us here are looking for hon. Members to reach consensus on the way ahead. Britain's friends across the world—the Governments I deal with every day—hope and expect that we will leave the EU in an orderly way and emerge as a reinvigorated ally on the international stage. Let us rise to the moment, meet those expectations and show that whatever our views may be—leaver or remainer—we are democrats, and proud to be in one of the oldest democracies in the world, where we do what the people tell us.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The right hon. Gentleman has talked the matter into the buffers.

2.30 pm

*The debate stood adjourned (Standing Order No. 11(2))*

*Debate to be resumed on Monday 14 January (Order, 9 January).*

**Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab):** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Quite a few speakers in this debate referred to the toxic climate outside this place as a result of the entire Brexit issue, so I just wanted to seek your advice on a related matter. The brain injury



[*Dr Rupa Huq*]

charity Rehab holds an annual and very popular MPs versus journalists pancake race, in which the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins), and I both participated last year. However, the event has been pulled this year over worries that the climate outside is so horrible that it is not worth running it; apparently Shrove Tuesday is very near exit day and the charity does not think it is worth the risk. I wonder whether you might know which parliamentary authority to raise this case with. Could we have some reassurance that it is still possible for the event to go ahead, because the event raises money for a great charity?

**Mr Speaker:** Clearly it is a magnificent cause, and I am very sorry to hear news of the postponement or cancellation, and the rationale for that decision. I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her point of order because it gives me an opportunity to say a very small number of words on the subject of security. She was very likely present in the Chamber earlier in the week when very grave concerns were aired about aggressive, threatening and intimidating behaviour towards Members and journalists. In response to points of order on that matter, I hope I gave sympathetic and understanding responses. More particularly, I committed to inquire further into the matter and to make appropriate representations.

On top of the letter sent to the Metropolitan Police Commissioner by well in excess of 150 colleagues, as I subsequently advised the House, I myself wrote to the commissioner in explicit terms underlining the extent and intensity of concern felt in this place about the threat to security. Further to that letter to the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, I must tell the House that in Speaker's House yesterday morning I hosted, with the Lord Speaker, a meeting with Commissioner Cressida Dick and her colleagues for members of the Commissions of both Houses and the consultative panel on parliamentary security. In the course of that constructive engagement, the police communicated plans for increased security in the period ahead, which they trust and we very much hope will enable Members, journalists and members of the public to go about their business unimpeded by aggressive, threatening or intimidating demonstrators.

In that context and flowing from that meeting, a detailed letter has today gone to all colleagues from Eric Hepburn, the director of security for Parliament, and Jane Johnson, the Chief Superintendent of the Metropolitan police based here, together with a short covering letter from me. I hope that is of interest and potentially of reassurance to colleagues. I am looking in particular in the direction of the right hon. Member for Mid Sussex (Sir Nicholas Soames), who very eloquently raised his concerns, together with other colleagues, on the matter earlier in the week. I hope that its relevance to the event to which the hon. Lady has referred is obvious. That event is some distance in the future and the question of whether it goes ahead is not a matter for the Chair, but I very much hope that, as a result of the increased security that is now to be set in train, people organising events within the precincts of the Palace of Westminster, adjacent to it or in close proximity to it, will feel confident and comfortable that they can safely proceed with their plans. I hope that is helpful to the hon. Lady.

## Oxford to Cambridge Expressway

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—(*Wendy Morton.*)

2.34 pm

**Layla Moran** (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): I am grateful to the House for allowing me to raise the important issue of the Oxford to Cambridge expressway, which is of grave concern to my constituents. I would like to start by giving my sincere thanks to the Minister for his commitment to engage both with me and my constituents. He very graciously accepted my invitation to visit Botley to see for himself how our community would be affected. I am very grateful, and so are they. I hope he sees today as an extension of that visit by putting what was said in our private meeting on the record and into the public domain.

In September, the Government announced their preferred corridor for the Oxford to Cambridge expressway. That corridor covers many different potential routes, every one of which would have a significant impact on my constituents. The level and tone of the responses I have received highlights the importance of meaningful consultation at every stage. Failure to do so, I am sorry to say, has already raised people's suspicions and elicited some strong opposition to the proposals. For example, Lucy, who lives in Botley, sums up the feelings of many when she says:

"I am concerned that there has so far been no"

official

"public consultation. I feel residents only have part of the story so far, and this is very worrying."

Residents have had no say on this proposal overall, as to whether they agree with the stated objectives of the scheme, whether they believe it is an effective way to achieve those objectives, or whether there are more effective ways to spend taxpayers' money. Many have told me that the case for this scheme is simply not strong enough, and that there are other objectives that should be met. Indeed, many have pointed out that there are different objectives within different parts of Government that are contradictory. The scheme, which is proposed by Highways England, is based on the need for a more rapid route for freight lorries to travel between southern and western ports and eastern and northern destinations. At the same time, the National Infrastructure Commission argues that the road is there to help build a million more homes. Yet several residents point out that surely the massive level of commuter traffic that would also be coming on to the road would get in the way of the freight lorry movements, and vice versa. How these aspects are being joined up is, as yet, unclear. Roland and Jackie express the common feeling that the last thing Oxfordshire needs is more traffic when they say:

"This expressway is not needed. Oxford is full. It cannot take any more traffic. Long traffic jams are a regular way of life for us all. The prospect of beautiful South Oxfordshire being massacred by this vanity project is heart breaking."

It is very unclear what the knock-on effect of the traffic generated by the expressway will be. Every single one of these routes will, in turn, affect different parts of the community. I would now like to focus on that.

**John Howell** (Henley) (Con): I hear what the hon. Lady is saying on this matter. I would like to pay some tribute to the Liberal Democrats, because this project started life in 2015 in a Department for Transport paper that was signed off by Baroness Kramer and Norman Baker, as well as Conservative Ministers. But does she accept the point of view of the Labour council in Oxford that this is a way of reducing the traffic that goes round Oxford?

**Layla Moran:** I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's intervention. I will deal with that point later, but no, I do not.

If the expressway is routed round the north of Oxford, there is likely to be a negative effect on the already heavily congested road network around Kidlington, Yarnton and Begbroke. Some investment is already planned to try to improve congestion on the A40, as was mentioned earlier this week, but probably not enough to cope with the existing problem, let alone the additional housing developments already planned. As far as I am aware, the potential impact of the expressway has not yet been looked at in relation to that.

The route will also run close to several important ecological sites. My constituent Judy, who lives in Kidlington and is an ecological consultant and wildlife expert, says:

"I have studied and loved the wildlife areas in the path of the Expressway, especially Cothill Fen, Wytham Woods and Oxford Meadows for many years. All these wildlife areas of national and international importance are potentially at risk of damage from the Expressway. Either by direct damage"—

which is obvious—

"or by damaging effects of air pollution from increased traffic or things like hydrology change, noise or light pollution. These areas are our irreplaceable natural heritage and need to be preserved intact for future generations."

It is worth noting that Wytham Woods is one of the most studied woodland areas in the world.

If the expressway utilises the A34 west of Oxford, that is likely to lead to homes being demolished, a worsening of the already poor air quality around Botley, and impact on the Commonwealth war graves that are close to local schools—the Minister knows that well, because we had a walkabout and he saw it for himself. The expressway will also—indeed, it already does—impact on house prices. While shopping at the butchers recently, I met a gentleman who was concerned that the spectre of the expressway was having a negative effect on his ability to sell his house, and he desperately wanted to move. In our meeting, the Minister and Highways England seemed sympathetic to those arguments, not least because demolishing so many houses in an area that needs more houses, not fewer, seems nonsensical, and would be extremely expensive.

**Robert Courts** (Witney) (Con): The hon. Lady mentions environmental factors, which I agree are important. Does she agree that the impact on the environment could be minimised and mitigated if we use existing roads, and upgrade and utilise existing sections, rather than routes that involve virgin grassland?

**Layla Moran:** I do not rule out the use of existing roads, but where the proposed route would impact on a community as directly as it would in Botley, it should be ruled out. Again I ask the Minister to do that today,

because that particular section is horrific, and if we do not rule it out, the wider impacts felt not only there but in other nearby communities could be massive. Sophie from Abingdon contacted me on that point. She strongly opposes the plan because of air pollution in the Wootton area. Jane from Botley repeats concerns about what will happen to schools and says:

"I regularly walk on Westminster Way which runs parallel to the A34 and frequently find the fumes so strong that I have to cover my face and change my route."

As an asthmatic she sometimes finds that she cannot even walk near the A34 as it is now.

Villages, including South Hinksey and Wytham, currently have direct access to the A34, and residents in those communities are worried about what will happen to that access. South Hinksey is already dealing with the start of the Oxford flood alleviation scheme, which will cause chaos to access to the village. The expressway could be an even bigger scheme, and I wonder whether that has been taken into account.

On the final option, if the expressway is routed to the south of Oxford it will have to go through the green belt, bringing a large amount of additional traffic to an already congested Oxford ring road and the A34 south of Oxford. That stretch of the A34 is already at capacity and has regular gridlocks. Any incident on the A34, however minor, leads to a rapid build-up of traffic, and long tailbacks result in commuters using local towns and villages as rat runs just to get out. We should not make that problem worse in the long run by including an expressway.

I would love the Department to focus on delivering the long-awaited A34 safety review, and I would be extraordinarily grateful for an update on that project, which has been promised for months. I also believe that long-promised and overdue investment in upgrading the Lodge Hill junction must be finished before we can assess how to handle extra traffic on the A34. Will the Minister keep pushing the county council to press on with that project, because there have been yet more delays?

It is not clear whether dealing with the many potential impacts of the expressway has been fully costed, or whether those impacts will be left as problems for local communities to sort out after it has been completed. Many of my constituents argue that the value-for-money and environmental impact of the expressway scheme as a whole should be tested actively against other options. Sophie, again, said:

"I would like to see a plan to reduce congestion in the area, as I feel it is at an all-time high. I would like to see this plan focus on public transport improvements, particularly rail transport and cycle infrastructure."

We know that that is happening to an extent, but it could be so much more if we reinvested that money.

As we know, the expressway follows a route similar to east-west rail. However, as plans for the expressway have been worked up, the plans for east-west rail have been downgraded. In particular, plans for electrification have been dropped. A growing list of other rail schemes in and linking to Oxfordshire have been delayed or not delivered—the electrification of the line between Didcot and Oxford has been delayed; Oxford commuters look with envy at the quieter, more comfortable trains serving

[Layla Moran]

Didcot and Reading; and plans for the expansion of the very overcrowded Oxford station have taken years to make progress.

With the right approach, not only could the capacity and quality of rail travel be improved, but much better facilities could be provided for cyclists, as has already happened in Cambridge. Other rail projects, which would cost much less than the expressway, include reopening the station at Grove, on which there is cross-party endeavour; introducing passenger trains through to Cowley; and upgrading facilities at Radley and Culham. All those projects could tie in better with the local cycling network. I am grateful to the Minister for debating with me in the House on a previous occasion the recent report by Andrew Gilligan, which sets out a clear and coherent strategy for investment that could transform Oxford and surrounding communities by making them cycle-friendly. All those things together would cost a tiny fraction of the expressway.

Crucially, there is a huge amount of peer-reviewed evidence showing that when Governments choose to invest money in additional road capacity, although in the short term there may well be an alleviation effect, the long-term impact is more traffic, more pollution and higher carbon dioxide emissions, at a time when we should be bearing down on all those things. However, when Governments choose to invest in public transport, the result is the opposite. At the very least, the Government should have given equal consideration to all the other approaches first before making this decision. If they are looking to achieve the best long-term value for taxpayers' money and are committed to switching from the car to other forms of transport, this is their chance.

In conclusion, I share my residents' deep concern that this Conservative Government are forcing an expressway on our area without fully consulting people about their premise. I am sorry to say that, to add insult to injury, Conservative MPs in Oxfordshire have lobbied the Minister to use the existing road, and I am concerned that that includes Botley. I would love clarification that that was not part of the lobbying effort and that Members did not ask for Botley to be bulldozed. If that were the case, I would let the Minister know, and, as I am sure he is aware, I will not let that or any other part of the scheme drop.

2.47 pm

**The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Jesse Norman):** I am grateful to the hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran) for ending a long week with a little digestif on a topic we have discussed in different ways over a considerable period. I congratulate her on securing the debate, which is the latest in a sequence of public discussions we have had about rail and road links, and other forms of transport, in Oxfordshire.

As the hon. Lady kindly acknowledged, I know from my visit to her constituency last year that there is very strong interest in the proposals for this road, and particularly in what they may mean for Botley. I thought her speech was going terribly well until she introduced a rather unnecessary party political note at the end. The fact is that I get lobbied by Members of Parliament from around Oxfordshire of every political stamp, and she is

quite prominent among them. She should be grateful for that, and delighted. As my hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell) mentioned, this project originated in proposals by the coalition Government, which had Liberal Democrat support. We do not know quite where the Labour party is on the issue, but I have no doubt that, if it reflects on the project, it will see that it is of national as well as local significance.

I will of course turn to the hon. Lady's questions about route design, but it is important to be clear about the wider issue of why the Government believe it is important to fill the "missing link", as it has been called, between the M40 at Oxford and the M1 at Milton Keynes and to develop other road enhancements around Oxford. The arc between Oxford and Cambridge is a nationally—conceivably even globally—significant project. Two of the region's universities are ranked in the global top four, and it is internationally competitive in attracting investment in a whole range of areas of science and technology. It has key industry concentrations in areas such as IT, life sciences, automotive engineering and professional services. We believe that, with the right package of interventions and investment, there is a further transformational opportunity to amplify the position of the arc, the cities that it links and the space in between as a world-leading academic and industrial powerhouse.

It must, however, be acknowledged that, statistically, Oxford and Cambridge are two of the least affordable places to live in the UK, with house prices double the national average. The hon. Lady was coy about whether she wanted house prices to go up or down, and it would have been interesting to know which it was. If they go up, that will benefit her constituents who own houses, but if she wants them to go down, she shares the Government's view that more housing would be a good idea, and that steers her in the direction of the housing associated with this project and with east-west rail.

According to analysis by the National Infrastructure Commission, a shortage of housing presents a fundamental risk to the continued success of the area—and, of course, there is a wider shortage in the country. The commission estimates that taking action in the area could unlock more than 1 million new jobs and increase economic output by £163 billion a year. Those are enormous and, as I have said, potentially transformational numbers. Let me put the scale of that growth in context: £163 billion is roughly equivalent to an economy the size of Scotland's. Even without such transformational growth, traffic growth of up to 40% by 2035 is forecast in the region and threatens to seize up the existing road infrastructure. The hon. Lady was right to raise traffic concerns—I absolutely agree with her about that—but separating strategic from local traffic, which is one of the goals of this project, may help to ease the congestion.

The Government are taking action through a commitment to investment in two infrastructure projects which will, we hope, transform the ability of local people and businesses to get about. Our investment in both east-west rail and the Oxford-Cambridge expressway will unlock economic growth and new housing. In particular, the expressway is expected to reduce journey times between Oxford and Cambridge by up to 40 minutes. Some have argued that we should build only one of those routes, but the Government disagree. Both road



and rail have important roles to play, and they have different uses. They provide choice for users and competition, and they avoid overcrowding on unimproved networks.

As the hon. Lady said, some have also argued that we should redirect our investment to other parts of England to support economic growth, jobs and housing elsewhere. As she will know, no Government have taken that priority more seriously than this one. That is why we are investing in road, rail, active transport and other transport modes to support the goal of national and, indeed, rebalanced economic growth at rates not seen for a generation.

At the time when we announced that we would back the expressway, we also announced the dualling of the A66 across the Pennines and our commitment to improving the M60 around Manchester. Those are both very significant projects.

**Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con):** I apologise for having missed the first few minutes of the debate.

Although Wycombe is not affected by this route, other parts of Buckinghamshire including Milton Keynes will be, as will my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Government who live along it. My hon. Friend has talked of transformational growth, and of both economic and housing growth. Can he reassure me that he will consult Members of Parliament who are currently in the Government—or, indeed, in the Chair—about their views on the project, and will ensure that our new unitary authority is fully involved as it develops?

**Jesse Norman:** As you and other colleagues will know, Mr Speaker, it is terribly important to be aware that no road can be built without consultation, and the scale of this road requires a consultation of commensurate scale and depth. A great deal of informal consultation has already been undertaken by Highways England and by the Government, and we expect it to continue.

As the House will be aware, we have been making substantial investments across the country. We have invested in dual carriageway links between Basingstoke and Taunton on the A303 and on the A30 through Cornwall, and in the motorway route between Newcastle and London.

Let me now turn to the question of the route for the expressway and its design. Last September the Government announced the preferred corridor for the expressway, central corridor B, with options to pass east or west—or, as one might see it, north or south—of Oxford. The preferred corridor was chosen following extensive engagement with local authorities, MPs and interested parties including local environmental groups. It broadly aligns with east-west rail, making it easier for people to choose between different modes of transport, improving competitiveness between the two modes and reducing car dependency for existing and new communities.

It is important for the House to be aware that we have not ruled out any options at this stage. That is a preferred route. We do not make prejudgments about decisions as to the extent to which existing roads are upgraded versus new routes constructed. We have not prejudged any decisions about the number of lanes, junctions, or other features of the road.

**Layla Moran:** If this a preferred route, does that mean the ruling out of Otmoor is not absolute, or is it?

**Jesse Norman:** As I have said, we have not made prejudgments. Our strong preference is not to cross Otmoor. We have therefore selected options that do not do that; we have given that very clear signal. But it is important to say that we are still at a relatively early stage of the process, and our preferred routes are just that, and are subject to further discussion, consultation and review. The Government and Highways England need to do serious further analytical work to develop, design and route options that are workable for communities and the environment, that facilitate freight movements, and that ease people's travel for work and leisure.

As has been mentioned, there are considerable constraints of many different kinds in relation to Oxford, and those are part of the wider process of evaluation. I recognise that this will be particularly important for the hon. Lady's constituents in Botley, as it is for those of other colleagues in the region who are affected both directly and indirectly. Their concerns expressed to her about the possibility of widening the A34 and the potential impacts on safety and emissions were made very clear to me when I visited the area—and walked around it, as the hon. Lady said—as they have been again today by her.

Local feedback is an important part of this process and has already influenced it. As has been said, the preferred corridor avoids Otmoor precisely because it has been widely recognised as an area of particular environmental significance. The Government wish to develop the scheme overall in a way that is sensitive to the natural, built and historic environment, and all those factors will be in play. Those considerations have played a central role in selecting the preferred corridor so far, and a full environmental assessment will be undertaken as part of the route development. More widely, the Department will continue to listen to interested parties of every stamp and from every quarter of the compass as it develops route options for public consultation later this year.

There will be a full consultation on route options to help shape the design so that it meets the needs of local people and businesses and the country as a whole. Indeed, the Department has commissioned England's Economic Heartland, the sub-national transport body that comprises local council leaders across the region, to undertake a connectivity study in parallel with the work we are doing. That study will look at how the expressway can deliver wide-ranging benefits to parts of the country outside the immediate vicinity of the corridor and will go some way towards addressing the question raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker).

All this design and analytical work will lead to a public consultation on possible routes later this year, when people will be able to have their say on route options, as well as the overarching case for the scheme. A further public consultation will be held on the design of the preferred route.

The expressway is due for delivery in 2030. By that time much work will have been undertaken on Oxfordshire's transport infrastructure. The hon. Lady touched on some of that. East-west rail will be one of the country's most strategically important rail projects, reinstating a

[*Jesse Norman*]

rail link between Oxford and Cambridge. The Government reconfirmed our commitment to that project at the autumn Budget, and it is on schedule for delivery by the mid-2020s. Highways England is developing a series of safety enhancement projects for the A34; the hon. Lady asked about that. The work is currently at feasibility stage and interactions with the different expressway route options are being assessed. On the A34 Lodge Hill interchange improvements, Oxfordshire County Council is leading discussions with Highways England and the Government to develop a suitable scheme that meets local needs.

We of course recognise the importance of walking and cycling. I do so at least as much as any Member of Parliament, as I cycle to and from this building every day of the working week. We note the recommendations of the Gilligan review, which the hon. Lady and I have

discussed. Local authorities can channel investment for cycling and walking from local funds and from the relevant national funding streams, of which there have been a plethora of late, including the local growth fund, the future high streets fund announced in the last Budget and the housing infrastructure fund that will come in later this year. There are also the Highways England designated funds in this road investment strategy and in the next period, and the clean air fund.

I conclude by assuring Members of this House that there will be ample opportunity for them and their constituents to express their views and to shape decisions about the expressway in a way that preserves and safeguards value for future generations.

*Question put and agreed to.*

3 pm

*House adjourned.*

# House of Commons

Monday 14 January 2019

*The House met at half-past Two o'clock*

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## Oral Answers to Questions

### DEFENCE

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### Vanguard-class Life Extension Programme

1. **Mr Kevan Jones** (North Durham) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the financial sustainability of the Vanguard-class life extension programme.

[908521]

#### **The Secretary of State for Defence (Gavin Williamson):**

The Vanguard-class life extension and availability sustainment programmes are essential to maintaining the United Kingdom's continuous at-sea deterrence and are prioritised accordingly. The programmes are managed using established Ministry of Defence processes and, as such, are routinely reviewed.

**Mr Jones:** April this year marks the 50th anniversary of continuous at-sea deterrence, and I pay tribute to the men and women of the submarine service for their dedication over those 50 years. Given the reported delays in the refurbishment programme of the Vanguard class, can the Secretary of State assure the House that CASD will be maintained into the future?

**Gavin Williamson:** The right hon. Gentleman is right to pay tribute to the men and women, both past and present, who have done so much to maintain that at-sea nuclear deterrence. I can give him an absolute assurance that the investment and resources that are needed are being made available to maintain this important deterrence, which has always had a lot of cross-party support.

**Sir Nicholas Soames** (Mid Sussex) (Con): When my right hon. Friend considers the financial sustainability of the Vanguard programme, does he also consider the question of the nuclear doctrine? When was it last revised and on what basis would he reconsider revising it?

**Gavin Williamson:** This is something that has to be continuously revised and looked at not just by our Department, but right across the Government, and that is always ongoing.

**Stewart Malcolm McDonald** (Glasgow South) (SNP): As the doyenne of British nuclear history, Lord Hennessy, observed recently, the current Vanguard life extension plans are a

“technological leap in the dark”,

which also means there is little room for flexibility in the overhaul and procurement cycle if CASD is to be maintained with two submarines in 2033-34. What discussions has the Secretary of State had in his Department about contingencies around the Vanguard-to-Dreadnought transition, which we know were discussed during the previous transition to Vanguard?

**Gavin Williamson:** We constantly have discussions right across Government to make sure that our continuous at-sea nuclear deterrence can be sustained. We have been investing in technology and parts to make sure that the Vanguard class has everything it needs in the future. But what is critical is the investment we are making: we announced earlier this year an additional £400 million of investment in the Dreadnought class to make sure that is delivered on time and to budget.

**Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** But I am afraid to say that, as the misery of the modernising defence programme has shown all of us, the Secretary of State's Department has much less latitude with large projects than he would like. With the nuclear project sucking up money, as he has just mentioned, from all other lines of spending, how long will it be before this overpriced nuclear weapons programme gets within sight of the Chief Secretary to the Treasury's white elephant hunt across the Government?

**Gavin Williamson:** When I look around this Chamber, I see many Members on both sides of the House who are absolute supporters of the importance of the continuous at-sea nuclear deterrent and understand how vital it is to keeping Britain safe. That unites both the main parties, and will continue to do so in the long term when we deliver Dreadnought.

**Anne-Marie Trevelyan** (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con): Does the Secretary of State agree that Vanguard—and indeed Dreadnought, the next generation of our CASD programme—is probably the best weapon for peace the world has ever had? Will he update the House on plans to celebrate CASD's 50th anniversary, which will be my birthday, too—we are almost twins?

**Gavin Williamson:** I cannot imagine either CASD or my hon. Friend reaching 50, and I think we should put my hon. Friend on one of the submarines as part of that celebration. The anniversary shows that our nuclear deterrent has kept Britain, and also our NATO partners, safe over 50 years.

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Before we proceed, I feel sure that colleagues throughout the House will wish to join me in extending this afternoon a very warm welcome to the Speaker of the Malaysian Parliament, Mohamad Ariff, whom I had the privilege of welcoming to the Speaker's briefing meeting this morning—welcome to you, Sir, and to your colleagues—and a similarly warm and effusive welcome to the Speaker of the Australian



House of Representatives, the right hon. Tony Smith. Sir, you are welcome; thank you for joining us and we wish you well in your important work.

### Illegal Drone Use: Airports

2. **Henry Smith** (Crawley) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to support civilian authorities to tackle illegal drone use at and around UK airports. [908522]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Stuart Andrew)**: The Ministry of Defence rapidly deployed counter-unmanned air systems capability in support of Sussex police and the Metropolitan police, both at Gatwick and at Heathrow. We are working with colleagues in the Department for Transport and across the Government, and will continue to do so.

**Henry Smith**: I would like to convey the sincere thanks of the Gatwick management to the Ministry of Defence for its swift action last month during the drone incursion, and I can confirm that they have now bought a very similar system for future use. May I have an assurance that the MOD remains on standby to assist civilian airfields in these situations?

**Stuart Andrew**: I join my hon. Friend in thanking the RAF for its work. It worked incredibly quickly to get to both Gatwick and Heathrow. Of course, our armed forces are always ready to respond, should they need to, but it should be said that responsibility for drone activity at civilian airports lies with the airport operators.

**John Spellar** (Warley) (Lab): I have today received a parliamentary answer revealing that no Transport Minister visited Gatwick during the drone crisis. Can the hon. Gentleman tell us what contingency plans his own Department had for dealing with drones at airports? Will he also tell us on what date the Transport Department—or, indeed, the Cabinet Office—asked the MOD for help and support during the crisis? How did his Department respond, and when?

**Mr Speaker**: I say to the right hon. Gentleman in good spirit that he is uniquely talented in delivering an oral question as though it were of the written variety.

**Stuart Andrew**: I was pleased to go to Heathrow myself just last week—[HON. MEMBERS: “Gatwick.”] I know, but I personally went to Heathrow last week. We responded to the request that we received from Sussex police on 20 December and we have been working with colleagues across the Government, and with the Department for Transport, to ensure that we have all the availability that is needed, and that the airports have the proper advice that they require so that they can get the systems they need to ensure that they can protect their own runways.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker**: Ah, the good doctor! I call Dr Julian Lewis.

**Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): The Ministry of Defence is evidently well prepared to respond very quickly to drone threats, once it is asked for assistance,

but can the Minister explain the policy whereby installations are not already in place and a crisis has to arise before that assistance is deployed to the airports?

**Stuart Andrew**: As I was saying, the protection of airports is in fact an issue for those airports. I know that the Department for Transport is working with airfields across the country to ensure that they have the protections they need. The response by the MOD was incredibly swift, and I pay tribute to it for that.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Is it not time that this Government took drones seriously? The fact is that drone technology is advancing very quickly. This is going to be the way in which we wage wars, and the Americans, the Chinese and the Russians are all investing in the technology. Even in our airports, drones present a great danger that we should address immediately.

**Stuart Andrew**: We are taking this very seriously. The Ministry of Defence has been working on this over the past couple of years, and we are of course working with our allies to ensure that we have the very best technology to protect our armed forces and keep this country safe.

**Bob Stewart** (Beckenham) (Con): Does the military actually have radar that is capable of identifying something that is, say, 50 cm across?

**Stuart Andrew**: I obviously cannot go into the details of the capability that we have—I do not think that that would be sensible for the security of our country—but, having visited the system that is in place at Heathrow, I can say that it is incredibly effective.

**Gerald Jones** (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab): The recent drone intrusions at Gatwick and Heathrow were highly embarrassing and created great inconvenience for thousands of passengers but, more importantly, they presented a real and significant security risk. We are all indebted to the armed forces personnel who worked to tackle those intrusions, but we clearly need a long-term solution to this growing challenge. Will the Minister tell us why it is taking the Government so long to bring forward regulations to introduce a wider exclusion zone around airports and ensure the safety of UK airspace?

**Stuart Andrew**: We take this matter incredibly seriously, and it is important to get things absolutely right because there are all sorts of implications for the aspects of security that we will need to introduce. We are working across Government, and the MOD is providing its advice and expertise to ensure that we get proper legislation in place to make the response effective.

### Outsourcing: Quality of Service

3. **Karen Lee** (Lincoln) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the quality of service delivered through contracts outsourced by his Department. [908523]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Stuart Andrew)**: The Ministry of Defence regularly monitors the performance of all its contractors, including for outsourced services. That is carried out through the

robust monitoring of contract performance indicators, with action being taken as appropriate when standards are not met.

**Karen Lee:** Capita, which receives millions of pounds through MOD contracts, has consistently missed its recruitment and savings targets, yet it was handed a £500 million fire and rescue contract last year despite receiving a dire financial risk assessment. Following the Carillion fiasco, will the Minister recognise that this Government's ideological commitment to outsourcing has caused needless precarity for MOD workers in my Lincoln constituency and across the UK?

**Stuart Andrew:** In the wake of Carillion's collapse, the Prime Minister commissioned a review of outsourcing, with which the MOD has engaged, that seeks to improve the public service outcomes and value for money of Government outsourcing. However, I gently point out to the hon. Lady that outsourcing also happened under the previous Labour Government.

**Douglas Chapman** (Dunfermline and West Fife) (SNP): The Minister will be aware that Members have offered scathing reviews of the Government's no-deal Brexit outsourcing procurement decisions across portfolios. What no-deal outsourcing contracts has the MOD issued? Will the Minister ensure that there is a comprehensive review of procurement processes before he joins the Secretary of State for Transport in thrusting his Department into a Brexit procurement fiasco?

**Stuart Andrew:** We work closely with all the companies to which we outsource, ensuring that we monitor their work and that they meet the standards that are expected of them. If they do not meet those standards, we will take the necessary action, and we have done so.

**Nia Griffith** (Llanelli) (Lab): The Defence Fire Safety Regulator's leaked report highlighted a catalogue of failures to manage fire safety in single-living accommodation. It appears that the estates contract that was outsourced to CarillionAmey does not include the inspection and maintenance of fire doors and fire escapes, which is a shocking omission that puts servicemen and women in an unacceptable situation. Will the Minister agree to carry out an immediate review of fire safety across all MOD sites and to implement the report's recommendations in full? Will he also agree to halt the outsourcing of the defence fire and rescue service to Capita, which seems grossly irresponsible in the circumstances?

**Stuart Andrew:** The Ministry of Defence takes the safety of its people and the findings of the report extremely seriously. We are committed to addressing the shortfalls identified in the report. We have already taken action on some of the recommendations, and we will continue to ensure that we implement the report's other recommendations.

#### Syria: Coalition Forces

4. **Mr Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): What recent discussions he has had with his US counterpart on the future deployment of coalition forces in Syria. [908524]

**The Secretary of State for Defence (Gavin Williamson):** I have regular conversations with the US Secretary of Defence on a range of issues, including Syria. Last week I had my first discussion with the acting Secretary of Defence, and the MOD will continue those discussions with the US Department of Defence.

**Mr Carmichael:** One of the many risks of the position taken by President Trump, as recently exposed on Twitter, is that it leaves the Kurdish forces and population in Syria vulnerable to attacks by Russia, Turkey and others. The Kurds have been an important part of the coalition of which we have been part. Will the Secretary of State give me some assurance that, whatever America does, we will continue to stand with those who have stood with us?

**Gavin Williamson:** Our whole country owes a great debt of gratitude to the Syrian Democratic Forces and many of the Kurdish forces that are part of it. I am in continuing discussions with my French and US counterparts to ensure that we do everything we can to continue to support the SDF. The war that they have waged alongside us against Daesh has been vital, and we should not forget the debt of gratitude that we owe them.

**Fabian Hamilton** (Leeds North East) (Lab): Following Turkish President Erdoğan's refusal to meet US National Security Adviser John Bolton in Ankara last week to discuss the future of the Kurdish YPG forces fighting Daesh in Syria, is the Secretary of State worried that the withdrawal of US forces from Syria will allow Turkey to crush the Kurdish fighters, whom it regards as terrorists? Can the Government offer any further reassurances to the Kurdish forces that they will continue to support their efforts to overcome Daesh in Syria, and will the Government persuade our NATO ally Turkey to refrain from using its military might against the Kurds?

**Gavin Williamson:** We should recognise the fact that Daesh has been considerably degraded over the last few years and has been deprived of considerable amounts of territory, but we should not be complacent about the threat it continues to pose. We need to work with allies such as the SDF, as well as with Syria's other neighbours, to make sure we continue to put pressure on Daesh and do not give it the space to do us harm in this country. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that we also need to be speaking to our partners, including Turkey, to make sure that everyone comes to the table to create a long-lasting peace in Syria that, importantly, includes the Kurds.

#### Leaving the EU: Defence Co-operation

5. **Hugh Gaffney** (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (Lab): What plans his Department has for maintaining defence co-operation with European partners in the event of the UK leaving the EU without a deal. [908525]

**The Secretary of State for Defence (Gavin Williamson):** The UK is a global player. We will remain engaged in the world and central to European foreign and security policy as we leave the EU. Much of our engagement is managed bilaterally or in other organisations.

**Hugh Gaffney:** No deal would have a disastrous impact on defence co-operation, and the UK's defence sector relies on pan-European supply chains. Will the Government finally provide some certainty to workers in the wider defence sector by accepting that a permanent customs union with the EU is essential?

**Gavin Williamson:** As I am sure the hon. Gentleman is aware, 90% of our industrial collaboration with other European countries on defence is actually on a bilateral basis, not through the European Union. I imagine that that pattern will go long into the future. When we look at the defence of Europe, is it based on the European Union or on the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation? I would argue it is based on the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, not the European Union.

**Mr Philip Dunne (Ludlow) (Con):** Will my right hon. Friend take this opportunity, in the light of tomorrow's important votes, to explain his view of the claims made by some observers outside this place that the defence and security clauses of the withdrawal agreement would somehow cede control over defence operations and military procurement from Her Majesty's Government to EU institutions?

**Gavin Williamson:** I absolutely reassure the House that that is not going to happen. Our sovereign capability and sovereign control over our military and intelligence is something that will always be protected.

**Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab):** In order to appease the hard right of the Conservative party, the Prime Minister has spent the last two years presenting no deal as a viable option, but no deal would mean that we would have to withdraw from all common security and defence policy missions, with our seconded personnel sent home forthwith. We would be permanently shut out of the European Defence Agency and the defence fund, undermining vital research and industrial co-operation, and our defence industry would be hit by crippling tariffs and delays at the border, putting in jeopardy the equipment that our armed forces need. Given all that, does the Secretary of State agree that a no-deal Brexit would be catastrophic for defence and security?

**Gavin Williamson:** I do not agree at all. Our country can and will succeed, whatever it has to deal with and whatever it faces. Much of our defence collaboration is done through third-party organisations, whether they be NATO, the United Nations or joint expeditionary forces. As I have already touched upon, most of our defence industrial collaboration is done not through the European Union, but on a bilateral basis.

**Nia Griffith:** Why can the Secretary of State not just say, absolutely unequivocally, that no deal is not just undesirable but completely unthinkable? Does he agree with the Under-Secretary of State for Defence, the right hon. Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood), who has warned that no deal would be an "irresponsible act of self-harm"? It would be dangerous for Britain. Instead of using a no deal to blackmail MPs into supporting the Prime Minister's unworkable deal, why will the Government not do the responsible thing and rule out no deal once and for all?

**Gavin Williamson:** Obviously, the hon. Lady will have the opportunity to take part in the debate this afternoon and tomorrow. The Prime Minister has negotiated a deal with the EU that she is putting to this House, and perhaps the hon. Lady will support it. But it is also clear that this country always has and always will succeed, whether we are in the EU or outside it; whether we have a deal or no deal, Britain will succeed and Britain will prosper.

**Julia Lopez (Hornchurch and Upminster) (Con):** Following the Prime Minister's commitment to participate in aspects of the EU's defence framework, can the Defence Secretary advise as to the carve-outs the UK has negotiated, or intends to negotiate, from strict third country participation criteria in any common security and defence policy initiative?

**Gavin Williamson:** We have been clear that we will participate in the projects that are of interest and value to the UK, and we will not be dragged along into projects that are of no value and interest to this country.

### Illegal Immigration (English Channel)

**6. Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con):** What steps the Royal Navy is taking to support the Home Office in preventing illegal immigration across the English channel. [908526]

**The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mark Lancaster):** As the House is aware, HMS Mersey, an offshore patrol vessel—OPV—was deployed on 3 January in support of Border Force activity in the channel. Additionally, our support includes the deployment of up to 20 suitably qualified naval personnel on Border Force cutters to provide additional capacity.

**Mr Hollobone:** Illegal seaborne immigration in small boats across the English channel is driven by people traffickers. The way to stop people traffickers and the illegal immigration is by returning those rescued at sea to the port from whence they came in France. Is the Royal Navy doing that?

**Mark Lancaster:** Migration control is, of course, not a responsibility of the Ministry of Defence or the Royal Navy; it is a responsibility of the Home Office, so my hon. Friend's question is probably better directed to the Home Secretary. In this particular case, the Royal Navy is simply supplying support under normal MACA—military aid to the civil authorities—rules.

**Stephen Pound (Ealing North) (Lab):** The Royal Navy has a proud and glorious history, in respect not just of forming the wooden walls of this country, but being the nobility of Neptune's realm, and it has a proud humanitarian record. But the question related to preventing illegal immigration, so could the Minister tell us what the orders of the day are and what the Royal Navy is doing to prevent people from landing in this country?

**Mark Lancaster:** As I have tried to explain, migration is a matter for the Home Office. In this case, it has made a request for us to supply a vessel, HMS Mersey, to act as a platform for Border Office officers to operate from.



**Martin Docherty-Hughes** (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): I do not know how to follow that, but I will try. The Secretary of State has been waxing lyrical about the fleet ready escort being based on England's southern coast to deal with this phantom menace of mass immigration, with no plans for basing OPVs in Scotland, as he admitted to me in parliamentary questions. So will the Minister, on behalf of the Secretary of State, advise the House as to whether they have received any representation from the Scottish Conservative cohort in this House about basing fishery protection vessels anywhere remotely near Scotland?

**Mark Lancaster:** With respect to the hon. Gentleman, he seems to be confusing a number of different issues. The role of the fleet ready escort is certainly very different from that in which HMS Mersey is currently being engaged, as indeed is fishery protection, which is a matter devolved to the Scottish Government.

### Global Navigation Satellite System

7. **Lyn Brown** (West Ham) (Lab): What funding his Department has allocated to the proposed global navigation satellite system. [908528]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Stuart Andrew):** Some £92 million has been allocated from the Treasury EU exit fund to the engineering, development and design phase of a UK global navigation satellite system, which is currently under way. The UK Space Agency is leading the work, with the full support of the Ministry of Defence.

**Lyn Brown:** And yet the reality is that £1.2 billion of UK investment in the Galileo system may now have been wasted because of this Government's failed negotiation. This Government now want us to spend billions more on a delayed, diplomatically divisive and sketchy system just to cover up for their failure. How much more does the Minister expect the women and men of our armed forces to suffer as a result of lower investment in them because of this Government's botched Brexit negotiations?

**Stuart Andrew:** Galileo is an issue because our armed forces need to know that we have absolute faith in their secure systems. The EU decided not to allow us to have that information, which is why we are coming out. However, we are working across Government to look into the alternatives, which is why the Prime Minister has put the funding in place.

**James Gray** (North Wiltshire) (Con): What will the proposed UK system provide to our armed forces that the American global positioning system does not?

**Stuart Andrew:** It will obviously replicate very much what the US system has, but it will also ensure that we have additional capability should we need it. It is really important that our armed forces have all the equipment they need and that they have systems such as GPS so that we can put them in a safe environment when they are defending our country.

**Wayne David** (Caerphilly) (Lab): We understand that because of the Government's failure to negotiate our continued involvement in Galileo they are exploring

other options to build their own global satellite navigation system, possibly in co-operation with the United States of America. We know that that will cost the country up to £5 billion, but can the Secretary of State or his Minister tell us how many British companies have lost out on important Galileo contracts as a result of the Government's failure?

**Stuart Andrew:** We have in this country an exciting space industry that is working incredibly hard and is part of the 18-month engineering, development and design study that is expected to conclude in 2020. I am looking forward to seeing the results of that study, because I am sure that the great British industry that we have will provide us with the system that we need.

### Russian Military Activity (NATO Discussions)

8. **Andrew Bridgen** (North West Leicestershire) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with his NATO counterparts on the implications of recent Russian military activity for NATO's strategic priorities. [908529]

**The Secretary of State for Defence (Gavin Williamson):** I have regular discussions with my NATO counterparts on Russia. Most recently, the alliance strongly supported the finding of the United States that Russia is in material breach of its obligations under the intermediate-range nuclear forces treaty. NATO has also agreed further steps to bolster its ability to deter and defend against the growing threats we face.

**Andrew Bridgen:** The UK's participation in NATO's enhanced forward presence is the most visible demonstration of our commitment to the security of our eastern allies. Does my right hon. Friend agree that their security is a vital part of ensuring our own security?

**Gavin Williamson:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right in his analysis. By investing in defence along the eastern border against the threat of Russia, we are as much investing in our security here in the United Kingdom as we are investing in the security of nations such as Poland, Estonia and Romania. We need to continue to do this, and other nations need to step up to the mark as well.

**Mrs Madeleine Moon** (Bridgend) (Lab): Recent Russian military activities fall well below the provisions of article 5 of the north Atlantic treaty. Does the Secretary of State share my sadness that the public do not understand articles 1, 2 and 3 of that treaty, which promote peace, security, justice, stability and mutual aid, all of which are vital to our defence capability?

**Gavin Williamson:** We have to be confident about what NATO can deliver, and we must increasingly make the arguments for what NATO delivers for everyone and explain its full remit. As we look to the future, we are seeing nations such as Russia and, increasingly, China operating in a grey zone, just below the level of conflict. That does not mean that those actions are any less dangerous. In Ukraine, the grey zone has merged with conventional power.

**Richard Graham** (Gloucester) (Con): The implications of Russian policy in the near east may be more dramatic now that the US has withdrawn from Syria. Will my

right hon. Friend tell us whether there is a cross-departmental plan on the implications of the new regional dynamic for us and our other partners?

**Gavin Williamson:** We continue to work right across Government to look at how the changing political situation affects many countries, not only in Europe but, as my hon. Friend said, in the middle east. I assure him that we will continue to look at that issue closely.

**Carol Monaghan** (Glasgow North West) (SNP): Russian incursions into Scottish waters are increasingly blatant, yet still no major naval surface ships are based in Scotland. Has the Secretary of State had any discussions with his NATO counterparts about the UK's responsibility to patrol its north Atlantic maritime territory properly?

**Gavin Williamson:** What we have seen is increased investment in the North Atlantic, whether that is the deployment of P8s to Lossiemouth or the continued investment in our submarine forces at Her Majesty's Naval Base Clyde, and we will continue to make that investment. We are very much leading the way in dealing with the challenges that increased Russian activity in the North Atlantic presents not just to us but to the whole of NATO.

#### Leaving the EU: Future Defence Relationship

9. **Gill Furniss** (Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the UK's future defence relationship with the EU after the UK leaves the EU. [908530]

**The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mark Lancaster):** The UK will pursue a distinctive, independent and sovereign foreign and defence policy that meets British interests and promotes our values. The political declaration negotiated with the EU recognises the shared threats and values of the UK and the EU and provides a framework for an ambitious, broad, deep and flexible future relationship.

**Gill Furniss:** The EU Common Security and Defence Policy missions play an extremely important role for peace and security in the European continent and beyond. Can the Minister confirm that, post-Brexit, we will not be withdrawing personnel and operational support from such missions?

**Mark Lancaster:** The hon. Lady is absolutely right. Of course, up until recently, we actually led Op Atalanta, which was the counter-piracy operation in Somalia, although that has now handed over to a joint mission between Italy and Spain. In the future, the Prime Minister has made it absolutely clear that, just because we are leaving the European Union, it does not mean to say that we are leaving our responsibilities over security in the European Union. We will look at contributing to missions where we can when it is in both the UK and EU's interests.

**Jack Lopresti** (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, as we regain our position as an independent and global presence on the world stage, it is even more important that the United Kingdom is seen as a reliable and credible partner and ally across the world?

**Mark Lancaster:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. This is a golden opportunity for us to look to expand our footprint across the world. Only this year, we have seen Royal Navy warships in the far east—three in fact—and that is just the sort of presence that we look to continue in the future.

#### Royal Marines Bases

10. **Luke Pollard** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): When he plans to announce the long-term arrangements for Royal Marines bases. [908531]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Tobias Ellwood):** Before I answer this question, Mr Speaker, may I join you in welcoming our overseas guests here today? They are strong, important and valued Commonwealth allies. In particular, I thank our Australian representative: Sydney hosted the Invictus games in October and did an absolutely fantastic job in reminding all of us that there is life after injury, and that, through sport, people can develop a new chapter as they advance.

On the Royal Marines, I hope, Mr Speaker, that you will join me in congratulating the Royal Marines as they celebrate 355 years since their formation. They have a fantastic history: helping Lord Nelson secure victory at Trafalgar; ensuring that we secured The Rock in 1704; enabling us to land at Normandy with 17,500 Marines; and, of course, helping in the liberation of the Falklands. We all owe those who earned the coveted Green Beret a huge debt of gratitude.

**Mr Speaker:** That is characteristically gracious of the right hon. Gentleman. I just add that Melbourne is also hosting, over the next fortnight, the Australian Open, one of the great sporting events of the calendar and, for this Chair, now and again, a respite from politics.

**Luke Pollard:** Since my Adjournment debate on the Royal Marines' basing arrangements last week, I have received lots of feedback from those who have served in the Royal Marines. It is clear that the association between the Royal Marines and Stonehouse is a bond worth preserving. Will the Minister consider extending the closure date of Stonehouse barracks in Plymouth from 2023 to 2025 or later to allow enough time to build the state of the art Royal Marines superbase in the city that our Royal Marines rightly deserve?

**Mr Ellwood:** I join the hon. Gentleman—I hope the whole House will agree with me—in saying thank you to all those who have served and who are serving in the Royal Marines. He is aware that we had a series of debates last week supporting the Royal Marines and confirming an important continued presence in the south-west. He will be aware that 3 Commando Brigade will remain in the Plymouth area; 29 Commando Royal Artillery must move from the Citadel, which is no longer fit for purpose; 40 Commando will move from Taunton; 42 Commando will remain in Bickleigh; 45 Commando will remain in Condor; and our close protection unit looking after our nuclear assets and Lymington will continue as well.

**Johnny Mercer** (Plymouth, Moor View) (Con): The Minister's predecessor assured me that Plymouth would remain the centre of gravity for amphibious operations

in this country. Will the Minister confirm that, whatever happens in this rebasing strategy, Plymouth will remain the centre of gravity for amphibious operations in the United Kingdom?

**Mr Ellwood:** I can confirm that Plymouth will remain the centre of gravity for the Royal Marines commandos. As I just said, 3 Commando headquarters will remain there. Confirmation of our commitment to the Royal Marines was made this year when the Defence Secretary was able to confirm the continuation of Albion and Bulwark, those stalwart workhorses required for amphibious capability.

### UK Airstrikes Against Daesh

11. **Royston Smith** (Southampton, Itchen) (Con): What assessment he has made of the effectiveness of UK airstrikes against Daesh. [908532]

**The Secretary of State for Defence (Gavin Williamson):** Royal Air Force airstrikes have played a vital role in the campaign against Daesh. By supporting local troops on the ground in both Iraq and Syria, we have helped them to retake more than 99% of the territory that Daesh once occupied across both countries. This is a significant success, but Daesh still holds pockets of territory. We must continue to fight the terrorist threat that Daesh poses in the middle east and, of course, in the United Kingdom.

**Royston Smith:** As the Secretary of State has alluded to, it is estimated that 99% of the territory once held by Daesh is now gone. In the light of the coalition's success in helping to degrade Daesh in Syria, what further actions does my right hon. Friend propose when airstrikes are no longer required?

**Gavin Williamson:** We have seen 51 airstrikes against Daesh in the last month, 27 of which occurred in the last two weeks alone, so the tempo of activity and the amount of resource that the coalition will continue to have to commit will still be substantial over the long term. We will continue to work closely with our allies to see what kind of support package needs to be offered to continue to put pressure on Daesh, whether that is in Iraq or other countries.

### Offensive Cyber-capabilities

12. **Matt Warman** (Boston and Skegness) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to develop offensive cyber-capabilities. [908533]

20. **James Cartlidge** (South Suffolk) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to develop offensive cyber-capabilities. [908541]

**The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mark Lancaster):** The Ministry of Defence is committed to exploiting offensive cyber as a warfighting tool. We are developing and employing capabilities through the national offensive cyber programme, and ensuring that offensive cyber is fully integrated with military full-spectrum operations.

**Matt Warman:** Working with the private sector and keeping legislation up to date is essential when it comes to developing cyber-capabilities, offensive or otherwise.

What steps is the Department taking to ensure that the private sector is appropriately involved and that legislation is kept up to date?

**Mark Lancaster:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I can reassure the House that all our offensive cyber operations comply with the law of armed conflict, and with national and international law. This is very much a 21st century technology, which is why we apply the enterprise approach and work closely with the private sector when it comes to developing this capability.

**James Cartlidge:** Of course, the private sector is a real success story; there is huge growth in the area. What more can the Government do to work with the private sector—in the context not just of defensive cyber, but of offensive cyber—to ensure that we can bring forward technology that assists not only the country, but UK firms as well?

**Mark Lancaster:** The short answer is by utilising the skillsets of the private sector. In many ways we have done this by recognising the use of reserves. We cannot always compete with the salaries paid by the private sector, but many of those working in the private sector are committed to national security. That is why this has very much been a growth area when it comes to the use of reserves.

**Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Cyber-security is supposed to be a priority of the modernising defence programme, yet post-Brexit we are going to lose access to the European arrest warrant, Europol and the sharing of data used in EU frameworks. How is the Ministry of Defence going to deal with those challenges?

**Mark Lancaster:** It is very much within the agreement. Equally, this is a priority, which is precisely why we are investing £1.9 billion in it over coming years.

### Capita's Army Recruitment Contract

13. **David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the effectiveness of Capita's Army recruitment contract. [908534]

17. **John Grogan** (Keighley) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the effectiveness of Capita's Army recruitment contract. [908538]

**The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mark Lancaster):** The Army is working closely with Capita, with multiple interventions now in place and delivering improvements. Regular soldier applications are at a five-year high, supported by last year's award-winning "This is Belonging" marketing campaign. It will take longer to see increases in trained strength due to the length of the recruitment and training pipelines.

**David Hanson:** This contract has underperformed. How much would it cost to cancel it, and why is the Minister not considering that as a key option?

**Mark Lancaster:** There are certainly alternative plans in place should this contract not perform, and the Secretary of State has made it absolutely clear that he has not ruled that out. However, I am pleased that in



recent months, after interventions by Capita, we have seen a dramatic improvement in the contract. One of the indications of that is that applications are now at a five-year high.

**John Grogan:** Capita's complete failure to deliver on its Army recruitment contract is frustrating the ambitions of many youngsters whose only desire is to serve their country. In the light of all this, may I ask the Minister again: can Capita be trusted to run the defence contract, and that of the fire service as well?

**Mark Lancaster:** We have been quite open about the fact that there have been challenges in this contract. Equally, the Chief of the Defence Staff, in his appearance before the Select Committee the other day, recognised that some of these issues were of the Army's own making historically. I can only repeat again that I am confident—this has occupied much of my time in recent months—that improvements have been made to the contract, and we are now seeing that pipeline working. It is much more effective than it has been in the past, and I think the results will be seen in a few months' time.

**Will Quince (Colchester) (Con):** I accept that it is early days, but has the Minister made any assessment of the Army's new recruitment advertising campaign?

**Mark Lancaster:** Yes. The very fact that everybody seems to be talking about it is a very positive sign. Time will tell, but early indications are that applications are up by over 20% on this time last year and by 35% on 2017, so that appears to be positive.

#### Armed Forces Personnel: Trends

14. **Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab):** What recent assessment he has made of trends in the number of armed forces personnel. [908535]

16. **Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab):** What recent assessment he has made of trends in the number of armed forces personnel. [908537]

23. **Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab):** What recent assessment he has made of trends in the number of armed forces personnel. [908545]

**The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mark Lancaster):** We remain committed to maintaining the overall size of the armed forces, and we have a range of measures under way to improve recruitment and retention. The challenge is kept under constant review.

**Alex Cunningham:** Surely the Secretary of State recognises the need for a serious recruitment programme for the armed forces rather than this targeting of gamers, whose screen skills could, I suppose, be redeployed in bombarding the Spanish navy with paintballs.

**Mark Lancaster:** I am grateful, but I am not the Secretary of State.

**Alex Cunningham:** Not yet!

**Mark Lancaster:** I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his confidence in me. With respect, he is rather missing the point of the latest recruitment campaign. We will always have core intenders who want to join the military, but equally we are trying to attract a whole group of people who do not realise that the modern military requires many skills other than the ability to use a bayonet. That is precisely why, when it comes to looking at peacekeeping operations, we need to use the compassion of the so-called snowflakes who can sit there and be effective operators in the humanitarian environment.

**Mr Speaker:** In calling the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Nick Smith), I take this opportunity to wish him a very happy birthday—might I suggest the 49th?

**Nick Smith:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. It is very kind of you to give me your best wishes.

Does the Minister not accept that the number of fully trained personnel in each of the armed services is now lower than it was this time last year, making a mockery of the Conservatives' manifesto pledge to maintain the overall size of the armed forces?

**Mark Lancaster:** The overall manning of the armed forces remains at 93%. Crucially, that means that we are maintaining all of our operational commitments.

**Peter Kyle:** As part of the future accommodation model, service personnel are being forced off-patch. This could increase the loneliness among service personnel that has been identified by the Royal British Legion. Has the Minister made an assessment of the implications for people and for the attractiveness of coming into the forces that that will induce?

**Mark Lancaster:** Let us be absolutely clear. The future accommodation model is about choice. It is about recognising that not everybody necessarily wants to live on the patch, and about creating a more stable armed forces. For example, creating super-garrisons means that families are not being moved around the country the whole time. The aim is to create a good retention tool and, crucially, to give our service personnel choice in how they live their lives.

#### Modernising the Defence Estate

15. **Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab):** What recent representations he has received on the modernising the defence estate programme. [908536]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Tobias Ellwood):** The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the better defence estate programme is a 25-year programme to rationalise the defence estate, which is far too large for our present circumstances. We need to look at our training areas and our garrisons, and we need to provide places for civilian housing too. He will be aware that Chester is involved in that programme.

**Christian Matheson:** Does the Minister share my concern that reducing the number of barracks and concentrating them in one place—for example, in the north-west, at Weeton in Preston—reduces the operational footprint of the Army in the north-west or elsewhere in

the country and therefore reduces operational effectiveness? Might it not be better to keep open some barracks, such as the Dale barracks in Chester, to maintain a better operational spread?

**Mr Ellwood:** It is interesting that the hon. Gentleman raises our footprint in the north-west of England, which is a very large recruitment area, because the Defence Secretary was talking about that this morning. The hon. Gentleman will be aware of the decisions that have been made concerning the Dale barracks. The 2nd Battalion Mercian Regiment and the Royal Logistic Corps units will be moving. The Fox barracks will remain, and the Army Reserve will be there, but his point is well made, and we will try to act upon it.

**Rebecca Pow** (Taunton Deane) (Con): Millions of pounds have been invested in the Norton Manor site, where 40 Commando is based, in Taunton Deane. It is ideally located for the marines, and more than 150 people aside from the marines work on the extensive site. This place has a great deal to recommend it, so will my right hon. Friend give a commitment that all those aspects will be assessed in the overall plan to rationalise the defence estate?

**Mr Ellwood:** My hon. Friend makes a powerful case for the Taunton barracks and 40 Commando. She is aware that the decision has been made already, but perhaps we can meet separately to see what more can be done to provide support.

**Mr Speaker:** As befits a former teacher of more than 30 years' standing, the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Thelma Walker) has been most patiently and courteously waiting for her opportunity.

### Armed Forces: Morale

18. **Thelma Walker** (Colne Valley) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the level of morale in the armed forces. [908539]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Tobias Ellwood):** The hon. Lady is right to raise concerns about morale in our armed forces. The continuous attitude survey is critical for us to understand the views of our armed forces personnel. We often talk about training, exercises and operations, but the welfare of our personnel and their families is critical.

**Thelma Walker:** I thank the Minister for his response. A recent survey of armed forces personnel found that only two in five are satisfied with service life in general. That has been linked to low pay and poor-quality accommodation. What are the Government doing specifically to reverse the decline in our armed forces' morale?

**Mr Ellwood:** As I mentioned in my opening remarks, that is a concern, and we must address it. Pay has never been an issue in the armed forces. When I joined up, it was not an issue. People do not join the armed forces for the money, but we do not want it to become an issue. I was pleased that the pay freeze was lifted last year, with a 2% rise. Effort is also being made to improve accommodation and provide flexible working, which is

the main ingredient that forces people to depart, because they are unable to spend enough time with their families. Those changes have been introduced, and I hope they will affect the morale of our armed forces.

### Topical Questions

T1. [908546] **Mike Wood** (Dudley South) (Con): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

**The Secretary of State for Defence (Gavin Williamson):** As we start the new year, I want to pay tribute to the men and women who spent Christmas away from home in service of their country. Over the Christmas period, I visited UK armed forces personnel in Ukraine, South Sudan and Kenya. It was excellent to see the work they are doing in the security, peacekeeping and humanitarian fields.

**Mike Wood:** What action is the Ministry of Defence taking to support the democratic Government in Ukraine? Will the Secretary of State update us on his recent trip to Odessa, and particularly the position of Ukrainian navy sailors held prisoner by Russia?

**Gavin Williamson:** What we are seeing in Ukraine is the most dreadful of situations, where Russia's aggressive acts include Ukrainian sailors being held against their will, and they continue to be held against their will. As an act to demonstrate their intent for 2019, Russia and the Kremlin should be looking at letting these men return to their families and friends at the earliest possible opportunity. We are supporting the Ukrainian people. We have already seen HMS Echo visiting Odessa, and the Royal Marines will start training with Ukrainian forces in the very early part of this year.

T4. [908549] **Alex Sobel** (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): Does the Secretary of State want to apologise to Scots Guardsman Stephen McWhirter, who was called a snowflake in Capita's disastrous £752 million recruitment campaign, without his permission? Guardsman McWhirter has received torrents of mocking messages, and he has said on Facebook that he will resign from the Guards.

**The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mark Lancaster):** I am afraid what the hon. Gentleman says is simply untrue. The Guardsman concerned gave his specific permission for his photograph to be used on that poster and understood exactly the content of the campaign.

T2. [908547] **Matt Warman** (Boston and Skegness) (Con): Sexual violence against women has been an appalling part of the violence we have seen in South Sudan. Will the Secretary of State say a little bit more about what British troops have contributed as our part of the UN operations there?

**Gavin Williamson:** I have had the great privilege of seeing our service personnel who are part of the UN mission, and the work that they are doing in combating sexual violence in South Sudan is something we can all feel rightly proud of. We have seen them take action to deal with some of the threats that many women and children are facing every day, but we have to look at how we can do more. Earlier last year, we saw the opening of a new training programme at Shrivenham, and we need to look at how we can step up that work.

T7. [908553] **Mr Kevan Jones** (North Durham) (Lab): Tomorrow afternoon, the funeral takes place of Acting Corporal Iain Dodds, formerly of the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers. His family are obviously grieving. He died, very tragically, before Christmas, at the age of 39, following years of adjusting having left the service after serving in both Iraq and Afghanistan. May I put on the record my thanks to the Minister for the Armed Forces for helping the family with the funeral arrangements?

**Mark Lancaster:** I am very grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his acknowledgment. In cases like this, it is absolutely right that collectively across the House we should act in the way we have. I am delighted that we have managed to put things in place to help the family.

T3. [908548] **Andrew Bridgen** (North West Leicestershire) (Con): What measures have the Ministry of Defence taken to ensure that serving and former members of the armed forces suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder or other mental health issues are given priority when it comes to the provision of social housing?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Tobias Ellwood):** I am pleased to say that the majority of people make the transition into civilian life without a problem, but there are those who require our support, and we have provided a new programme through the mental health and wellbeing strategy to emphasise this approach. We are also focusing on the veterans strategy, which will provide for a consultation on what more we can do to support those affected by PTSD.

T8. [908554] **Helen Goodman** (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): Further to that question, Durham County Council has just won a gold award for setting up an excellent outreach programme for veterans, including guaranteeing job interviews. Will the Minister consider making that mandatory across the entire country?

**Mr Ellwood:** First, I commend the programme. Before I go down that road, I would encourage more of a voluntary approach; I do not like mandating such things. I would be happy to visit the programme, which might be a starting point.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** I call Ranil Jayawardena. Where is the chappie? What a pity. Very well—I call Nigel Huddleston.

**Nigel Huddleston** (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): Will the Secretary of State confirm when the final clean-up in Salisbury will take place, and what further training can be provided to the armed forces to prepare them for such attacks?

**Gavin Williamson:** We expect the final clean-up to be completed by March. I pay tribute to all the service personnel across all three services who have done so much in dealing with the attack. Additionally, we will be training Royal Marines to be those best able to deal with the challenges of nerve agents, to make sure we deepen our resilience against future threats.

T9. [908555] **Dr Philippa Whitford** (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): The security review of 2015 identified cyber-attack, terrorism and climate change as among the greatest threats to the UK. As none of those are dealt with by replacing Trident, whose price-tag is soaring and which still has safety concerns, is it not time to change direction and invest in real cyber-security?

**Gavin Williamson:** We have to recognise the need to invest in a whole spectrum of different capabilities, whether that is nuclear deterrence, conventional forces or cyber-security and offensive cyber.

**Kevin Hollinrake** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): The medal campaign group for Bomber Command has identified that it is the only main campaign not to be recognised by the Air Crew Europe Star. Will my right hon. Friend do all he can to ensure that the committee responsible considers its submission to address that issue?

**Mark Lancaster:** I am very sympathetic to those calls. However, the award of the clasp rather than the medal for the aircrew who served with Bomber Command is consistent with the policy for other awards in recognition of service during world war two, which simply dictated that campaign medals would reflect involvement in broad theatres of war. Exactly the same policy applied to Fighter Command, who received a clasp for their service during the battle of Britain.

**Layla Moran** (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): Further to that question, my constituent, Wing Commander Jim Wright, is a 95-year-old veteran who has campaigned long and hard for those changes to be made in respect of Bomber Command. I hear what the Minister is saying, but we owe these gentlemen a debt for their heroic acts. Given that time is marching on, surely they should be recognised in the way that they deserve?

**Mark Lancaster:** As I say, I am sympathetic, but the aircrew have been recognised, through the award of the clasp to the medal. We are just being consistent in how the policy has been applied over many years.

**Robert Courts** (Witney) (Con): Redevelopment of the REEMA sites in Carterton is an urgent priority for west Oxfordshire, not only for RAF personnel who depend on the housing, but because of its effect on west Oxfordshire's housing stock. Will the Minister meet me again to discuss how we can progress this urgent matter?

**Mr Ellwood:** I would be delighted.

**Stephanie Peacock** (Barnsley East) (Lab): Further to the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Lincoln (Karen Lee), may I press the Minister on recruitment? MOD figures reveal that in the first quarter of last year, Capita failed to bring in 90% of the recruits that the British Army needs. When I wrote to the Minister about this issue, he simply referenced old data. When will the Government recognise the crisis of failed privatisation and bring recruitment back in-house?

**Mark Lancaster:** The reality is that there is a delay between people applying to join the Army and coming through the pipeline as trained soldiers. What I am



trying to explain to the House is that, as a result of the recent recruitment campaign, applications to the armed forces, in particular the Army, are up significantly—indeed, they are at a five-year high. In time, that will work its way through into actual numbers serving in the Army.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): The Russian annexation of Crimea has been followed by the construction of the Kerch bridge to the Russian mainland. To date, no NATO ship has entered under the bridge into the sea of Azov. When does the Ministry of Defence expect that situation to change?

**Gavin Williamson:** We can be very proud that the Royal Navy was the first navy to enter the Black sea and go to Odessa in solidarity with our Ukrainian friends. Currently we have no plans, but we will continue to keep this situation under review; and we plan to make sure that further Royal Navy vessels visit the Black sea later this year.

**Jessica Morden** (Newport East) (Lab): What progress is the Minister making with the Home Office to help those Afghan interpreters who came here under the Government's scheme but are now finding huge difficulties in being reunited with their families because normal immigration rules apply? They deserve our support.

**Mark Lancaster:** We review the policy constantly, and I will update the House in due course.

**Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): What discussions has the Defence Secretary had with the Secretary of State for Health about identifying and resourcing the health needs of veterans in the NHS 10-year plan, which was published last week?

**Gavin Williamson:** We have regular discussions with the Department of Health. We recognise that properly supporting veterans is not something that the Ministry

of Defence can do on its own; something has to be done right across Government. That is why the creation of a veterans board, working across Government and bringing the Department of Health together with other Departments, is vital. As part of the veterans board, the Department of Health for England, as well as the devolved nations, is working on how we can enhance the support that we give to veterans.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I point out, as much for the benefit of our visitors as for right hon. and hon. Members, that the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mrs Moon) not merely represents Bridgend and is a member of the Defence Committee, but is President of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly and we are very proud of that.

**Mrs Madeleine Moon** (Bridgend) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Civilian authorities and agencies are now often on the frontline in dealing with cyber-attacks, chemical weapons attacks and drone incursions. Will the Secretary of State confirm that the Ministry of Defence is stepping up training and resilience capability of our civilian agencies to ensure that the skills transfers are there, so that they too are able to defend our country?

**Gavin Williamson:** Yes; of course we always have that backstop of being able to step in and support civilian authorities as well. Increasingly, as we touched on earlier, there is a growing grey zone where people who wish to do us harm are acting, and we need to consider how we support civilian authorities more in future to help them best deal with those threats.

**Mr Speaker:** Again, in the name of the intelligibility of our proceedings to those visiting, I point out that we are about to have a point of order—not just any old point of order, but a point of order from the Mother of the House, the female Member with the longest uninterrupted service, since 28 October 1982, if my research is correct or my recollection accurate.

## Points of Order

3.36 pm

**Ms Harriet Harman** (Camberwell and Peckham) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Thank you for agreeing to hear it. The House will obviously be fully aware that we have a very important vote tomorrow in which all hon. Members will want to take part. My hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) is nine months pregnant and due to have a caesarean tomorrow. She should not have to choose between going through the Division Lobby in a wheelchair while nine months pregnant, having postponed her caesarean, and losing her right to vote. If the Whips were to agree, and with the agreement of the Leader of the House, would it be possible, Mr Speaker, for you to facilitate a proxy vote so that she can have her baby and have her vote? The House agreed to this change in principle in February last year. In the circumstances of tomorrow's important vote and my hon. Friend's pregnancy, would it be possible for that to be arranged?

**Emma Reynolds** (Wolverhampton North East) (Lab)  
*rose—*

**Mr Speaker:** Very well, I will come to the hon. Lady now.

**Emma Reynolds:** Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. Can you advise me on how to expedite the process of introducing proxy votes? How many babies do we in this House, collectively, have to have before we see any change? I will probably be on my second before we have a policy to introduce proxy votes. There should be some urgency in implementing this reform of the House.

**Mr Speaker:** Let me respond to the right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman) and the hon. Member for Wolverhampton North East (Emma Reynolds). In the first instance, I think it worthwhile to be candid in saying that I am advised—of course I seek advice and must then hear what the advice is—that it is not within the gift of party authorities, although I would argue that they are in a sense House authorities, to facilitate proxy voting for tomorrow. I respect that view, although in all candour I am not sure that I agree with it, but it is tendered to me in good faith and I put it out there for the House to know.

I believe it is absolutely essential, not just for the rights of the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) but for the reputation of this House as an institution approaching, or starting to take an interest in, the modern world, that she should be facilitated to vote tomorrow. The notion that she should have to be wheeled through a Division Lobby would, I think, be regarded by very large numbers of people as completely uncivilised. That should not have to happen.

It has been suggested to me that—in a departure from, or at any rate an extension of, the normal nodding-through arrangement, which ordinarily applies to somebody who is indisposed but on the parliamentary estate—the hon. Lady could be nodded through and her vote counted even if she were, in fact, in a hospital bed at the time. I do not rule out that possibility and for my part I

would be happy, on my own shoulders, to agree to that. Personally, I think it preferable that the hon. Lady should have a proxy vote, but that seems to me to depend on cross-party agreement. I have been approached about the matter by the chair of the all-party parliamentary group on women in Parliament, the hon. Member for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford), who wrote to me very recently. It is good to see her in her place—forgive me, but I had not seen her. If she wants to come in on this exchange, she very properly can, or not if she does not wish to do so. I wrote back to her making it explicitly clear that I have made clear from this Chair my support for, and willingness to assist in the introduction of, proxy voting for the purposes of baby leave. I have done that several times.

It is important for the House to know, and for those attending our proceedings to be told, the facts of the matter. The issue has been debated twice in the Chamber. The first was on 1 February last year in a debate under the auspices of the Backbench Business Committee. If memory serves, that debate was secured at the instigation of the right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham. On that occasion, the proposition that proxy voting for baby leave should be introduced was passed, if I am right, *nem con*—that is to say, without opposition. Subsequently, there was a general debate in this Chamber on 13 September last year in Government time. There was no Division of the House, so there is no recorded vote, but my recollection is that there was strong support for the change on that occasion. The Leader of the House, who I think was present at the time, indicated her desire to expedite progress on the matter. From my own contacts, I understand it to have been very much her wish to bring about change before the end of last year.

If I may say so, and I will, it is extremely regrettable that almost a year after the first debate, and more than four months after the second debate, the change has not been made. Frankly, that is lamentable—lamentable—and very disadvantageous and injurious to the reputation of this House. If an agreement can be reached between the usual channels today—I am chairing in the Chamber, so Members will need to come and tell me what has been agreed—I am very happy to facilitate a change for tomorrow, preferably in the form of a proxy vote for the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn, but at the very least something to ensure that she can be nodded through.

It really is time, in pursuit of the expressed view of this House, that reactionary forces are overcome. If people want to express their opposition, let them not do so murkily behind the scenes; let them have the character to say up front that they oppose progressive change. I hope we can get progressive change. What better opportunity to do so than before our historic vote tomorrow? I hope I have made my own views clear.

That partly deals with that. I am now in the hands—I say this for the benefit of our observers—of a very formidable band of colleagues. They will help make it happen.

**Dr Philippa Whitford** (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. While I utterly support the idea of proxy voting for women such as our colleague the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq), we have people who are absent from the

Chamber and from Parliament with a varying range of illnesses, or who have partners or family members who are terminally ill. The issue needs to be dealt with across the range.

**Mr Speaker:** That may very well be so, and I am not unsympathetic to the hon. Lady's proposition, but I was speaking pretty much off the top of my head, and what I did not say but should have said, because it is part of the pattern and the picture, is that the Procedure Committee was invited to consider this matter. I gave evidence to it, as I know other Members did, and the Procedure Committee specifically endorsed the idea and was looking for a resolution to be put to the House. Ordinarily, such a resolution would be put to the House by the Leader of the House. I very much regret that that has not happened, but pragmatically I am seeking, on the back of discussions with the right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham, to broker progress not next month or next year, or at some unspecified point in the distant future, but with effect from tomorrow. The wider issue of other categories can and should of course be properly considered by the House of Commons.

## Universal Credit

3.45 pm

**Margaret Greenwood** (Wirral West) (Lab): On 6 January, it was reported in *The Observer* that the Government had—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The hon. Lady is always ahead of herself. What she does at this stage is say, "To ask the Minister to make a statement on universal credit". We will get her full blast in a moment.

**Margaret Greenwood** (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Minister to make a statement on universal credit.

**The Minister for Employment (Alok Sharma):** As I outlined in the written statement tabled last Friday in the House, we have decided to replace the regulations relating to managed migration previously laid before the House with two new sets of regulations.

These regulations will allow a series of measures relating to universal credit to be put in place. The Government will seek powers in an affirmative set of regulations for a pilot of managed migration so that the Department cannot issue any more migration notices once 10,000 people have been awarded through the process. Those regulations will also deliver on our commitment to provide transitional protection for those managed migrated to universal credit. Separate regulations will put in place a severe disability premium gateway, allowing recipients of this benefit to continue to claim existing benefits until they are managed migrated on to universal credit.

In addition, my statement reported that we were bringing forward the necessary legislation to remove the planned extension of the policy to provide support for a maximum of two children in universal credit. This overall policy ensures that parents receiving benefits face the same financial decisions about the size of their family as those supporting themselves solely through work. We decided, however, that it would not be right to apply the policy to children born before it came into law on 6 April 2017, so we have cancelled that extension.

The benefits freeze up to April 2020 was voted for by Parliament as part of the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016. As a general point, any changes relating to benefits uprating will be brought before Parliament in the usual way.

**Margaret Greenwood:** On 6 January, it was reported in *The Observer* that the Government had decided to ask for powers from Parliament for a pilot of the managed migration of 10,000 people from legacy benefits to universal credit, rather than for a pilot of managed migration as a whole. However, on 7 January at oral questions, and the following day in response to an urgent question, Ministers failed to provide clarification of the Government's plans. Then on Thursday, the Secretary of State told Sky News that she did not expect the social security freeze to be renewed when it came to an end in April 2020.

On Friday 11 January, the Secretary of State made a wide-ranging speech on social security, setting out her intentions in relation to managed migration, private sector rents, childcare costs and the two-child limit, but she did not make it in this House or give Members the



[Margaret Greenwood]

opportunity to ask questions about those really important matters. On the same day, the High Court found in favour of four single mothers who had brought a legal challenge against the Government on the grounds that universal credit failed to take into account their fluctuating incomes after they were paid twice in a month because their paydays fell very near the end of the month.

How do the Government intend to respond to the High Court judgement? Does the Minister think that the two-child limit is fair to the children affected, and will the Government not scrap it altogether? Will they address the key concern with managed migration, which is that nobody's claim for benefits that they are currently receiving must be ended until they have made a successful new claim for universal credit?

Will the Government make sure that the levels set for payments to people in receipt of severe disability premium who have already transferred to universal credit reflect the financial loss they have suffered? Will they take immediate action to ensure that no one has to wait five weeks to receive their initial payment of universal credit? Why are they not cancelling the benefits freeze now rather than waiting until April 2020, given that the Secretary of State says she believes that the reasons for it being introduced no longer apply? Finally, will the Government call a halt to the roll-out of universal credit?

**Alok Sharma:** I thank the hon. Lady for her comments. Very many people outside the House—many stakeholders—have welcomed the statements made in the House on Friday and what the Secretary of State said in her speech. I am sorry that the hon. Lady did not welcome the positive changes that have been made and are being proposed.

The hon. Lady talked about a number of issues, and I shall go through them. She mentioned the legal judgment on Friday; as she acknowledged, that judgment came out literally a few days ago. As a Department, we will consider it very carefully and then respond. On the two-child policy, we have of course made that change; as she will be aware, the regulations were laid on Friday. She talked about the overall two-child policy, and we do believe that the overall policy is fair. Ultimately, those receiving support in the welfare system should face the same sort of choices as those who support themselves solely through work. It is worth pointing out that if a family who supported themselves solely through work decided to have another child, they would not automatically expect their wages to go up. This is about sustainability.

The hon. Lady mentioned the pilot. We have made it clear that that will start in July 2019, and we are working with a wide range of stakeholders on it. She talked about the severe disability premium: those regulations have been laid. She also mentioned the benefits freeze. May I ask her to reflect on the reason why we had to make various policy choices in the past? It was the awful financial mess left us by the last Labour Government. [Interruption.] I am sorry, but she cannot get away from that point.

I have one final thing to say to the hon. Lady. She talks about changes to the five-week period. I have said this in the House before: if she is so keen on supporting claimants, particularly the vulnerable, as we on the

Government Benches are, why did she not vote for the £1.5 billion of support that came in under Budget 2017 and the £4.5 billion of support announced in the 2018 Budget?

**Several hon. Members** rose—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. On account of the fact that a prime ministerial statement is to follow and that we then have eight hours of protected time for the debate on the withdrawal agreement, I will seek to conclude these exchanges by 4.15 pm. I am sure that colleagues will want to factor that into their calculations.

**Mr Kenneth Clarke** (Rushcliffe) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister and his Secretary of State on the progress that they are making on eliminating some of the obvious defects that have emerged in this otherwise highly desirable policy. Does he agree that the problem is that the details were designed by people who were well intentioned but too paternalistic in their attempts to introduce people to the disciplines and normal way of life of people in work? They were often dealing with people who were vulnerable and relying day to day on cash.

When it is affordable, after we have really recovered from the consequences of the financial disaster, will my hon. Friend address the five-week delay in the first payment, which does cause hardship and which I hope will be gone by the time the so-called migration comes to my constituency?

**Alok Sharma:** I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for his support for the policies that we have announced. On the five-week period, we have ensured that people can get support through 100% advances from day one if they require it; two weeks of housing benefit run-on is also available. As part of the package that we announced in the Budget, additional run-on support will be available from 2020.

My right hon. and learned Friend is right: we need to make sure that throughout this process we support the most vulnerable, and that is exactly what the changes that have been announced have been all about.

**Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): First, I want to say how inappropriate it is for the Secretary of State to have made this statement on Friday outside the House and then not even to have bothered to come here today to speak for herself.

We in the Scottish National party welcome this U-turn from the Secretary of State, which vindicates what we, along with a range of charities, women's organisations and faith groups, have been saying since the July Budget in 2015. However, none of us will be fully satisfied as long as the two-child limit applies to births after 6 April 2017: it must be scrapped now. The Secretary of State has already accepted the fundamental unfairness of the two-child limit, so why does the Minister feel that this policy, with its cruel and pernicious rape clause, must continue, even though it has been ruled unfair for other people? Does he not see that it creates a two-tier system in universal credit depending on when children were born? We cannot plan for everything in our lives.

Has the Secretary of State heard the evidence from Turn2us and the Child Poverty Action Group that the two-child policy is forcing women into terminating

healthy pregnancies? Has she heard about the discrimination against religious and ethnic minorities? Does she know that most people claiming this benefit are actually in work, and does she know that in its first year of operation it affected 73,530 people? Where does the 15,000 figure come from?

Friday's court ruling laid bare flaws in universal credit which many Members have been highlighting in relation to the timings of payments. High Court judges said that the DWP had wrongly interpreted the relevant regulations and, shamefully, had tried to justify that on cost grounds. What steps will the Secretary of State take to put that right, and will she stop wasting money in the courts rather than ensuring that our constituents receive what they are fully entitled to?

In its final year alone, the benefit freeze will cut £4.7 billion from the welfare budget, more than the amount that the Chancellor pledged for the work allowance for the next four years. Will the Secretary of State make the case to the Chancellor for scrapping the freeze, which is making life so hard for so many of our constituents?

**Alok Sharma:** I am grateful to the hon. Lady for welcoming the changes that have been announced. She has referred to the Secretary of State. As the hon. Lady will know, the statement about the changes was made in my name, and the regulations were laid in my name. It is therefore entirely appropriate that I should come here and, quite rightly, answer questions asked by colleagues.

The hon. Lady talked about the non-consensual conception clause. Of course I agree with her that women who find themselves in such utterly awful circumstances must be given the help that they need, and that that must be done in the most compassionate way possible. We have discussed the point before, and she knows that it is purely a question of whether the circumstances that are described are consistent with those of someone who has met the criteria for the exception. The individuals who are dealing with this are third-party professionals who already have experience of supporting vulnerable women.

As I have said, we will consider Friday's court judgment and respond to it.

**John Redwood** (Wokingham) (Con): I welcome the emphasis on helping people into work, and the idea that the implementation of the policy should be compassionate. With that in mind, may I ask whether there will be changes in the timing of benefit so that those who are most in need of it receive it earlier, and whether there will be a review of the housing element, which has sometimes caused trouble as well?

**Alok Sharma:** My right hon. Friend is, of course, right: throughout this process, we must provide support for the vulnerable in particular. As he will know, once universal credit is fully rolled out, there will be over £2 billion more in the welfare system than there is under the current legacy benefits. One of the changes made in the Budget was the uplifting of work allowances, which will help young parents and also the disabled.

**Debbie Abrahams** (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): Any improvements in this hideous programme are welcome, but there will still be thousands of universal credit claimants who are moved on to it this year as a

result of natural migration, with no transitional protections. How many people will be pushed into poverty by that move and the Government's lack of compassion in failing to unfreeze the benefits system?

**Alok Sharma:** As I have said previously in the House and as I said earlier this afternoon, we have put more money into the system to support the most vulnerable, which is absolutely right. As for the pilot phase, we will of course work very carefully with stakeholders to make sure that we get it right.

**Sir Nicholas Soames** (Mid Sussex) (Con): I warmly welcome this excellent move by the Department. Will my hon. Friend please pay tribute to the sympathetic, careful, diligent and effective manner in which the staff of the Jobcentre Plus in Haywards Heath carry out their difficult duties?

**Alok Sharma:** My right hon. Friend has highlighted a very important point. He has talked of the incredibly hard-working DWP staff in the Haywards Heath jobcentre, but the Secretary of State and I see the same hard work as we go up and down the country talking to our colleagues in jobcentres. They are all incredibly committed, and they see the benefits of universal credit in helping people and ensuring that claimants have the one-to-one support that was not in place before.

**Stephen Timms** (East Ham) (Lab): I also welcome these modest steps in the right direction, but why did the Secretary of State and the Minister both deny a week ago the change that the Minister has now announced about the separate regulations for the 10,000 migration? Will the Minister respond to the point made by the Father of the House, the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke)? The five-week delay is indefensible; it is forcing people to rely on advances, putting them into debt right at the start of their claim.

**Alok Sharma:** I know that we have had this exchange before, and I am sorry if the right hon. Gentleman feels that I repeat myself. Of course it is important that we get money in people's pockets early. There is no question about that, and that is why we made the changes when we said we would make sure that absolutely anyone who needed it could get up to 100% of their advances up front. I have talked about the two-week run-on for those on housing benefit, which does not have to be repaid, and as the right hon. Gentleman knows in the last Budget we also announced that from July 2020 those on out-of-work DWP benefits will also get a two-week run-on.

**Rachel Maclean** (Redditch) (Con): The manager of the Jobcentre Plus in Redditch said that this is the best system she has seen in 30 years; she has been on the frontline. Does the Minister welcome the fact that today the Resolution Foundation has pointed out that it is those on the lowest end of the income spectrum who are getting back into work, so this is a truly progressive benefit? It is great to see these reforms.

**Alok Sharma:** My hon. Friend highlights an important point. I was at the launch of the Resolution Foundation report this morning, which highlighted precisely the point she has raised. I encourage all colleagues on both

[Alok Sharma]

the Government and Opposition sides to go to their jobcentres and talk—[*Interruption.*] No, if they would talk directly to the people responsible for providing that advice, I think they would find that the system is working.

**Ms Angela Eagle** (Wallasey) (Lab): The Minister should not patronise the Opposition by pretending that somehow we do not all do our constituency duty and we have not been to visit our local jobcentres. I can assure him that we have, and the problem with this benefit is that it was introduced to save money. Large cuts in welfare systems and payments were made. The Minister has put a little bit back, which has got to be welcome, but he has not put back what was taken away, and what was taken away is leaving my constituents relying on food banks with not enough to eat. He needs to recognise that reality.

**Alok Sharma:** May I suggest that if the hon. Lady has time she and I should talk directly to colleagues in the jobcentre in her area? Let us have a discussion with them and see how we can support her constituents even better.

**Huw Merriman** (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): Surely everybody in this place will want to help people on benefits but ultimately transfer them so that they have the opportunity to work and then pay more into the essential public services that they, and indeed we all, need to get by. Given that we have record employment and also record low unemployment, surely this policy must be doing something right to those ends.

**Alok Sharma:** The policies we have put in place since 2010 are working; we can see that in the jobs figures. When we came to power in 2010, some 1.4 million people in the country had been on out-of-work benefits for at least nine of the previous 10 years; that is not a legacy that the Opposition should be proud of.

**Ruth George** (High Peak) (Lab): Yes, universal credit does help Jobcentre Plus workers who are trying to persuade people to go into short-hour jobs and zero-hours contracts where their hours of work fluctuate. We welcome the very small changes to this that will help a few thousand people, but what will the Government be doing to help the thousands on universal credit who were paid a few days early over the Christmas period, then received absolutely nothing for their December-January payment of universal credit and are now suffering arrears of rent and childcare payments because of that which the High Court has just ruled against?

**Alok Sharma:** We will of course respond on the High Court ruling. I am pleased the hon. Lady raised the point about what sort of jobs have been created: just to put it on the record—these are not Government figures; they are from the Office for National Statistics—since 2010 some 75% of all the jobs created are full time, are in high-level occupations and are permanent. That is something I wish Opposition colleagues would acknowledge.

**Nigel Mills** (Amber Valley) (Con): I commend the Minister for these announcements, especially the one on the two-child limit. He appears to have accepted the recommendations of the Select Committee within hours

of its making them. On that theme, if he is looking for ideas, perhaps he missed some of the previous recommendations. For example, in the managed migration that he is now trialling, will he look at moving people on existing benefits over, rather than asking them to make a new claim? That would be a far more effective system, and far better for the claimants.

**Alok Sharma:** I am pleased that my hon. Friend feels that we were able to react in a matter of hours to the recommendations of the Select Committee. I think he is talking about a process of pre-population, and we will of course work throughout the pilot phase. We have responded to the Social Security Advisory Committee with some of the plans that we have. I would point out, however, that when we had the move to employment and support allowance, we underpaid people as a result of having incomplete information.

**Neil Coyle** (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab): I welcome the Minister's commitment to reopening the Wallasey jobcentre in order to meet the commitment that he has just made to my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle). It is five years since the Government began to impose universal credit. Does not this latest change underline the fact that it has failed in its three aims? It is overdue, over budget and overly complex. Should not all the roll-out be halted until all the fundamental flaws are fixed?

**Alok Sharma:** Universal credit has now rolled out across the country, as the hon. Gentleman will be aware, and we will of course continue to proceed with it. He is right to say that we need to get this right for everyone, and that is precisely what the changes are about. Universal credit does work for the vast majority of the people who claim it, but it is absolutely right that we provide support, particularly for the most vulnerable.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): Can the Minister confirm that the spending on universal credit when it is fully rolled out will be some £2 billion a year more than on the existing legacy benefits, and that this could be worth an average of up to £300 per universal credit family?

**Alok Sharma:** My hon. Friend is right to say that there will be more money in the system. I should point out that, under the legacy benefits system, there is £2.4 billion of unclaimed benefits. That will change under universal credit, supporting an estimated 700,000 households who will get paid their full entitlement.

**Chris Stephens** (Glasgow South West) (SNP): Many Opposition Members take representations from trade unions. They are the voice of the DWP workforce, but it often falls on deaf ears in the Government. Is not the reality that the final year of the benefit freeze absolutely undermines any changes that Ministers are trying to make to the benefit system? Will he tell us what representations he and his Department are making to the Treasury to scrap the final year of the benefit freeze?

**Alok Sharma:** I am not going to apologise for repeating that the reason we made so many difficult decisions when we first came into office and in subsequent years was the record deficit left by Labour—[*Interruption.*]



There is no getting away from that. I have already made it clear that when it comes to issues around uprating, these will be announced in the appropriate way to Parliament.

**Mr Ronnie Campbell** (Blyth Valley) (Lab): You gave billions to the banks.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Mr Campbell, it is very early in the week. I cannot put this down to the effects of hot curry, because I doubt that you have consumed any thus far. There are several days to go, and you need to remain calm. You are a very great figure in the House, and I am concerned for your wellbeing.

**Helen Goodman** (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): We have been warning Ministers about this problem of the dates for months, so will the Minister now rule out—what is the word? [*Interruption.*] No! Will he rule out appealing against the court decision?

**Alok Sharma:** Let me repeat this once more. The judgment to which the hon. Lady refers came out on Friday and we are going to have to consider it carefully. We will respond in due course.

**Nigel Huddleston** (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): I applaud the Government for listening and for making essential changes based on evidence brought forward by those on both sides of the Chamber of the House of Commons. Can the Minister assure me that if further evidence comes to light requiring further changes, the Government will continue to listen and make changes as necessary?

**Alok Sharma:** I hope we have shown over the past couple of years that we do listen and that we do make changes. Of course we will continue to do so where that is appropriate.

**Alison McGovern** (Wirral South) (Lab): Sometimes it can be hard to understand what the Minister is really saying to us. Most people call non-consensual conception rape, and that is what we are talking about. Most people in this country would call picking and choosing between the children we choose to support discrimination. The next time they Minister has to come to the House, as he undoubtedly will, to tell us about a policy change in relation to the two-child policy, will he commit to telling us exactly what the characteristics are of the kids that our Government will no longer support?

**Alok Sharma:** I am sorry that the hon. Lady feels unable to welcome the changes. The previous two Budgets have included additional support and, as I just said in answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Worcestershire (Nigel Huddleston), we will see what more we can do where that is appropriate.

**Kevin Hollinrake** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): Universal credit was rolled out in my constituency almost two years ago. The roll-out was largely successful, but there are issues, particularly with payment frequency. Will my hon. Friend commit to continue to listen, learn and make adaptations where necessary?

**Alok Sharma:** My hon. Friend makes an important point, because several of the other issues announced by the Secretary of State relate to looking at more frequent direct payments to private landlords and at alternative payment arrangements, including offering them proactively.

**Owen Smith** (Pontypridd) (Lab): I welcome the fact that the Minister will disapply the policy for 15,000 children and families, but will he confirm whether he will still take more than £2,500 from 640,000 families? What is fair or compassionate about that?

**Alok Sharma:** The hon. Gentleman is right that the policy will support 15,000 families, but we anticipate that 77,000 families and 113,000 children will benefit over a five-year period. It is important that we provide support, but ultimately, as he will know, the overall policy was tested in the courts and was found to be sound.

**Joanna Cherry** (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): Universal credit is now being rolled out in my constituency and across Edinburgh, and I have been meeting those who specialise in advising my constituents on the problems that they encounter in the benefits system. The Community Help and Advice Initiative wants to know why the Government are not halting the roll-out until all universal credit's flaws are properly addressed.

**Alok Sharma:** I think the hon. and learned Lady will find that universal credit has already rolled out in her local area, because the last roll-outs were in December. In terms of providing support, she will be aware of the partnership we now have with Citizens Advice, which will make a difference and help the most vulnerable in particular.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I welcome the changes that the Minister has proposed, but universal credit has created incredible problems in my constituency, including delays and reductions in payments. Will he outline what will be done to assist those who are already in the universal credit system and not on the pilot scheme?

**Alok Sharma:** The hon. Gentleman and I have discussed universal credit before and, as I have said, my door is always open. If he has specific cases, I will be happy to review them.

**Rushanara Ali** (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab): Over 100 MPs supported the cross-party campaign to scrap the two-child limit policy, including the hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss). However, some 3 million children will still be affected by the policy, even though the Government have decided to relax it somewhat. Will the Minister heed MPs' advice and scrap the policy altogether?

**Alok Sharma:** We have listened. In November, I spoke to the hon. Lady and other colleagues about the policy, and we have changed its retrospective nature. However, I point out that the overall policy is about fairness not only to those who receive welfare but, of course, to taxpayers.

**Christine Jardine** (Edinburgh West) (LD): This Government have finally recognised the risk to women and children of giving universal credit to just one member of a household. Will the Minister now explain how the DWP will identify the main caregiver in a household and what other steps will be taken to protect women and children from domestic abuse?

**Alok Sharma:** Payment to a single person in a household is not a unique feature of universal credit, and such payment also exists in the legacy benefits system. The hon. Lady is right that, right now, 60% of all universal credit payments go to the female's bank account. The Secretary of State has announced that we will look at what more we can do to enable the main carer to receive universal credit, and very often that will be the female in the household.

**Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): We have been back for only seven days and this is now the second urgent question on universal credit. Is it not time for the Secretary of State to come to the House and make a Government statement on what she intends to do about the mess of universal credit?

**Alok Sharma:** I am sorry that the hon. Lady is so unhappy. I would have thought that she should be welcoming all the positive changes we have been making. Indeed, the Secretary of State was before the House just last week at Work and Pensions Question Time answering questions on universal credit and other policies.

**Sir Mark Hendrick** (Preston) (Lab/Co-op): When are the Government going to do something about the long-winded, cumbersome and complicated process of applying for universal credit? I have a constituent who applied in September and has received only one payment—we are now in mid-January—mainly because of mistakes made by officials in the Department. When are the Government going to do something about this?

**Alok Sharma:** If the hon. Gentleman has a specific case, I would be very happy to look at it. The timeliness of payments has been increasing under universal credit, but one reason why we may not be able to make full payments to people is that we are waiting to verify some of their costs, which may relate to childcare, rent or whatever. I am very happy to talk to him about the case he raises.

**Sammy Wilson** (East Antrim) (DUP): I know from my private conversations with the Minister that he genuinely wants this system to work, and I welcome the changes he has made. May I suggest that, when it comes to migration from existing legacy benefits, instead of requesting that the applicant provides the information, the Department uses the information already available to work out what payments should be made to the applicant?

**Alok Sharma:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his kind words. Again, he raises the issue of pre-population. In our response to the Social Security Advisory Committee, we have set out what we plan to do, but the key thing is that we need to make sure that we get all the information so that we can pay people the full amount they are due.

**Susan Elan Jones** (Clwyd South) (Lab): Last year, several newspapers carried harrowing accounts of women who were forced to seek abortions simply because of the two-child limit policy. I hear what the Minister says about retrospective changes, but how will the proposal help women who wish to go ahead with an unplanned pregnancy?

**Alok Sharma:** As the hon. Lady will know, we already have a set of exemptions in the policy. We recently announced two further exemptions, but the overall policy was tested in the courts last year and was found to be sound.

**Jonathan Edwards** (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): When will the British Government extend the much-needed transitional protection to people who are migrating naturally through a change of circumstance?

**Alok Sharma:** The best way the hon. Gentleman can make sure we provide support through transitional protection for those who migrate is by supporting the regulations when we vote on them under the affirmative procedure.

**Mike Kane** (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): Sixty bishops wrote to the Government last year condemning the two-child limit. Does the Minister counsel those bishops to advise members of their flock who are considering having a third child to exercise more social responsibility?

**Alok Sharma:** When I met parliamentary colleagues to discuss the two-child policy, the meeting was chaired by the Bishop of Durham. We have made changes to the policy but, overall, this is about being fair to the taxpayer while being sustainable at the same time.

**Dr Philippa Whitford** (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): Some EU citizens are now being refused universal credit as they cannot produce proof of their residency rights. This particularly affects women in caring roles who have worked less and paid less tax. I welcome the Secretary of State's wish to reduce universal credit's impact on women, so will the Department review this scandal before it becomes a new shame on universal credit?

**Alok Sharma:** A clear set of criteria determines whether someone can claim universal credit. If the hon. Lady has a specific case or specific sets of cases, she should come to discuss those with me.

**Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP) *rose*—

**Drew Hendry** (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP) *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Ooh, what a taxing choice! I call Mr Alan Brown.

**Alan Brown:** A good choice, Mr Speaker.

Following on from the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford), has the Minister assessed how many EU citizens who have made their lives here are now routinely being turned down for universal credit? I am thinking of people such as my constituent Laura Nani. Until we got the decision overturned last week, she would have been evicted for rent arrears, and left homeless and penniless. When will the Minister look into this? Will he apologise to my constituent for the DWP getting it wrong? I note that the Prime Minister is sitting next to him, and when I raised this matter at Prime Minister's questions, she dismissed it out of hand.

**Alok Sharma:** Let me be absolutely clear: when we get something wrong in the Department, we apologise, and I write to apologise to individuals and colleagues. Where there are specific cases to raise, I am happy to meet the hon. Gentleman and his colleague.

**Drew Hendry:** You are saving the best for last, Mr Speaker.

For nearly six years, from pilot through to full service roll-out, my constituents in Inverness and then in the rest of my constituency have been suffering and reporting the flaws of universal credit to the Government. Now that the mistakes have been admitted to and the flaws have been acknowledged, what will the Minister do to compensate the people who have endured that suffering?

**Alok Sharma:** Overall, the universal credit policy is absolutely working. It is getting more people into work, which is ultimately what the welfare system is also about. As the hon. Gentleman knows, if he has individual cases, I am happy to take those up with him and to discuss them.

## Leaving the EU

4.21 pm

**The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May):** With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to update the House on the further assurances and clarifications we have received from the European Union on the Northern Ireland protocol.

As a proud Unionist, I share the concerns of Members who want to ensure that in leaving the European Union we do not undermine the strength of our own Union in the UK. That was why, when the EU tried to insist on a protocol that would carve out Northern Ireland from the rest of the UK's customs territory, I said no. I secured instead a UK-wide temporary customs arrangement, avoiding both a hard border on the island of Ireland and a customs border down the Irish sea. I also negotiated substantial commitments in the withdrawal agreement and the political declaration to do everything possible to prevent the backstop ever being needed, and to ensure that if it were, it would be a temporary arrangement. But listening to the debate before Christmas, it was clear that we needed to go further, so I returned to Brussels to faithfully and firmly reflect the concerns of this House.

The conclusions of December's Council went further in addressing our concerns. They included reaffirming the EU's determination to work speedily to establish by 31 December 2020 alternative arrangements so that the backstop will not need to be triggered. They underlined that if the backstop were nevertheless to be triggered, it would indeed apply temporarily. They committed that, in such an event, the EU would use its best endeavours to continue to negotiate and conclude as soon as possible a subsequent agreement that would replace the backstop. They gave a new assurance that negotiations on the future relationship could start immediately after the UK's withdrawal.

Since the Council, and throughout the Christmas and new year period, I have spoken to a number of European leaders, and there have been further discussions with the EU to seek further assurances alongside the Council conclusions. Today, I have published the outcome of these further discussions, with an exchange of letters between the UK Government and the Presidents of the European Commission and European Council. The letter from President Tusk confirms what I said in the House before Christmas, namely that the assurances in the European Council conclusions have legal standing in the EU.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney General has also written to me today confirming that in the light of the joint response from the Presidents of the European Council and the Commission, these conclusions "would have legal force in international law".

He set out his opinion—"reinforced" by today's letter—"that the balance of risks favours the conclusion that it is unlikely that the EU will wish to rely on the implementation of the backstop provisions."

Furthermore, he stated that it is therefore his judgment that

"the current draft Withdrawal Agreement now represents the only politically practicable and available means of securing our exit from the European Union."



[The Prime Minister]

I know that some Members would ideally like a unilateral exit mechanism or a hard time limit to the backstop. I have explained this to the EU and tested these points in negotiations, but the EU would not agree to this because it fears that such a provision could allow the UK to leave the backstop at any time, without any other arrangements in place, and require a hard border to be erected between Northern Ireland and Ireland. I have been very clear with the EU that that is not something we would ever countenance—the UK is steadfast in its commitment to the Belfast agreement and would never allow a return to a hard border—but it is not enough simply to say this. Both sides also need to take steps to avoid a hard border when the UK is outside the EU. To fail to do so would place businesses on the island of Ireland in an impossible position, having to choose between costly new checks and procedures that would disrupt their supply chains or breaking the law.

We therefore have the backstop as a last resort, but both the Taoiseach and I have said consistently that the best way to avoid a hard border is through the future relationship—that is the sustainable solution—and that neither of us wants to use the backstop, so since the Council we have been looking at commitments that would ensure that we get our future relationship or alternative arrangements in place by the end of the implementation period so that there will be no need to enter the backstop and no need for any fear that there will be a hard border. That is why, in the first of the further assurances that it has provided today, the EU has committed to begin exploratory talks on the detailed legal provisions of the future relationship as soon as Parliament has approved the deal and the withdrawal agreement has been signed. The EU has been explicit that that can happen immediately after this House votes through the agreement.

If the House approved the deal tomorrow, it would give us almost two years to complete the next phase of the negotiations, and of course we would have the option to extend the implementation period, were further time needed, for either one or two years. It is my absolute conviction that we can turn the political declaration into legal text in that time, thereby avoiding the need for the backstop altogether.

The letters also make it clear that these talks should give

“particular urgency to discussion of ideas, including the use of all available facilitative arrangements and technologies, for replacing the backstop with permanent arrangements”,

and furthermore that those arrangements

“are not required to replicate”

the backstop “provisions in any respect”. So, contrary to the fears of some hon. Members, the EU will not simply insist that the backstop is the only way to avoid a hard border. It has agreed to discuss technological solutions and any alternative means of delivering on this objective, and to get on with that as a priority in the next phase of negotiations.

Secondly, the EU has now committed to a fast-track process to bring our future trade deal into force once it has been agreed. The Commission has now said that if there is any delay in ratification, it will recommend

provisionally applying the relevant parts of the agreement so that we would not need to enter the backstop. Such a provisional application process saved four years on the EU-Korea deal, and it would prevent any delays in ratification by other EU member state Parliaments from delaying our deal coming into force.

Thirdly, the EU has provided absolute clarity on the explicit linkage between the withdrawal agreement and the political declaration, and made that link clear in the way the documents are presented. I know that some colleagues are worried about an imbalance between the withdrawal agreement and the political declaration, because the EU cannot reach a legal agreement with us on the future relationship until we are a third country, but the link between them means that the commitments of one cannot be banked without the commitments of the other. The EU has been clear that they come as a package. Bad faith by either side in negotiating the legal instruments that will deliver the future relationship laid out in the political declaration would be a breach of their legal obligations under the withdrawal agreement.

Fourthly, the exchange of letters confirms that the UK can unilaterally deliver all the commitments that we made last week to safeguard the interests of the people and businesses of Northern Ireland and their position in our precious Union, for it gives clear answers to address some questions that have been raised since the deal was reached—that the deal means no change to the arrangements that underpin north-south co-operation in the Belfast agreement; that Stormont will have a lock on any new laws that the EU proposes should be added to the backstop; and that the UK can give a restored Northern Ireland Executive a seat at the table on the joint committee overseeing the deal.

President Juncker says explicitly in his letter that the backstop

“would represent a suboptimal trading arrangement for both sides.”

We have spoken at length about why we want to avoid the backstop, but it is not in the EU’s interests either, for this backstop gives the UK tariff-free access to the EU’s market, and it does so with no free movement of people, no financial contribution, no requirement to follow most of the level playing field rules and no need to allow EU boats any access to our waters for fishing. Furthermore, under these arrangements, UK authorities in Northern Ireland would clear goods for release into the EU single market with no further checks or controls. This is unprecedented and means the EU relying on the UK for the functioning of its own market, so the EU will not want this backstop to come into force, and the exchange of letters today makes it clear that, if it did, the EU would do all it could to bring it to an end as quickly as possible.

Nevertheless, I fully understand that these new assurances still will not go as far as some would like. I recognise that some Members wanted to see changes to the withdrawal agreement, a unilateral exit mechanism from the backstop, an end date or rejecting the backstop altogether, although it should be said that that would have risked other EU member states attempting to row back on the significant wins that we have already achieved, such as on control over our waters or on the sovereignty of Gibraltar. The simple truth is that the EU was not prepared to agree to this and rejecting the backstop altogether means no deal. Whatever version of the future relationship Members

might want to see—from Norway to Canada, to any number of variations—all require a withdrawal agreement, and any withdrawal agreement would contain the backstop. That will not change however the House votes tomorrow. To those who think that we should reject this deal in favour of no deal because we cannot get every assurance we want, I ask what a no-deal Brexit would do to strengthen the hand of those campaigning for Scottish independence or, indeed, of those demanding a border poll in Northern Ireland. Surely that is the real threat to our Union.

With just 74 days until 29 March, the consequences of voting against this deal tomorrow are becoming ever clearer. With no deal, we would have no implementation period, no security partnership, no guarantees for UK citizens overseas and no certainty for businesses and workers such as those I met in Stoke this morning. We would also see changes to everyday life in Northern Ireland that would put the future of our Union at risk. And if, rather than leaving with no deal, this House blocked Brexit, that would be a subversion of our democracy, saying to the people whom we were elected to serve that we were unwilling to do what they had instructed.

I say to Members from all parts of this House that, whatever you may have previously concluded, over these next 24 hours give this deal a second look. No, it is not perfect and, yes, it is a compromise, but when the history books are written, people will look at the decision of this House tomorrow and ask: did we deliver on the country's vote to leave the European Union; did we safeguard our economy, our security and our Union; or did we let the British people down? I say that we should deliver for the British people and get on with building a brighter future for our country by backing this deal tomorrow. I commend this statement to the House.

4.33 pm

**Jeremy Corbyn** (Islington North) (Lab): I thank the Prime Minister for an advance copy of her statement.

In December, the Government shamefully pulled the meaningful vote on the Prime Minister's deal, with the promise that she would secure legal assurances from the EU that the backstop would be temporary. The Leader of the House confirmed that when she said:

"The Prime Minister is determined to get the legal reassurances that...Members want to see."—[*Official Report*, 20 December 2018; Vol. 651, c. 1013.]

The Foreign Secretary told us that the Prime Minister would "find a way" to win tomorrow's Commons vote by getting assurances with "legal force" that the Irish border backstop is only temporary. On receiving today's letter to the Prime Minister from the Presidents of the European Commission and the Council, it must now be clear to all Members across this House that, yet again, the Prime Minister has completely and utterly failed to do that. Today's letter is nothing more than a repetition of exactly the same position that was pulled more than one month ago. It categorically does not give the legal assurances that this House was promised, and contains nothing but warm words and aspirations.

Is it not the case that absolutely nothing has changed from the Attorney General's letter of advice to the Cabinet? His advice, which the Government tried to hide, explained with great clarity the reasons why the

UK could find itself locked into the Northern Ireland backstop protocol with no legal escape route. Today's letter means nothing. The truth remains that by the end of 2020 the UK will face a choice of either extending the transition period, which comes at an unknown financial cost, or falling into the backstop, which the Attorney General has said endures indefinitely until such time as an agreement supersedes it.

The Attorney General has updated his legal advice today, as the Prime Minister just said, and he clearly says that the assurances do not alter the "fundamental meanings" as he advised the Government in November. If there were legally binding assurances on the temporary nature of the backstop, surely they would have been written into the withdrawal agreement itself. The letter published this morning is clear that this is not possible, saying,

"we are not in a position to agree to anything that changes or is inconsistent with the Withdrawal Agreement".

This morning's joint letter does say that

"negotiations can start as soon as possible after the withdrawal of the United Kingdom."

But my question to the Prime Minister is: how is that possible when the Cabinet cannot agree it amongst themselves? That is why the political declaration is so vague. Actually, I believe that the right word is "nebulous".

Given that the Prime Minister has failed to secure the promised changes, there can be no question of once again ducking accountability and avoiding tomorrow's vote: no more playing for time; no more running down the clock to scare people into backing this damaging shambles of a deal. I am sure that Members across the House will not be fooled by what has been produced today. It is clear that what we are voting on this week is exactly the same deal that we should have voted on in December. I am sure the Prime Minister knows this, which is why today she is trying to blame others for this chaos.

Given the lack of support for the Prime Minister's deal, we might have thought that she would try to reach out to MPs. Instead she is claiming that, by failing to support her botched deal, Members are threatening to undermine the faith of the British people in our democracy. The only people who are undermining faith in our democracy are the Government themselves. I can think of no greater example of democracy in action than for this House to reject a deal that is clearly bad for this country. During the past two years of shambolic negotiations the Prime Minister has failed to listen. She has not once tried to work with Parliament to construct a Brexit deal that this House and the country can support, and now she is left facing a humiliating defeat and is blaming everybody but herself.

If this deal is rejected tomorrow—and I hope it is—the blame will lie firmly with the Government and firmly at the feet of the Prime Minister. There is a deal that could command support in the House that would include a new and comprehensive customs union, a strong single market relationship, and a guarantee to keep pace with European Union rights and standards. Instead, the Prime Minister still chooses to take the most reckless path.

As we enter the week of the meaningful vote, we should remember that the meaningful vote is only happening because of pressure from the Opposition in

[Jeremy Corbyn]

this House. Let us remember the incompetence that we have been forced to endure. We have seen two years of shambolic negotiations; red lines announced, then cast aside. We are now on our third Brexit Secretary, all of whom have been largely excluded from the vital stages of the negotiations. We were promised the easiest trade deal in history, yet we have seen a divided Government deliver a botched withdrawal deal with nothing more than a vague outline of what our future relationship with the EU will be. Meanwhile, conditions in this country for millions of people continue to get worse. We just had an urgent question about universal credit and the disaster that is for millions of people in this country.

The Government are in disarray. It is clear: if the Prime Minister's deal is rejected tomorrow, it is time for a general election; it is time for a new Government.

**The Prime Minister:** I am not sure that there were many questions to me in the response that the right hon. Gentleman gave, but let me respond to some of the points of fact that he referenced, some of which were perhaps not as correct as they might have been.

The right hon. Gentleman said that there is no legal termination mechanism in the withdrawal agreement on the backstop. There is, but the point is that it is not a unilateral termination mechanism—it is a termination mechanism that requires agreement between the two parties.

The right hon. Gentleman said that in December 2020 we would face either having the backstop or the implementation period extension. Of course, the point is that we are negotiating to ensure that at that point no such choice will be necessary because we will have the future arrangement in place.

The right hon. Gentleman says that it is not possible to start the negotiations as soon as the meaningful vote has been held and agreement has been given to the withdrawal agreement and the political declaration. Indeed, Whitehall stands ready to start those negotiations. We have been looking at this, because we know the basis of those negotiations—it is in the political declaration—and everybody is ready to start those as soon as possible.

The right hon. Gentleman talked at the end about universal credit. May I just remind him that under this Government 3.4 million more jobs have been created? That means all those people being able to earn a regular wage to help support their families. Under universal credit, we see a system that is helping people get into the workplace rather than leaving them living on benefits for nearly a decade, as happened under the last Labour Government.

Finally, the right hon. Gentleman called, as he does regularly, for a general election. Here, as I think we saw yesterday, he is not thinking about the national interest—he is merely playing politics, because yesterday, when asked whether, if there was a general election, he would actually campaign to leave the European Union, he refused to answer that question five times. We know where we stand—we are leaving the European Union and this Government will deliver it.

**Mr Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe) (Con):** I congratulate the Prime Minister on getting rather further than I thought she would with the assurances and the letters that she has obtained, but I fear it will do no good,

because she is up against two bodies of opinion. One is the hard-line Brexiteers on this side, and the Leader of the Opposition and his Front Bench, who think that if they cause crisis and deadlock it will result in leaving with no deal. The others are a lot of hard-line remainers, largely on the Labour Back Benches, who think that if they cause chaos and deadlock it will lead to a second referendum. One of them is wrong, but the problem is that she is up against both of them.

Does the Prime Minister accept that if we lift our eyes from the present chaos and look to what the country needs, beyond our leaving the EU, if the House of Commons can insist on doing that, we need a permanently open border in Ireland for treaty and security reasons, and we need a permanently open border, for economic reasons, across the channel for our trade and investment? Does she accept that it is difficult to proceed until there is some consensus for that across the House of Commons, and it does not look as though we are going to get there by 29 March, which is a date that should obviously be delayed?

**The Prime Minister:** I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for his points. I do not believe that the date of 29 March should be delayed. He set out that there are those who want to see no deal and those who want to see a second referendum and potentially frustrate Brexit. The inexorable logic of that, if this House wants to ensure that we deliver on Brexit for the British people, is to back the deal that will be before the House tomorrow.

Obviously we want to ensure that there is a consistently and sustainably open border into the long term between Northern Ireland and Ireland. That is our commitment—to ensure that there is no hard border there. There would be economic advantage in an open border and frictionless trade between the UK and the European Union, and that is exactly the proposal that the Government have put forward.

**Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP):** I thank the Prime Minister for an advance copy of her statement, though I am left asking myself, “Is that it? Is that all you've got, Prime Minister?” Nothing has fundamentally changed. It is a wishlist.

With little more than 24 hours until this House votes on the Prime Minister's deal, she has come back completely humiliated. The letters published between the UK Government and the European Union reveal that she has utterly failed to get the concessions she promised. The EU letter explicitly insists that there cannot be any renegotiation of the backstop or the withdrawal agreement. It states:

“we are not in a position to agree to anything that changes or is inconsistent with the Withdrawal Agreement”.

The Prime Minister is simply in fantasy land, presenting her statement as bringing changes when it does not. This Government must stop threatening no deal. It is time to face reality, extend article 50 and let the people decide.

In Scotland, people know that it is the Tory Government dragging Scotland out of the European Union against our will. It is the Tories treating the Scottish Parliament with contempt, and it is this Prime Minister and this Tory party who continue to silence Scotland's voice and sideline our interests. The Prime Minister said this morning:



“What if we found ourselves in a situation where Parliament tried to take the UK out of the EU in opposition to a remain vote? People’s faith in the democratic process and their politicians would suffer catastrophic harm”,

and yet she is demanding precisely that of Scotland, taking Scotland out of the EU in opposition to an overwhelming remain vote. To people in Scotland, the Prime Minister has made it clear time and time again that our voices are not to be listened to. She talks about respecting the results of referendums, but this is the same Prime Minister who voted against Welsh devolution and voted to wreck the Scottish devolution referendum result.

This is a defining moment. The people of Scotland know more than ever what comes from a Tory Government we did not vote for. Why does the Prime Minister continue to ignore Scotland’s voice and Scotland’s interests? Why is she so petrified of allowing the people to decide, now that we know the facts? If she is not, will she now do the right thing—extend article 50 and let the people decide?

**The Prime Minister:** The people across the United Kingdom did decide; they decided in June 2016 that we should leave the European Union, and it is absolutely right that this Government are committed to delivering on the vote of the British people.

The right hon. Gentleman talks about the interests of Scotland. As he knows, the interests of Scotland are best served by ensuring that Scotland remains a part of the United Kingdom. If the Scottish National party is so clear that politicians should listen to the voice of the people, it should listen to the voice of the Scottish people expressed in the referendum in 2014 and abandon the idea of independence.

**John Redwood** (Wokingham) (Con): Given that the EU intends to take huge sums of money and powers off us in return for just 21 or 45 months of more talks and massive uncertainty, why should we ever believe the EU would give us a good deal when it pockets all that it wants up front?

**The Prime Minister:** Throughout the negotiations, we have actually ensured that the European Union has had to concede to the United Kingdom Government in a whole range of areas on which it did not wish to concede. If we look into the future, my right hon. Friend and I do have a difference of opinion on this in that he believes that World Trade Organisation terms are right for our future trade with the European Union, but I think that a more ambitious free trade agreement between us and the European Union is what is right. That is what is set out in the political declaration, and that is what I believe is the good deal for the UK in leaving the EU.

**Sir Vince Cable** (Twickenham) (LD): The Prime Minister has confirmed today that, under her deal, Britain will remain between two and four years—possibly longer—in a customs union. The Leader of the Opposition is supporting Brexit with a somewhat longer period in a customs union. With that relatively small difference, are they not essentially two peas in a pod?

**The Prime Minister:** No, definitely not.

**Sir William Cash** (Stone) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend confirm what she said at Stoke today: namely, that she will never extend—never extend—the date of our leaving beyond 29 March this year, and never in any circumstances whatsoever allow the repeal of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, or of the repeal of the European Communities Act 1972 under that Act?

**The Prime Minister:** I did indeed confirm that our intent and what the Government are working for is to leave the European Union on 29 March. There are those who may try to find ways to prevent that from happening—I think that is a real risk—but the Government are firm in their commitment in relation to leaving the European Union.

On the issue that my hon. Friend has raised on the withdrawal Act, we have passed the withdrawal Act through this House—through this Parliament—and it does repeal the European Communities Act 1972. Of course, for the period of the implementation period, it would be necessary within the WAB—the withdrawal agreement Bill—as my hon. Friend knows, to ensure that we are still able to maintain the rules that we need to operate by in order to abide by the negotiated agreement on the implementation period, but I can assure him that it remains the commitment of this Government to leave the European Union on 29 March.

**Edward Miliband** (Doncaster North) (Lab): I know the Prime Minister is totally sincere in her sense of duty to this country and in her belief in her deal, but I want to turn her attention to something she does not want to contemplate, which is defeat tomorrow night. I say to her in the strongest terms that the tone and substance she strikes in the wake of that eventuality will define her legacy to this country. I want to urge her not to succumb to the absurd argument that this is a war between this House and the Government, when this Government are a servant of this House. I want to urge her also, if she loses tomorrow night, to give this House an open and honest process where it can express its view, and she and the Government then become the servant of this House in the negotiations.

**The Prime Minister:** The Government are the servant of the people: we are ensuring that we are delivering what the people want in relation to Brexit. We have negotiated what I believe genuinely is a good deal for the United Kingdom, and that is why I will continue to encourage Members of this House to support it.

**Mr Owen Paterson** (North Shropshire) (Con): It is absolutely clear: the British Government, the Irish Government and the European Union have always said that there will be no hard border between Northern Ireland and the Republic, and today’s border works perfectly satisfactorily with electronic means. It is extraordinary and exasperating that we are still stuck on the question of the backstop, when the Prime Minister has met technical experts who know that existing techniques and processes could deliver smooth delivery of that border. What meetings have been held since she met those experts prior to pulling the vote in December?

**The Prime Minister:** It is exactly those sorts of technological solutions that we are committed to pursuing. As I said to my right hon. Friend when he brought a

[The Prime Minister]

proposal to me, the proposal he brought to me did not fully address all the issues in relation to the border between Northern Ireland and Ireland, but we are continuing to look—and will look actively and with the European Union—at the ways in which we could ensure that those alternative arrangements would deal with the issue that we are addressing.

May I also say to my right hon. Friend that it is not the case that the European Union has said that there will be no hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland? The no-deal plans published by the European Commission in December make it clear that there will be no flexibility on border checks in no deal, so the Irish Government will be expected to apply EU checks in full.

**Nigel Dodds** (Belfast North) (DUP): To be fair to the EU, it has made it clear that there will be no changes to the withdrawal agreement, and there is nothing in these letters that is inconsistent with the withdrawal agreement. To be fair to the Attorney General, he says in his letter today that the letters do not alter the fundamental meanings of its provisions. Five weeks after the Prime Minister pulled the vote, saying that there had to be a legally binding assurance, will she admit that nothing has fundamentally changed? That is the reality; let us not kid ourselves about that. In pulling the vote, she must have realised that there needed to be legally binding changes to the withdrawal agreement for it to have any chance of getting through this House. Even at this late stage, does she not accept that the problem with the backstop is that it effectively defines the future relationship for Northern Ireland, because if the whole of the UK is not aligned to a high degree for single market purposes and we are not in a customs union, Northern Ireland will be?

**The Prime Minister:** It was right that I took the views of this House. The overwhelming view of this House on the backstop was that people wanted to ensure that it would not carry on indefinitely or be a permanent arrangement. The right hon. Gentleman has just indicated that he thinks that that is the case for the backstop. What we have received from the European Union are those further assurances and the recognition that the European Council conclusion in which some of those assurances are referred to does have legal force in international law and effectively sits alongside the withdrawal agreement and the political declaration package, and that it would be part of any consideration on any challenge to the withdrawal agreement in relation to those particular issues.

I recognise that what I have brought back, as I said in my statement, is not what some Members wanted from the European Union, but it is not the case that this has not gone further than when we were initially discussing the debate. There have been some further assurances from the European Union, but I accept that they are not the same level of assurances that some Members of this House wished for.

**Anna Soubry** (Broxtowe) (Con): The Prime Minister is right when she says that she is the servant of the people. There are 2 million young people who were not able to vote back in 2016, two and a half years ago. [Interruption.] I am so sorry that hon. Members on this side of the House seem to be in some way dismissing

those young people. They are the future of our country. The Treasury's own analysis shows that, whichever way we cut it, Brexit is going to make our country poorer. Why should those young people not have a right to a say in their future, given that they will bear the brunt of Brexit? Why, when the Prime Minister's deal fails tomorrow, can it not go back to the British people, so that everybody, especially young people, can have their say on their future and on Brexit?

**The Prime Minister:** My right hon. Friend has asked me questions in relation to putting a decision back to the British people in the past, as have other hon. and right hon. Members, and referred to a new generation of young people who were not able to vote in the 2016 referendum. This House was very clear that this was a decision to be taken in that referendum and that Government would abide by the decision that was taken in that referendum, and 80% of the votes cast at the last general election were for parties that said that they would respect the result of the referendum. I believe that we should respect the result of the referendum and ensure that we deliver leaving the European Union.

**Hilary Benn** (Leeds Central) (Lab): We will find out tomorrow evening whether the House is willing to support the Prime Minister's deal, but what is now clear is that the EU will not be able to offer any further help, because as long as it continues to say

“we are not in a position to agree to anything that changes...the Withdrawal Agreement”,

a number of her Back Benchers will not be reassured. While the Prime Minister will, for the next 26 hours at least, argue that we should back her deal, can I invite her today to commit, if she loses, to reaching out across the House to try to find a way out of the crisis that is facing our country that can command the support of Parliament, and if it is necessary in order to do that, to being willing to seek an extension to article 50?

**The Prime Minister:** Of course, the House will give its view tomorrow night. I will be continuing to encourage Members of this House to vote for what I believe to be a good deal. The right hon. Gentleman might have noticed that, actually, I have been meeting and hearing from Members from across the House on this particular issue. I continue to believe that this is a good deal, because it delivers on the referendum. It is crucial that this House delivers on the referendum and does so in a way that protects people's jobs and security, and gives certainty to businesses. That is why I believe it is a good deal.

**Sir Patrick McLoughlin** (Derbyshire Dales) (Con): No one is ever going to get what they fully want out of negotiations, but the very simple fact is that all the leaders of our major industries, including Rolls-Royce, Toyota and Jaguar Land Rover, have said that this is the right deal for them to continue winning markets and employing people in this country. Is that not one of the most important decisions we should bear in mind in trying to protect manufacturing jobs and our country's future?

**The Prime Minister:** My right hon. Friend is absolutely right, but it is not just leaders of manufacturing industry. He is absolutely right that they have made clear it that this is a good deal and a deal that should be supported,

but others have too. For example, Scottish fishermen and farmers have also been saying that this is a deal that should be supported. When Members think about the jobs of their constituents, it is important that they remember that.

**Liz Saville Roberts** (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): The Prime Minister comes hot-foot from her speech in Stoke where she commanded us to honour the result of the referendum, yet in 1997 she voted against legislation to establish the National Assembly of Wales and in 2005 she stood on a manifesto calling for another referendum, with the option to overturn the result. How does the Prime Minister square her personal track record on referendums with such commands?

**The Prime Minister:** The Conservative party went into opposition in 1997. We accepted the result of the referendum vote in Wales. *[Interruption.]* Yes. We made clear at the time that we respected the result of that referendum in Wales. I think anybody who sees the Welsh Assembly today, and what it has been doing over recent years, will recognise that that was the right decision.

**Mr David Jones** (Clwyd West) (Con): I commend my right hon. Friend for listening to the concerns of hon. Members, and for seeking to obtain further concessions and clarifications from the European Union, but does not the use of the words by Presidents Juncker and Tusk that

“we are not in a position to agree to anything that changes or is inconsistent with the Withdrawal Agreement,”

simply serve to underline those concerns and make it all the more likely that hon. Members will reject the withdrawal agreement tomorrow?

**The Prime Minister:** The concern that Members overwhelmingly raised was the issue of whether or not the backstop could continue indefinitely. The European Union, within the withdrawal agreement in a number of ways, makes it clear that the backstop can only be a temporary arrangement. It has given further assurance in Council conclusions, which, as I say, have legal force in international law. That has been confirmed here in the UK, so it has gone further than it did within the withdrawal agreement. I have said to the House on many occasions that there is no deal with the European Union that does not involve a withdrawal agreement and there is no deal that does not involve having a backstop, as a commitment to the people of Northern Ireland that there will be no hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland.

**Yvette Cooper** (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): The Prime Minister called on everyone this morning to

“move beyond division and come together”.

Does she not recognise that she has made the divisions worse and made it harder for people to come together by not consulting either Parliament or the public on her red lines or the negotiating objectives, and by ducking and delaying votes? Does she not recognise that brinkmanship is the worst possible way to make such big decisions for the future of our country? Will she tell the House now that she has not ruled out extending article 50 if her plan is rejected tomorrow?

**The Prime Minister:** As I have said on many occasions in this House—I have come regularly to the House and answered questions from Members on the position that the Government have been taking on these particular matters—I am clear, and it is in our legislation, that we should leave the European Union on 29 March this year.

**Sir Nicholas Soames** (Mid Sussex) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister reconfirm to the House that whatever the future trading relationship that the United Kingdom wishes to have with the European Union, the withdrawal agreement is clearly absolutely necessary to securing it?

**The Prime Minister:** My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. The point is that there are two issues: how we leave the European Union and what our future relationship will be. Any trade agreement that we would wish to agree with the European Union will require us to have agreed the details of the withdrawal agreement. As I have said previously, any withdrawal agreement will include a backstop.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** I am looking for a new, young Member. I call Mr Barry Sheerman.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Thank you, Mr Speaker. Will the Prime Minister go back to that very good question asked by her colleague the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), who made a very intelligent plea for more time? This decision will be one of the most important we take in 100 years, let alone this century. Why should we rush it? It is complex, and the Prime Minister’s statement today shows how complex it is. We need more time. Why can we not have it?

**The Prime Minister:** On 29 March, it will be almost three years since people voted for us to leave the European Union. This House voted overwhelmingly to trigger article 50 in the knowledge that the process had a set time and that that meant we would be leaving on a particular date.

**Mr Mark Francois** (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): The withdrawal agreement is a draft international treaty. If we were to vote for it tomorrow and then ratify it, it would be binding upon us in international law. It would outrank legally any motion or amendment of this House, or even an Act of Parliament. The agreement confirms that in black and white in article 4 on page 11. The question is whether the letters have any legal power over the treaty. The Prime Minister quoted from the operative paragraph 2 of the Attorney General’s advice. Forgive me, but she quoted selectively. The paragraph, which is brief, reads:

“I agree that in the light of this response, the Council’s conclusions of 13 December 2018 would have legal force in international law and thus be relevant and cognisable in the interpretation of the Withdrawal Agreement, and in particular the Northern Ireland Protocol, albeit they do not alter the fundamental meanings of its provisions as I advised them to be on 13 November 2018.”

In other words, the letters do not overrule the treaty. They are a fig leaf, and a small fig leaf at that. Is that not true?

**The Prime Minister:** The letters are additional to the text in the treaty and they do have force in international law. I say to my right hon. Friend that I was clear in my



[The Prime Minister]

statement, and I have said since, that I recognise that what we have from the European Union does not go as far as some Members of this House would like and prefer it to go, but we have those further assurances that sit alongside the withdrawal agreement. In any position in which the backstop within the withdrawal agreement was being challenged, they would be part of that consideration. As has been said, they have force in international law.

**Mr Chris Leslie** (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): To be clear on the Prime Minister's strategy, she is asking us to trust her and agree to get past exit day before we even start to negotiate the whole future relationship between the EU and the UK. Does she not accept that that would be a massive leap in the dark? Anything could happen in that two-year period. For example, who will be her successor concluding those negotiations?

**The Prime Minister:** The political declaration sets out the instructions to the negotiators for the next stage in relation not just to the trade arrangements but to the security arrangements and some issues underpinning all of those, such as the questions of data exchange. Those are the instructions according to which the negotiators for the next stage will be working in order to change it into a legal text. It is not possible for the EU to agree a legally binding text of the trade agreement with a country that is a member of the EU; it has to wait until we are a third country and outside the EU.

**Greg Hands** (Chelsea and Fulham) (Con): The Prime Minister will have read the comments from leading European Commission officials at the very highest levels about the withdrawal agreement since it was finalised. Sabine Weyand, Michel Barnier's deputy, has said:

"This requires the Customs Union as the basis for the future relationship".

She has also said:

"They must align their rules, but the EU will retain all the controls".

Finally, she said:

"The EU retains its leverage".

Martin Selmayr, the secretary-general of the Commission, has said:

"The power is with us".

He also told the *Passauer Neue Presse* on 7 December that the agreement showed that

"leaving the EU...doesn't work".

Those in Brussels clearly believe it is a great deal for them. Why is the Prime Minister seemingly equally enthusiastic in thinking this is a great deal for the UK?

**The Prime Minister:** I know that a number of Members were concerned about the phraseology in the political declaration around the future relationship in relation to customs and about building on the protocol and the assumption that therefore what was in the protocol would effectively have to be taken forward into that future relationship. In fact, the letters we have received today from the EU make it clear that that is not the case. My right hon. Friend asks why I believe this is a good deal. I believe it is a good deal because, as I have said previously, it delivers on the vote of the referendum—control of money, borders and laws; out of the common fisheries policy and common agricultural policy; the

ability to have an independent trade policy—and enables us to do so in a way that protects jobs and security and gives certainty to businesses.

**Kate Hoey** (Vauxhall) (Lab): I genuinely respect the Prime Minister's willingness to come back time after time to talk to Parliament and the public about her deal, even if today she has not really brought back anything very different—if we are honest. Will she state very clearly that this Parliament voted to give the people the opportunity to decide whether to leave or not to leave, not this Parliament, and will she therefore state categorically that, whatever happens tomorrow night and in the next few weeks, we will be leaving on 29 March, because that is what the people voted for?

**The Prime Minister:** We will be leaving the EU on 29 March. I believe it is important that Parliament delivers on the vote that people took in 2016. As I just said in response to the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman), Parliament voted to trigger article 50 with the two-year timeframe it contained. For the sake of our democracy, it is important that we deliver on the Brexit vote in 2016.

**Mary Creagh** (Wakefield) (Lab): In Wakefield on Saturday, a man approached me to say that, on the day the Prime Minister delayed the vote, his business lost a multi-million-pound contract and, as a result, his order book was empty and redundancies were starting. Her delay has achieved nothing, apart from paradoxically leaving her a little safer in her job, thanks to surviving a vote of no confidence, and my constituents quite a lot less safe in their jobs. After her deal is voted down tomorrow, will she extend article 50 and work across the House to give our constituents the option to vote again but this time on what they know will happen, which is continued uncertainty in the trading relationship between their businesses and the EU for at least the next four years?

**The Prime Minister:** Business is absolutely clear that the certainty it requires is the certainty that will be given by agreeing this deal.

**Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): To guarantee Brexit, the Prime Minister should prorogue Parliament until April—tempting, isn't it?

**The Prime Minister:** My right hon. Friend is trying to tempt me down a road that I do not think I should go down. Were Parliament to prorogue until April, I would be denied the opportunity to see my right hon. Friend and answer his questions on a regular basis, and that would be very sad.

**Mr George Howarth** (Knowsley) (Lab): I accept that the Prime Minister has tried her best, but does she not accept that everything she has said today does not alter the fact that she has no majority in this Parliament and no authority in the country, and that her Government now serve no useful purpose?

**The Prime Minister:** I say to the right hon. Gentleman that the Government are getting on with what we believe is right in putting a deal to this Parliament to deliver on Brexit and for the British people. I also say to him that this is not the only thing that this Government have been involved in. I would hope that, when he talks about what the Government have been doing, he would recognise the importance of the long-term plan for the

national health service and the significant investment in the national health service that the Government have agreed and are going to put in.

**Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg** (North East Somerset) (Con): In her statement, my right hon. Friend pointed out that the EU will not agree to an end date to the backstop or a unilateral exit mechanism. Does that make her doubt its sincerity when it says that it does not really want the backstop?

**The Prime Minister:** The concern that the European Union has about those two options are, as I said in my statement, that somehow the United Kingdom would engineer a situation where it simply pulled out and there was a hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland. It wants to guarantee that there would be no such hard border.

I have said to the European Union that Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom: we want to guarantee that commitment to the people of Northern Ireland—it is important, because they are part of the United Kingdom. But the European Union has been clear that in every circumstance, whatever trade agreement was negotiated in future and whatever the withdrawal agreement, it would require a backstop to be part of that.

What we can do is ensure that we get the future relationship in place, such that the backstop is never needed and that, were it to be needed, it would be only temporary. It is getting that future relationship in place that enables us to ensure the long-term sustainability of the guarantee that we have given the people of Northern Ireland.

**Luciana Berger** (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): In spite of what we heard from the Prime Minister just a few minutes ago, she was one of 144 Tory MPs who voted against the foundation of the Welsh Assembly back in December 1999; that was 18 months after the referendum result. Why was it acceptable for her to do that then, given that today she has ruled out the opportunity for this country, including 2 million young people who did not have a say back in 2016, to have a people's vote on the actual terms of the withdrawal agreement?

**The Prime Minister:** I did not answer the specific point about young people when my right hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry) raised that question, so I would like to address it now.

I recognise that there are people today who are now eligible to vote who were not eligible to vote in 2016. But I have to say to Members who say that that is a reason for having a second vote that actually, regardless of how that vote went, people could say in two years' time that there was another group of young people who should be voting and therefore we should have another vote. No, Parliament was clear: the decision in 2016 was a decision that would be delivered.

**Victoria Prentis** (Banbury) (Con): Tempting as it is to sex up international law by talking about fig leaves, could the Prime Minister confirm to me that the status of these letters from the EU today is that they are legally binding if we were to have, say, an arbitration under international law in the future?

**The Prime Minister:** I am very happy to respond to my hon. Friend, who, with her legal experience, has rather more experience of these matters than I do. That is right: the letters do have that legal force and they would be taken into account. In looking at any arbitration or dispute that arose, they would be part of the consideration that would be taken into account, so they do have that legal force.

**Stephen Doughty** (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): May I gently say to the Prime Minister that whatever our views on Brexit across the House, we are all patriots? It is not subversive to take a different view from the Prime Minister; it is simply democracy in action. It is not subversive because otherwise the position that the Prime Minister and the Conservative party took for nearly eight years after Welsh devolution would also have been subversive. It was not: it was just a different point of view.

I am very proud that the Welsh Assembly is in my constituency, and that it is there today. Does the Prime Minister not agree that there is a fundamental difference between Welsh devolution and Brexit? Support for Welsh devolution grew, which is why the Prime Minister was not successful in her call for another referendum or abolition of the Welsh Assembly. Support for Brexit has fallen, and that is exactly why we need to put it back to the people.

**The Prime Minister:** I am afraid I do not accept the underlying premise of the hon. Gentleman's question, which is that support for Brexit has fallen. There are indeed people who say that they voted leave but would now vote to remain. There are also people who say that they voted remain but would now vote to leave the European Union. The overwhelming view that is expressed to me when I knock on doors and hear from people directly is that they just want the Government to get on with the job that the people gave the Government—the job of leaving the EU.

**Vicky Ford** (Chelmsford) (Con): Last week the shadow Brexit secretary, the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), implied that he supported much of the withdrawal agreement, but would vote against it because he wanted more clarity on the long-term relationship. However, the EU has made it clear that we cannot have the clarity on the long-term relationship before the withdrawal agreement: the horse must come before the cart. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is the Opposition who are being reckless in jeopardising our chances of moving on with the negotiations before Europe shuts for its elections?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend has made a very important point about the timing. In agreeing the withdrawal agreement and the political declaration, we have the opportunity to start those negotiations—to get that work going—before the European parliamentary elections take place in the summer. It is indeed right that the European Union cannot negotiate that legally binding text and sign up to it until we are outside the EU, but is willing to start the negotiations so we can ensure that we are in the best place possible to deliver the future relationship in December 2020.

**Sir Mark Hendrick** (Preston) (Lab/Co-op): Why is the Prime Minister prepared to hold the House to ransom? She knows that she will lose the vote tomorrow,

[*Sir Mark Hendrick*]

and she still insists on the exit date of 29 March in spite of calls for article 50 to be extended. Would she really want to see this country crash out of the EU, with all the losses of jobs and business that would go with that?

**The Prime Minister:** I have made it very clear that if people want to avoid no deal, what they should be doing is supporting this deal. As I am sure the hon. Gentleman will know, businesses such as BAE Systems have said that it is a good deal and should be supported.

**Mr John Baron** (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): The Prime Minister is aware that many of us have wished her well in these negotiations, but in the absence of any legal certainty about the UK's right to leave the backstop unilaterally—something that my amendment (f) seeks to address—what certainty is there that the EU will not drag out the trade negotiations so that in, say, five years' time we are still discussing the issue?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend and I have discussed this before. The European Union does not see the situation that would exist if the trade negotiations were continuing for some considerable time, and if the backstop had come into existence, as a good place for the EU. Tariff-free access to EU markets without paying any money, with no free movement of people and with no access for EU boats to our fishing waters, is not a good place for the European Union to be in.

As I explained, the reason why the EU is concerned about the idea of a unilateral exit mechanism is that it does not want to see circumstances in which the UK pulled out of the backstop and left the creation of a hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland. I suspect that my hon. Friend does not trust the European Union not to try to keep us in the backstop. The EU's concern is about whether it can trust us not to effectively leave a situation in which there was a hard border. What we have been working at is finding a compromise between the two in which we can all have confidence.

**Caroline Lucas** (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): The Prime Minister claims that the possibility of no Brexit would be a subversion of democracy. Is it not true that the real subversion of democracy is a Prime Minister who has consistently sought to shut Parliament out of this process from the very beginning, and who now refuses to go to the people to see whether they are still satisfied with a deal that bears no resemblance to the one that they were promised two and a half years ago? Why will she not go to the people? Why is she so afraid to put her deal to the people? If they still like it, they will vote for it, but if they do not, they should have the right to remain.

**The Prime Minister:** When people voted in the referendum in 2016 they wanted—in the words used at the time and that I have used since—control of our borders, our money and our laws; this deal delivers on that. They wanted us to be able to have an independent trade policy; this deal delivers on that. They wanted us to be out of the CAP and CFP; this deal delivers on that. I think we should be delivering what people voted for in 2016.

**Richard Drax** (South Dorset) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on standing firm on the date. Does she agree that, bearing in mind the track record of

the EU and the difficulty we have had in negotiating anything like a fair trade deal, the only way we will actually achieve one is when we leave the EU, regain our sovereignty and sit down and discuss properly with it a fair trade deal—which I am personally convinced we will reach, and very quickly?

**The Prime Minister:** We have the outline of that free trade deal with the EU; we have set that out in the political declaration. We have the opportunity and commitment to ensure that that can be put in place by December 2020 by agreeing the withdrawal agreement and the package with the political declaration, and I believe that is the right thing to do.

**Rachel Reeves** (Leeds West) (Lab): Last week Parliament voted in favour of two amendments tabled from the Back Benches, by my right hon. Friend the Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) and by the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve). The support for those amendments against the wishes of the Government makes it clear that Parliament does not support leaving the EU without a deal. The Prime Minister said in her statement just now that no deal would mean no implementation period, no security arrangements in place and no certainty for businesses and workers, and would put the future of Northern Ireland at risk. Given how catastrophic the Prime Minister accepts a no-deal Brexit would be, will she now rule it out and instead look to extend article 50 if and when Parliament rejects her deal tomorrow?

**The Prime Minister:** It is very simple; either we have no deal or we have a deal. The deal on the table is a good deal for the UK and the EU has made clear that it is the deal.

**Mrs Helen Grant** (Maidstone and The Weald) (Con): The Prime Minister is working extremely hard and robustly in the best interests of the people of this country. Does she agree that our democracy will be damaged if we do not deliver on Brexit?

**The Prime Minister:** Yes, I do agree with my hon. Friend, because many people who voted in the referendum in 2016 had not voted before or had not voted for some considerable time, and I think their faith in politics, and indeed the faith in politics of all those who voted to leave the EU, would be damaged if we did not deliver on that. I think it is very simple: we asked the people what their view was and said we would do what they decided, and we should now do it.

**Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): It was the Prime Minister's absolute conviction in 2017 that it was not in the country's interests to hold a general election. It is now the Prime Minister's absolute conviction that we will secure a legal deal setting out our future relationship with the EU by December 2022 at the latest, albeit six and a half years after the Brexit vote. Why should we believe the Prime Minister?

**The Prime Minister:** The commitment to that and the determination to reach that point is not simply something I have said. It is there in the documents; it is a commitment from the UK Government and the EU.



**Charlie Elphicke** (Dover) (Con): Will the Prime Minister confirm that whatever tactics are used by the Labour party—whatever Trump-style shutdown threats to Government finances it may bring to this House—she is determined that we should leave the EU on 29 March, and does she also agree that while no deal would not be ideal, it would not be the end of the world either?

**The Prime Minister:** As I said earlier today, of course there would be damage to the economy; there would be an impact and consequences from no deal, and I have set them out. Over time the UK could recover from that, but I believe that, as my hon. Friend says, it is important that we deliver leaving the EU, and I am concerned about attempts that could be made to try to find ways of effectively rejecting the vote of the British people in 2016. I believe we should deliver Brexit, and this Government will do so.

**Peter Kyle** (Hove) (Lab): The Prime Minister said that she had listened to the previous debates and withdrew the vote so that she could focus on the backstop, but the truth is that concerns about trade and Dover were raised three times more often than concerns about the backstop. What negotiations has she had with the EU about trade and the border at Dover in the past few weeks, and what changes has she brought back to the House?

**The Prime Minister:** The political declaration sets out an ambitious trade arrangement with the European Union for the future. It sets out clearly a number of specifics in relation to the customs arrangements across the border between the United Kingdom and the European Union at the various border points. What we now see is a clear commitment from the European Union to the nature of that political declaration, and the fact that it is part of the package with the withdrawal agreement.

**Rachel Maclean** (Redditch) (Con): Will the Prime Minister provide assurances to the distribution, exporting, technological and manufacturing businesses in my constituency that if and when the deal is passed, as I hope it will be, she will move quickly to put in place our future arrangements, in order to give those businesses—and most importantly their employees, who are my constituents—the certainty that they need?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend raises an important point. We should consider those businesses, those employers and the constituents who are employed by them. Indeed I will move quickly. It is clear now from the EU, and once the withdrawal agreement has had the agreement of this House, we can sit down and start the work of putting the future relationship in place such that it is there at the end of the implementation period and there is a smooth and orderly exit for businesses and their employees in this country.

**Angela Smith** (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): In May 2012, the Government asked the people of Sheffield to vote in a referendum on whether they wanted a city Mayor. Sheffield rejected that proposal by 65%, but the Government went on to impose a mayoral model three years later. Why is it right for the Government to ignore the wishes of the people in one referendum but to say that they will abide by the wishes of the people in another?

**The Prime Minister:** In 2016, as part of the campaign for the referendum, the Government, who took the position that they supported remaining in the European Union, sent out a leaflet to every household in the United Kingdom in which they clearly said that they would abide by the decision of the referendum.

**David Duguid** (Banff and Buchan) (Con): Can my right hon. Friend confirm that, contrary to the assertions made by President Macron and others, in the event of a backstop, which would be undesirable for both sides, there would be no more common access to our waters for EU fishing vessels?

**The Prime Minister:** Yes, I can confirm that to my hon. Friend. It is clear that if no agreement has been reached on this matter, there will be no access to our waters for EU boats in the circumstances in which the backstop is in place. That is one of the reasons why the European Union will not consider that to be a good place for it to be.

**Ian Murray** (Edinburgh South) (Lab): In the Prime Minister's Lancaster House speech, she said that a future agreement with the EU would be concluded by the time the article 50 process had finished. That was to be used for businesses to implement the deal during the transition period. That is now not the case, is it?

**The Prime Minister:** We have the framework for that future relationship in the political declaration, we have the commitment that we can start work on that quickly, and we have the implementation period for businesses.

**Maggie Throup** (Erewash) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for her determination to secure a deal that protects jobs across Erewash. Can she also confirm that the EU27 have committed to work at a rapid pace to get future trade deals in place so that we will never need the backstop?

**The Prime Minister:** Yes, that is one of the things that we have now seen confirmed by the European Union. That is indeed its commitment. It wants to ensure that we can work together so that we get that future relationship in place at the end of the implementation period and so that the backstop need never be used.

**Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): Does the Prime Minister recognise that by threatening Members of Parliament with a democratic catastrophe if we vote against her job-destroying deal, she is embracing not only the hand of President Trump, but his methods? Will she now say, explicitly and for the particular benefit of those who threaten Members of Parliament both online and on our streets, that her Government losing tomorrow's vote would not undermine democracy and that, on the contrary, it would show that no one, particularly not this failing Government, is above our parliamentary sovereignty?

**The Prime Minister:** What I have said would undermine democracy—I am clear about this—would be the failure of this Parliament to deliver on the vote of the British people and to deliver Brexit. However, there should be none of the sort of behaviour that we have seen online or physically in relation to Members of this House or other members of the public regarding their views on the European Union. I have absolutely no truck with that.

[*The Prime Minister*]

That aggressive and vicious attitude is absolutely wrong. I say to the hon. Lady that this deal protects jobs and that what would have a negative impact on jobs would be to leave the European Union without a deal.

**Richard Graham** (Gloucester) (Con): Much of the concern about the Northern Ireland backstop relates to trust, so will the Prime Minister confirm my understanding of one of the reassurances that she has secured, which is that even if EU member states have not ratified a future trade agreement, that agreement would still be applied in order to avoid the backstop? That would mean that we would not be hostage to those in any regional Parliament, such as the Walloons or anyone else, in the way that the Canadian agreement was.

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend is right. It is normal practice in trade agreements to enable them to be provisionally brought into place while ratification processes are being undertaken. We have been clear that that is what we would do, and the European Commission has been clear that it would recommend that that is what the European Union should do. The agreement could therefore be put in place and the backstop would not need to be used, and it would not be hostage to those ratification processes.

**Chris Bryant** (Rhondda) (Lab): Downing Street has repeatedly briefed that the Prime Minister intends to support the amendments tabled by the right hon. Member for East Devon (Sir Hugo Swire) and the hon. Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison) tomorrow. However, earlier on in this process, the Government argued forcefully that any amendment to the motion under the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 would make it impossible for the Government to ratify the treaty. If the Prime Minister supports those amendments tomorrow, she will be arguing that she should not be allowed to ratify the treaty. Surely that cannot be right. Surely it is time that she came clean and decided that we will either vote in favour or against the deal tomorrow.

**The Prime Minister:** Nobody yet knows what amendments the Speaker will choose for voting on tomorrow. As for the ratification of the treaty as in the withdrawal agreement Bill when that comes through, the Bill will obviously need to reflect what is in the withdrawal agreement. A number of issues have been raised by hon. Members across the House—not just the ones to which the hon. Gentleman referred, but also issues around workers' rights—on which we have the ability to give further confidence to Members in a way that does not actually have an impact on the ratification of the treaty.

**Chris Bryant:** It does.

**The Prime Minister:** No, it doesn't.

**Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): Whatever option people want for the future relationship, other than actually remaining in the EU, there will need to be some sort of agreement with the European Union on money and citizens' rights and some guarantees around the Northern Ireland border. Does the Prime Minister agree that just kicking the can down the road, as some Opposition Members want, will not change any of those issues?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Any agreement will contain those elements, and we have those elements in the deal before us. The suggestion that all we need to do is somehow take longer and longer is not right, and the British people would turn around and say, "Three years on, we need to leave."

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): In December 2017, in response to a question from me, the Prime Minister said that Northern Ireland would never be treated differently in relation to the single market and the customs union. I welcomed that reply—and today the Prime Minister has referred to herself as a "proud Unionist"—but the withdrawal agreement has changed it and Northern Ireland will be treated very differently from the rest of the United Kingdom. The Unionism that the Prime Minister is putting forward has been weakened. Will she reiterate the Unionism of December 2017 and not her watered down and false version of January 2019?

**The Prime Minister:** As the hon. Gentleman will have noted, we published a document last week in relation to Northern Ireland that confirms the commitments we have given on one of the issues of concern that he and his hon. and right hon. Friends have raised about the potential differences in regulation between Northern Ireland and Great Britain. We are clear about the commitments we would give in relation to that situation, such that we do not see that difference occurring should the backstop be put in place. I believe firmly in the Union of the United Kingdom, and I want to do everything to ensure that we maintain the Union of the United Kingdom. There are of course already some differences in the treatment of Northern Ireland in relation to some laws, and some of those differences are significant in the areas in which they operate, but we have given a commitment to ensuring we do not have that divergence in future.

**Henry Smith** (Crawley) (Con): I am very appreciative of the Prime Minister's seemingly tireless efforts in negotiating the withdrawal agreement, but is it not the case that, because we could not unilaterally leave the backstop if it were to come into force, we are effectively ceding sovereignty, not taking back control?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right that there is no unilateral right to exit that mechanism. There is, of course, a termination mechanism within the withdrawal agreement and the protocol, but both sides would need to agree because of the fundamental point of ensuring that, at every stage, there is the guarantee of no hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland. The backstop need not come into force if the future relationship is put in place by the end of December 2020. Even if there were a need for something at that stage, it would be possible for this Parliament—we have been clear that it would be for this Parliament—to choose whether to go down the route of extending the implementation period instead. I believe that the best thing for us to do is to work to ensure that the future relationship comes into place, with a long-term and sustainable guarantee of no hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland.

**Chris Ruane** (Vale of Clwyd) (Lab): The Prime Minister has just informed the House that she and her party accepted and respected the vote of the Welsh referendum

on devolution in 1997. If that is the case, why did the 2005 Tory manifesto call for a further referendum on Welsh devolution, including an option to abolish the Welsh Assembly?

**The Prime Minister:** We accepted the vote on Welsh devolution, and we accepted devolution. Of course, we looked beyond that to extending the powers of the Welsh Assembly, and this Government have extended the powers of the Welsh Assembly.

**Stephen Kerr** (Stirling) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that any failure of this House to comply with the instruction of the people to take this country out of the European Union in an orderly way will play right into the hands of those who wish to destroy our precious Union and break up our United Kingdom?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. People want to see us leaving the European Union in an orderly, smooth way that does not disrupt people's jobs and livelihoods. To do it in any other way would, indeed, be a threat to the Union of the United Kingdom.

**Tracy Brabin** (Batley and Spen) (Lab/Co-op): Following on from my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central (Chi Onwurah), over the weekend we have seen a very disturbing increase in threats of violence against colleagues. Does the Prime Minister agree it is important that we are all mindful of our language, particularly when discussing parliamentary procedures and no deal and its consequences? Otherwise we are at risk of widening the divisions we have worked so hard to close, enabling a space in which the far right and its followers can step in.

**The Prime Minister:** I absolutely agree that there is no place for these kinds of threats, and for the abuse and harassment that has, sadly, been taking place. Members of this House, and indeed members of the public, should be able to hold different opinions, and hold them passionately, and debate them with passion and vigour, without the threat of physical violence and the sort of harassment and bullying that has happened online.

**Rehman Chishti** (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): The Prime Minister has said that the assurances she has from the EU would give legal certainty and clarity. If there is a dispute in that matter in relation to what is in the withdrawal agreement, who will be the final arbiter on it? Will that go to article 174, with the European Court of Justice to look at European law? Who will be the arbiter on that?

**The Prime Minister:** The arbiter would be the arbitration panel; a process of governance is set out in the arrangements that we have set out in the withdrawal agreement and, looking ahead, for the future relationship under the political declaration.

**Chris Law** (Dundee West) (SNP): It has been reported that Ireland has gained more than 5,000 jobs, including one assumes those created by a move by the firm set up by the hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) because of what the firm calls "considerable uncertainty" and increased costs due to Brexit.

Does the Prime Minister agree that this is all the proof needed to show why Scotland's best interests lie in being an independent member state of the EU?

**The Prime Minister:** Scotland's best economic interests—I suggest the hon. Gentleman looks at the figures—are met by remaining a member of the UK.

**Marsha De Cordova** (Battersea) (Lab): Given today's joint letter to the Prime Minister from Presidents Juncker and Tusk saying that the EU is

"not in a position to agree to anything that changes or is inconsistent with the Withdrawal Agreement",

is it not the case that the Prime Minister has achieved nothing since pulling the meaningful vote on 10 December? In her own words, "nothing has changed".

**The Prime Minister:** As I said earlier in response to a number of hon. Members, the concern that was expressed was about ensuring—[*Interruption.*] I am trying to answer the hon. Lady's question. The concern people had within the House, overwhelmingly, was one of ensuring that the backstop would be temporary if it ever came into place. That is in the withdrawal agreement already, but the further assurances that we have received further confirm that. As I have said, the December Council conclusions do have legal force.

**Kevin Hollinrake** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): In a speech on 11 October last year, Michel Barnier stated that in the event of no deal there would be checks at the border for all live animals and products of animal origin. Is that not potentially disastrous for Northern Ireland and for the integrity of the UK?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend is right; some have felt that the EU would not require such checks, but the EU has been clear that it would require checks in the circumstances of no deal.

**Anna Turley** (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op): I admire the Prime Minister's efforts to contort her deal over the backstop to try to get it over the line and passed, but surely she must now be stepping back and looking at the bigger picture, which is that her deal and any version of it is still a betrayal of what people voted for. Her deal is not what people voted for in 2016. So much has changed, and it is time to go back to them with the truth now and ask them for their view.

**The Prime Minister:** I believe that what people voted for in 2016 was to ensure that the ECJ jurisdiction ended in the UK—the deal delivers that; that free movement would come to an end—the deal delivers that; and that we did not continue sending significant sums to the EU every year—and the deal delivers on that.

**Simon Hoare** (North Dorset) (Con): Should not anyone in any party who purports to be concerned about having a positive future with the EU, preserving our Union with Scotland and protecting our Union with Northern Ireland now stop playing politics and vote for my right hon. Friend's deal, because a failure to do so is going to let genies out of bottles that are best kept corked?



**The Prime Minister:** I agree with my hon. Friend that it is important that people support this deal, because it delivers on the referendum, protects the Union and protects jobs and security.

**Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): All but 4% of Hull North constituents who have contacted me have asked me to vote down the Prime Minister's deal—and that includes many leavers. Does the Prime Minister think that is because they no longer support Brexit, or because they want the promises made during the leave campaign to be delivered and her deal does not do that?

**The Prime Minister:** There was obviously a vigorous referendum campaign. As I said earlier, I believe that when people voted, they voted to take back control of money, laws and borders. That is what this deal delivers, alongside the other things that people were concerned about, such as leaving the CAP and the CFP and having an independent trade policy.

**Matt Warman** (Boston and Skegness) (Con): *The Sunday Times* was in Boston on Saturday to take the temperature of the most heavily leave-voting town in the country. In a genuinely random sampling of people in the marketplace, it heard that my constituents understood that the wind was in the sails of those who want to stop Brexit. I cannot pretend that I was overwhelmed with love for the Prime Minister's deal, but people in the marketplace said that it was either back this deal or see no Brexit, and that would be anathema to British democracy.

**The Prime Minister:** I am interested in the views that were expressed in Boston at the weekend. I agree with my hon. Friend, and it is absolutely right that the Government deliver on the vote of the British people. People are becoming increasingly concerned about the possibility of there being attempts to try to thwart, frustrate or, indeed, stop that Brexit.

**Martin Docherty-Hughes** (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): The complexity of these islands is summed up in the Good Friday agreement, which allows and recognises the diversity of identity. On 22 October, the Prime Minister assured me, on the Floor of the House, that the right to be both British, Irish or both is secure, yet today those who seek to retain their Irish identity are having to officially renounce a British identity that they never had, at a cost of £372, and are having their freedom of movement limited for up to six months, and citizens in Northern Ireland are even having their residency questioned. Can the Prime Minister assure me, and people like Emma DeSouza and those of a Northern Irish background in my constituency, that the Prime Minister's Government are not using Brexit to undermine the fundamentals and complexities of the benefits of the Good Friday agreement?

**The Prime Minister:** We are indeed ensuring that the Brexit arrangements that we have negotiated with the European Union abide by the commitments in the Belfast Good Friday agreement. As was indicated in the December joint report, it is very clear in the withdrawal agreement that the point of nationality raised by the hon. Gentleman is referenced, and it is clear that the ability of people in Northern Ireland to identify as British or Irish is in there.

**Bill Wiggin** (North Herefordshire) (Con): I have sat through the entirety of the exchanges on this statement, and those on many before it, and I commend the Prime Minister for keeping her temper and for the polite way in which she has answered every question when it must sometimes be infuriating for her to do so. Will she just reassure me that if things do not go quite to plan tomorrow, she will still apply the fantastic British grit she has shown to how we leave under WTO rules?

**The Prime Minister:** I am of course working to ensure that things do go in the right way tomorrow, but I assure my hon. Friend that whatever I do and whatever happens, I will be working in the national interest with the determination, which I have always had, of ensuring that we deliver for this country.

**Dr Rupa Huq** (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): Small businesses with no time, energy or resources for no-deal planning are appalled to see the phantom ferry company's Government contract, the Kent lorry park experiment and the swathes of civil servants now given over to some sort of "Dad's Army"-style wargaming of troops on our streets, so will the Prime Minister tell us how much, by running down the clock and not ruling out no deal, her blackmail Brexit has cost the taxpayer to date and since 11 December?

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Lady will know the sums of money that have been made available by the Treasury to Departments across Government to provide for both no-deal preparations and the preparations for a deal. It is entirely right that we make those contingency arrangements to ensure that we have made the decisions and put in place the operations necessary should there be no deal.

**Nigel Huddleston** (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): Does the Prime Minister agree that all deals would require a backstop of some sort? As unpalatable as this deal and the backstop are, there is simply no such thing as a painless, risk-free backstop. If it was not this backstop, another backstop would be required, and it would perhaps be as dangerous as, or more concerning than, this one.

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is clear that whatever agreement was reached with the European Union, a backstop would be required. Some people talk about a different trade agreement for the future, but a backstop would still be necessary, because a negotiation would be required to ensure that a backstop was there for circumstances in which that new agreement could not come into place at the end of the implementation period. There is no agreement without a backstop.

**Deidre Brock** (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): A survey by Harvard researchers of 120 small and medium-sized enterprises and stakeholders concluded that for most companies

"the May deal is inferior to remaining in the EU or...a much closer relationship with the EU that includes continued participation in the Single Market".

We still respect experts in Scotland. When will the Prime Minister follow their advice, fulfil the people of Scotland's vote in the EU referendum, and protect our place in the single market and the customs union?

**The Prime Minister:** What we have negotiated with the European Union—what is set out in the political declaration—is the most ambitious trade relationship with any third country that the EU has ever negotiated. It is one with a good customs arrangement and good access to market. The protection of jobs was one of the things that I wanted to ensure we achieved in the deal that we negotiated, and it does just that.

**Sir Oliver Heald** (North East Hertfordshire) (Con): I thank the Prime Minister for meeting a group of MPs from all parties with manufacturing in their constituencies last week. Given the assurances that have now come forward from the EU, and bearing in mind that the overwhelming message from that meeting was that manufacturing businesses do not want a no-deal situation, which would be highly disruptive—that message came from both sides of industry in the meeting—does she agree that voting for the deal is the way forward?

**The Prime Minister:** My right hon. and learned Friend is absolutely right that it was clear in that meeting that a number of Members from both sides of the House, in conversation and discussion with the manufacturing industry, recognised the importance of ensuring that we protected jobs, and the potential impact that no deal could have on those jobs. I believe that it is a good deal because it delivers on the referendum, but protects jobs.

**Emma Little Pengelly** (Belfast South) (DUP): Will the Prime Minister confirm that, despite today's letters, the legal position remains that the UK cannot enter into the extension period without the explicit agreement of the European Union; that we cannot avoid going into the backstop unless we have the explicit agreement of the European Union on an alternative; and that once we are in the backstop, we cannot legally withdraw from it without the explicit agreement of the European Union?

**The Prime Minister:** As I have said to Members when they have referred specifically to the last of those points, there is no unilateral withdrawal mechanism. The United Kingdom can make the choice, and we are clear that Northern Ireland—Stormont—should have a voice in that choice, as to whether to go into the backstop or the implementation period. The reason why a unilateral exit mechanism is not there is that the European Union has a concern that the United Kingdom—we are clear that we would not do this—might use such a mechanism to put Northern Ireland and Ireland in a situation where there was a hard border.

**Patricia Gibson** (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): The Prime Minister clearly cannot get her deal through tomorrow night—the Foreign Secretary conceded as much last week—despite the false choice we are being offered. Meanwhile, the Leader of the Opposition wants to call an election in the hope, like Micawber, that something will turn up. It gives me no pleasure to say that I am beginning to think that, given how things are going, perhaps we all might as well wait to see whether a mermaid riding a unicorn will happen by and provide a solution. Does the Prime Minister not think that a sensible way forward would be, at long last and finally, to listen to the majority of the Scottish people, and reject Brexit and this entire shambles once and for all?

**The Prime Minister:** The sensible way forward is to deliver on Brexit for the British people and to do so with the deal that has been negotiated with the EU.

**Mr Paul Sweeney** (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): The Prime Minister received a letter that I and many other colleagues across the parties in this House signed warning against the impact of a no-deal Brexit on our industries, particularly our manufacturing industries, that rely on very sensitive supply chains across the European continent. Faced with this dilemma tomorrow night of a deal that is dead in the water or a default to a no-deal situation, it is clear that the Prime Minister cannot in all conscience entertain any scenario in which no deal is a possibility. Is it not her duty now to rule out, once and for all, no deal under any circumstances, as it is not in the national interest? She should not countenance it under any circumstances.

**The Prime Minister:** I am not asking Parliament to vote for no deal; I am asking Parliament to vote for the deal that ensures that we avoid no deal.

**Dr Lisa Cameron** (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): The Prime Minister has agreed the backstop as an insurance policy. Insurance policies usually protect but, according to her own MPs, this one leaves the UK vulnerable. Prime Minister, no one would even take out a car insurance policy that would leave them vulnerable, so whose insurance is it, and has she agreed to pay for the other driver's policy?

**The Prime Minister:** The point of the backstop as an insurance policy is that it is a guarantee that, in all the circumstances that have been set out, there will be no hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland, so it is a guarantee for people in Northern Ireland and for people in Ireland. I have been clear that the United Kingdom Government would not erect a hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland but, as I have indicated and as has been clear from a number of questions today, the European Commission is also clear that, in a no-deal scenario, checks at the border would be expected.

**Hugh Gaffney** (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (Lab): Prime Minister, at the eleventh hour, you decided to contact the trade unions of Great Britain that represent the workers who create the wealth of this country. Did you get a good response?

**The Prime Minister:** I had positive discussions with trade union leaders and a positive discussion with the chairman of the CBI.

**Joanna Cherry** (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): The Prime Minister has said that these written assurances have legal standing and legal force, and that they will be taken into account, but she has also acknowledged that paragraph 2 of the Attorney General's letter of advice says that they do not "alter the fundamental meanings" of the provisions of the withdrawal agreement. Can she confirm that, ultimately, as a matter of law, in any conflict between the wording of these assurances and the wording of the withdrawal agreement, the withdrawal agreement would triumph, and that therefore, in the months since she pulled the meaningful vote, nothing has changed?

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. and learned Lady says that it is my claim that these assurances have legal force. Obviously it is the European Union that has been clear that they have legal force and, as she has said, the Attorney General himself has said that they would have “legal force in international law and thus be relevant and cognisable in the interpretation of the Withdrawal Agreement.”

**Mike Gapes** (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): The Prime Minister referred to the “subversion of our democracy”. In our parliamentary democracy, no Parliament can bind its successor. It was not this Parliament that agreed to hold a referendum or to prematurely trigger article 50, but the previous Parliament. If she is talking about subversion of democracy, was her calling of the general election that she lost in 2017 a subversion of democracy?

**The Prime Minister:** May I gently point out to the hon. Gentleman that, actually, the Conservative party is in government in this country and we will deliver on the referendum of 2016?

**Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): This Prime Minister and this Government have been engaging in acts of outright fuddery—the spreading of fear, uncertainty and doubt—with the bizarre spectacle of the Financial Secretary to the Treasury running up and down with planted notes saying, “No food” and “No channel tunnel”. Is it no surprise to the Prime Minister that people in Scotland, as they watch this ridiculous spectacle, are starting to think that we could do a lot better running things ourselves?

**The Prime Minister:** It is entirely right that we are taking those mitigation measures in relation to no deal to ensure that we can deal with that consequence should that be the situation in which we find ourselves. I say to the hon. Lady that she and a number of her colleagues, including the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford), the leader of the SNP in Westminster, talk about listening to the voice of the people, but listening to the voice of the people means accepting the result of the 2014 Scottish referendum.

**Catherine West** (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): May I press the Prime Minister on the tone of the debate and ask what action is being taken by leaders of all different opinions on Brexit to ensure that a sense of people versus parliamentarians is not encouraged?

**The Prime Minister:** It is in the hands of all of us in this House to show that we are respecting the vote of the people, that we are respecting the views that people gave in 2016, and that the debate is about how we deliver on that vote. That is very important for everybody across the whole House.

**Albert Owen** (Ynys Môn) (Lab): If regulatory alignment is good enough for Northern Ireland, it is good enough for Wales, good enough for Scotland and good enough for England. For that reason, I will be voting against the Prime Minister’s deal tomorrow, because we want a level playing field in the United Kingdom. Moreover, 88% of constituents who have contacted me reject her deal. Many young people—75%—think that they will be worse off with Brexit. Now that she has been exposed as having form in voting against the will of the Welsh

people in the election and standing on a manifesto to overturn it, can she, at this eleventh hour, give the people a vote and a final say on Brexit?

**The Prime Minister:** The people were given a vote. They were given a vote by Parliament—Parliament agreed. The Government of the time said that that decision would be respected, and I believe that we should do so.

**Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab): May I plead with the Prime Minister to mind her language? She used a term in her statement to say that people’s opinions would represent a “subversion of our democracy”, which is completely unnecessary at a time when there is far too much inflammatory language about already. She holds the office of Prime Minister. She is describing the views of Members of this House, including former members of her own Government, when she talks about a subversion of democracy. I genuinely appeal to her to consider her office when using language of that kind.

**The Prime Minister:** And I appeal to Members across the whole House that they consider the duty that we have to the British people to deliver on the vote that they gave in the referendum of 2016, and to accept that and not to try to find ways of frustrating or stopping Brexit.

**Mike Kane** (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): I think that the Prime Minister owes this House a full and frank apology. While stealing 40 winks this morning after my 50th birthday celebrations at the weekend, I had to move train carriages just before Stoke-on-Trent to accommodate the Prime Minister and her entourage. I was forced to spend the rest of the journey with parliamentary colleagues and eminent BBC journalists. The point that I really wish to make is that, while this is a place of disagreement at the moment, the one thing on which I do agree with the Prime Minister is that she supports peace on the island of Ireland. No matter what tempests and storms we have over the next days and weeks, will she keep that as a priority and not be buffeted?

**The Prime Minister:** First, let me thank the hon. Gentleman for the note that he left in the train carriage when he moved places. Seriously, I say that it is absolutely the case that we have been clear throughout the negotiations with the European Union that we want to respect the Belfast/Good Friday agreement. The peace process has brought incredible benefits to the people of Northern Ireland. We want to maintain that peace process and we will not be doing anything that damages it.

**Jamie Stone** (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): May I, from the Opposition Benches, also acknowledge the courtesy with which the Prime Minister has answered myriad questions?

Mr Speaker, if I could magic you and the Prime Minister to the beautiful Scottish highlands, I would show you infrastructure projects such as roads, harbours and airports that would not have happened had it not been for European money. That expenditure was incredibly important in reversing the depopulation that was the historical curse of the highlands. When I return to my



constituency at the end of this long week, what should my answer be when my constituents say to me, “Jamie, what will replace this money?”

**The Prime Minister:** We will be putting in place the shared prosperity fund, which will look at disparities that occur between nations of the United Kingdom, and within communities and regions of the United Kingdom. We will obviously consult on how the shared prosperity fund will operate, but it will ensure that this is a country that works for everyone.

**Mr Speaker:** I must say to the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone) that his constituency always sounds an immensely agreeable place, and therefore I really must visit.

**Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): After two and a half years of complete lack of direction, the Prime Minister wants us to vote for this agreement, which only puts everything into touch and into the transition period. Yet she is somehow trying to convince herself that, to avoid the backstop and avoid a hard border in Northern Ireland, within the next year and a half or so she can agree a trade deal, a customs deal and find from nowhere a technology solution—invented, trialled and implemented within that year and a half. Will she tell me the key milestone dates for this magic solution, and can she name one major IT infrastructure project delivered in such a timescale?

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Gentleman talks about the direction over the past two and a half years. The Lancaster House speech, the Florence speech, the Munich speech, the Mansion House speech, the December 2017 joint report, the agreement in March last year of the arrangements for the implementation period, and now of course the political declaration and the withdrawal agreement—they set a very clear direction and it is a good direction for this country. It is a good deal for Scotland and for the whole UK.

## Points of Order

6.11 pm

**Chris Philp** (Croydon South) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Can you advise me whether there are any ways to remove the need for a money resolution for a Bill brought forward by a Back Bencher? Could you confirm that only the Government can move money resolutions?

**Mr Speaker:** That has long been the practice. I am not going to get involved in a detailed disquisition on these matters tonight as I think that would be premature and unnecessary. The hon. Gentleman has asked me a question and I have furnished him with an answer. I trust that satisfies him. If it does, good; but if it does not, never mind.

**Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. You may be aware of some speculation in the press, so could you confirm that a Committee of the whole House can only be chaired by the Chairman of Ways and Means?

**Mr Speaker:** The Standing Orders are perfectly clear. The hon. Gentleman need not ask me, either on his own initiative or at somebody else’s urging, a question to which the answer is readily available if he bothers to read the relevant material; it is pretty clear.

**Rebecca Pow** (Taunton Deane) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

This is a brave moment for me because I have never before made a point of order. I seek just a little bit of clarification regarding these so-called devices that have been much mentioned in the press over the weekend and that might give over control of the Order Paper—something that I would find deeply concerning. I would be very grateful if you gave some indication as to which other Members of Parliament you have had discussions with about these devices and their use. Is this normal procedure or am I just worrying about nothing?

**Mr Speaker:** Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear; people do seem a bit confused, but I will certainly try to help the hon. Lady. First, to the best of my knowledge and recollection I have not had any meetings or, as she puts it, discussions about such matters. I see a certain amount of speculation in the press but I am not aware of, or in any way party to or involved with, any such proposals. Secondly—I would have thought that the hon. Lady would know this after nearly four years in the House but perhaps she is not aware of it—more generally I regularly see Members from across the House upon a range of matters if they ask to see me. There is nothing odd or unusual about that; there is nothing without precedent. On the first point that she raised, the fact that there might be speculation about matters that causes perplexity or befuddles some people may be a concern for them, but it is not the responsibility of the Chair. I hope that I have given her a clear and explicit answer which brooks of no misunderstanding.

**Liz Saville Roberts** (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. The Prime Minister responded to my question earlier by saying:

[Liz Saville Roberts]

“We accepted the result of the referendum vote in Wales... We made clear at the time that we respected the result of that referendum in Wales.”

However, her actions and the actions of her party at the time and since then are on record, and they contradict these assertions. I fear that the Prime Minister has misled the House on this matter in responding to myself and other Members. How might she correct the record?

**Mr Speaker:** I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her point of order. I am sure that if she is suggesting what she has just suggested, she would wish to insert the word “inadvertently”, because she is a person of impeccable manners and I am sure that she would not suggest for one moment that the Prime Minister had deliberately misled the House. I just seek that assurance; is the hon. Lady suggesting that it was inadvertent?

**Liz Saville Roberts:** I am content to apologise and to insert the word “inadvertently”.

**Mr Speaker:** I was not requesting an apology, although it is very gracious of her to proffer it. I just wanted to hear the insertion of the word “inadvertently”. The answer is that, in a sense, the hon. Lady has partially found salvation in the matter by raising the point of order and putting the factual position as she sees it on the record. In terms of further redress, my response is that every Member of this House, including the Prime Minister, is responsible for the veracity of what she or he says. In the event that a Member believes that he or she has made an error, it is incumbent upon that Member to put the record straight. Knowing the commitment to this Chamber of the hon. Lady and her regular presence at statements and other opportunities to interrogate Ministers, I am sure that she can seek a correction in direct exchange with the Prime Minister at the material time.

**Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con):** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. We have seen some changes in precedent in recent days; indeed, you rightly said that precedent can be changed. If there were to be an amendment to the Business of the House motion preventing the Government from controlling the Order Paper, it would be—as I understand it from much more long-standing colleagues—a matter of precedent. What role might the Liaison Committee play in that decision?

**Mr Speaker:** I am not a member of the Liaison Committee. I will look at the situation on a case-by-case basis. If the circumstance arises, I shall make an appropriate judgment. I think we should leave it there. May I very gently say to the hon. Lady that the late Lord Whitelaw was so shrewd when he said that he personally preferred to cross bridges only when he came to them?

**Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab):** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. In my 17 years in the House, including two years as a Government Whip, I found out one thing, which is that if Members act as a Whip’s lickspittle, they get very little respect from other Members of the House—even, ultimately, from their own Whips.

**Mr Speaker:** The hon. Gentleman has made his own point in his own way with considerable force and alacrity. I am not going to accuse anybody of being—

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Trade (Graham Stuart):** It’s not a point of order, is it?

**Mr Speaker:** Well, it will just extend the proceedings if people chunter from a sedentary position ineloquently and for no obvious benefit or purpose. It is a point of order and I am responding to it. If the junior Minister on the Treasury Bench does not like the fact that I am responding to it, he can lump it, because I am going to respond to it in my way and in the fashion that I choose. His approval or disapproval is a matter of staggering irrelevance as far as I am concerned. I certainly would not accuse anybody of being a lickspittle, but I think the record shows that when I was a serving Back Bencher—and, for that matter, often as a Front Bencher—I was not overly preoccupied with the views of my Whips.

**Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con):** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. There has been a lot of speculation—not from you, but from other MPs in the House—about the ability of a Back Bencher to influence the Business of the House motion and take control of business on a specified day. As a Back Bencher, I seek your guidance as to whether any procedural device currently exists or whether a precedent will be set so that such a device can exist going forward.

**Mr Speaker:** I refer the hon. Gentleman to answers that I provided earlier. I am very happy to look at these matters in the round; there may well be discussions to be had about them in subsequent days. It is perfectly legitimate for the hon. Gentleman to seek to engage me on the matter, but I do not think that in this context there is any particular merit in repeating that which has already been said. I therefore urge him to consult the *Official Report*, and I hope that he will find it productive when he does.

**Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con):** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. This is relevant, because I know that members of the public and members of the press are asking about it; indeed, I have just been asked. Is it your understanding that if article 50 were to be extended, that could happen only if a Government Minister were to move a motion asking for it to happen? If that has changed, then it is a massive change to our entire democracy.

**Mr Speaker:** The hon. Lady raises an interesting point, but it does not appertain to the consideration that is before us today. I am certainly happy to reflect—[*Interruption.*] Well, she has asked me a question, very courteously I am sure, and I shall courteously reply. I do not think that the point of order is immediately relevant to the matter that we are debating today. If people want to offer opinions on the subject in the course of the debate, they can. We shall see what unfolds in subsequent days. [*Interruption.*] I do not know what will unfold. If some people think they are psychic and know what the result will be tomorrow, that is a matter for them.

**Vicky Ford** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** No, no: I am not taking any further point of order from the hon. Lady. She has raised the issue. I have given the holding response that I have given. [HON. MEMBERS: “Ah!”] I am not giving a verdict on this matter. I am not anticipating any such scenario.

I have not been approached about any such scenario. No Member of Parliament has posited any such scenario. So when people say, “Ah!”, as though something frightfully revealing has been said, I am sorry to disappoint them, but it has not. Nothing of any great significance has been said. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Chesterfield (Toby Perkins) is very courteous, but I am untroubled by these matters.

**Charlie Elphicke** (Dover) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I have been here for nine years, and I think the whole House knows that I am not entirely a Whips’ lickspittle. May I just ask for a point of clarification? My recollection is that a statutory instrument tends to be moved by a Minister of the Crown, for the very simple reason that legislation provides for that to be the case. Could you confirm that my recollection is correct?

**Mr Speaker:** Yes, that has always been the case, and I am not aware that there is any imminent or likely prospect of it being changed. I am not party to any such proposal. Nobody has posited to me a scenario in which I would be expected to agree to any such change. That is the reality. The position that I have set out at present is perfectly clear. The hon. Gentleman, for whom I have the highest regard, is perfectly entitled to ask me whether I understand, with reference to that which has transpired to date, his interpretation of proceedings to be correct. I do.

**Nigel Huddleston** (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. First, I am proud to have friends in the Whips Office—and right across the House. I seek your guidance relating to the speculation in the press this weekend, because it is important and concerning. I believe that it is a very important principle in this place that we are all equal, and that means equal knowledge, access to information and knowledge about procedures. If, as has been speculated, there are likely to be changes in procedures, can I implore you, Mr Speaker, to make sure that equal and fair treatment is considered, and that we are all aware of any changes in policies and procedures to make sure that there is not asymmetry of information, or advantage or disadvantage given to one Member of this House over another?

**Mr Speaker:** I am happy to assure the hon. Gentleman that, as has been my unflinching practice since 22 June 2009, I am always equally open to hearing from, and then, as best I can, responding to any Member of the House of Commons who approaches me.

**Sir John Hayes** (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con) *indicated assent.*

**Mr Speaker:** I am very grateful to the right hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes), who is nodding vigorously in assent to that proposition from a sedentary position. The right hon. Gentleman and I have known each other for well over 20 years, and he knows that I am utterly and scrupulously fair-minded in these matters. I have been, I am, and I always will be. I am not responsible for what other

people might be talking about. I do not plant stories in the newspapers. That is a black art perhaps practised by other people from time to time. It is not something that greatly concerns me. I do not get very excited about it. The hon. Member for Mid Worcestershire (Nigel Huddleston) is entirely entitled to seek the assurance of equality of treatment.

Let me just say one further thing in the light of some press reports. People really ought to understand, because it is incredibly simple, straightforward and uncontroversial, that any hon. or right hon. Member of this House who wishes to come to see the Speaker about something that concerns him or her can ask to do so, and diary permitting and subject to agreement on suitable dates, that would always happen. The notion that some particular advantage is given to a specified individual, or a little coterie, as part of a secret plot in private apartments is so staggeringly absurd that I would not expect for one moment that someone of the intelligence and perspicacity of the hon. Gentleman would give it credence for so much as a single second. I hope that is helpful to him.

**Matt Warman** (Boston and Skegness) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I mentioned during the statement that *The Sunday Times* was in my constituency taking its temperature. I should say that my constituents did raise your role as well as the role of the Government, and so I would perhaps say gently, in response to your earlier comment, that there is some doubt out there among the public. The question they asked me to ask you was this. You changed some precedents last week, and some of them wanted to know if you expected to change any more.

**Mr Speaker:** As I have already indicated, I made a judgment last week. I look at issues on a case-by-case basis, which is a perfectly reasonable thing to do. I know the hon. Gentleman will understand if I say that as someone who has been the guardian of the rights of this House for the last nine and a half years, I am confident and comfortable that others recognise my commitment to fairness in this Chamber. I have a high regard for the parliamentary commitment of the hon. Gentleman. I have no intention—and I do not refer to him in this context—of taking lectures on doing right by Parliament from people who have been conspicuous in denial of, and sometimes contempt for it. I will stand up for the rights of the House of Commons, and I will not be pushed around by agents of the Executive branch. They can be as rude as they like. They can be as intimidating as they like. They can spread as much misinformation as they like. It will not make the slightest bit of difference to my continuing and absolute determination to serve the House of Commons. Unlike some people in important positions, who of course are elected constituency Members but have not been elected to their offices here, I have been elected, re-elected, re-elected and re-elected as Speaker to do the right thing by the House of Commons. That is what I have done, that is what I am doing, and that is what I will go on doing. That is so crystal clear that I feel sure it will satisfy the hon. Gentleman.



## European Union (Withdrawal) Act

[8TH ALLOTTED DAY]

*Debate resumed (Orders, 4 December and 9 January).*

*Question again proposed,*

That this House approves for the purposes of section 13(1)(b) of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, the negotiated withdrawal agreement laid before the House on Monday 26 November 2018 with the title ‘Agreement on the withdrawal of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland from the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community’ and the framework for the future relationship laid before the House on Monday 26 November 2018 with the title ‘Political Declaration setting out the framework for the future relationship between the European Union and the United Kingdom’.

6.27 pm

**The Secretary of State for International Trade and President of the Board of Trade (Dr Liam Fox):** As we take this debate into the early hours of tomorrow morning, I hope that we will be able to replicate the good humour, good manners and resilience that the Prime Minister showed during her two hours in front of the House this afternoon. [*Interruption.*] Yes, Mr Speaker, I understand that. As a doctor, I admire good bladder control.

**Mr Speaker:** I am able to stay in the House for many, many hours. We are not talking about two hours, for the avoidance of doubt. I will very happily be here for 12 hours, if necessary, because I take my responsibilities to the House of Commons seriously.

**Dr Fox:** It is a pleasure to open this debate on global Britain and the economy as we consider how to honour the decision made by the British people, in a democratic referendum, to leave the European Union. When Parliament made the decision to hold the referendum, it made a contract with the British people that said, “We are unable, or unwilling, to make a decision on this constitutional relationship. This will be decided by the British people and Parliament will abide by that decision.” We have a duty to honour our side of that contract, whether we ourselves voted to remain or leave in the referendum. When we, as Members of Parliament, voted in that referendum, we did so in the knowledge that our vote carried an equal weight to that of other citizens of our country. For Parliament to attempt in any way to thwart or block Brexit by any means would be an act of vanity and self-indulgence that would create a breach of trust between Parliament and the people, with potentially unknowable consequences.

**Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab):** The right hon. Gentleman is raising an important point about the obligation of Members of Parliament as a result of the referendum, but we have also had a general election since that day. That general election could have given the Government an overwhelming majority, which would have seen Brexit move one way, but it did not; it ended up with a very tight House. As a result, we have a Prime Minister who could have sought to bring all of us along with her, but instead seems to have taken a very tribal view. What advice has the right hon. Gentleman given to the Prime Minister?

**Dr Fox:** The advice I will give to the hon. Gentleman is this. The point was raised in the previous Session that no House can bind its successor, but 80% of Members

of this House were elected on a manifesto that said they would honour the result of the referendum. We have a duty to do so if we are to keep faith with our voters.

**Albert Owen (Ynys Môn) (Lab):** Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con) rose—**

**Dr Fox:** I will give way to my hon. Friend, and then I will give way on a number of occasions later on.

**Henry Smith:** Is it not also the case that the Government spent more than £9 million of taxpayers’ money on a leaflet to every UK household saying that the decision of the British people would be respected, so the claim that people did not know what they were voting for or what the outcome would be is nonsense?

**Dr Fox:** The very act of spending that £9 million, given the outcome of the referendum, shows quite how easy it is to waste Government money.

It is clear that there are three possible outcomes to our deliberations.

**Albert Owen:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I do not make points of order lightly, as you know. The Prime Minister was asked a question earlier about respecting the will of the people and referendums. A number of Members—including, I think, the Secretary of State—voted against the Government of Wales Act 1998 after the 1997 referendum decided the matter. That should be on the record when he lectures us about Brexit.

**Mr Speaker:** The hon. Gentleman has put his point on the record, and it is there for people to observe if they wish.

**Dr Fox:** The hon. Gentleman confirms my wisdom in not giving way to him.

It is clear that there are three possible outcomes to our deliberations. I want to say at the outset that Members will determine which route they choose, and while we may disagree, I do not doubt either their motives or their patriotism as they choose the course available to this country. The first option is to accept the deal that has been negotiated—and there is no other deal available. The second is to leave the European Union with no deal, and the third is to have no Brexit at all. Before considering the implications of those options, it is important to underline the fundamental strengths that underpin the UK economy, the changing patterns of our trade and the future patterns of global trade.

**Several hon. Members rose—**

**Dr Fox:** I will give way in a moment.

The UK has an excellent economic success story to tell. Since a Conservative-led Government came to power in 2010, exports have grown by 38.1%, at around 6% per year, driven by an increase in services exports of 54.8%. We sold some £618 billion-worth of goods and services in 2017, up 10.9% on the previous year. New figures released last week by the Office for National Statistics revealed that exports of goods and services in the year to November 2018 were worth £630 billion, growing by £13.9 billion since the previous year. There have now been 32 consecutive months of exports growth.

As the UK considers future free trade agreements with the likes of the United States, Australia, New Zealand and the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership countries, goods exports to those countries continued to boom. To the USA, they were up to £54.9 billion; to Australia, up to £5.1 billion; to New Zealand, up to £869 million; and to CPTPP countries, up to £28.4 billion. There was other notable goods exports growth to non-EU markets—up 29.2% to Nigeria, up 27.3% to India, and up 18.5% to Thailand. That news comes as London retained its position as the top tech investment destination in Europe earlier this week. According to PitchBook and London & Partners, the capital received £1.8 billion-worth of tech investment in 2018—more than Berlin and Paris combined. So much for the failure that would result from a vote to leave the European Union.

**Charlie Elphicke** (Dover) (Con): Is not the key prize of leaving the EU that this country will be able to do trade deals around the world? If we adopted the advice of the Labour party, which is not to leave the EU in any meaningful way, we would not be able to do any trade deals across the globe.

**Dr Fox:** I will come to the specifics of the freedom to negotiate free trade agreements and the Opposition's policy on that. The point I was making was that when we voted to leave the European Union, we were told that the very act of voting to leave would result in massive job losses, a loss of investment in the United Kingdom, a collapse in confidence and a recession in the UK economy. Nothing could be further from the truth. We have created jobs. We have seen record inward investment, and we have seen our exports rise to record levels.

**Chris Bryant** (Rhondda) (Lab): The Secretary of State said that there were three possible outcomes to our deliberations. Actually, the three possible outcomes to our deliberations today and tomorrow are: first, that the package is agreed; secondly, that the package falls; and thirdly, that the package is amended. The former Brexit Secretary—the middle one—told the Procedure Committee, on legal advice:

“if amendments were passed which purported to offer approval, but only subject to changes being made to the text of either the Withdrawal Agreement or the Future Framework, this would, in effect, amount to Parliament not approving the documents that were put to it. In this circumstance, the Government would therefore not have the authority to ratify the Withdrawal Agreement.”

Does the Secretary of State agree that, if any amendment is carried tomorrow, it will not be possible for the Government to ratify the withdrawal agreement?

**Dr Fox:** As you well know, Mr Speaker, it depends what any amendment says, but the Government will seek to get approval for this agreement because there is no other agreement currently on offer from the European Union.

**Mrs Sheryll Murray** (South East Cornwall) (Con): I have a lot of admiration for my right hon. Friend. He is a much more experienced Member of Parliament than me and has been in this place for a long time. Could he explain to me how we would have no Brexit at all? As I understand it, and as many people are saying, even if the withdrawal agreement falls, the date of 29 March is in the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018.

**Dr Fox:** As the law stands, were there to be no changes, we would automatically leave the European Union on 29 March. If that piece of legislation was, however, changed by one means or another, the picture could be very different.

**Dame Cheryl Gillan** (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way, particularly as when we stood on our manifesto in 1997, our manifesto was so clearly against Welsh devolution. Does he agree that companies such as GE Healthcare, which is headquartered in my constituency and has just spent £12 million investing in the local economy, are right when they say that ratification of the withdrawal agreement would provide business with the certainty it needs? In contrast, an exit on no deal would present considerable challenges for their operations, supply chains and, most importantly, their customers.

**Dr Fox:** As usual, my right hon. Friend makes her point concisely. The argument has come from a wide range of business sectors that, while they can price in risk, they cannot price in uncertainty, and certainty is what they are looking for.

It is a matter of fact that the relative importance of the European Union as an export market for the United Kingdom has been declining over the last decade, falling from 48.9% of the total in 2010 to 45.2% in 2017. Of course, the importance of the UK to EU trade varies from country to country. Figures compiled by Japanese investment bank Nomura show that Belgium's economy is the most reliant on trade with the UK, with around 8% of Belgian GDP dependent on trade with Britain. That is the highest level within the EU27. Belgium exports over £30 billion-worth of goods to the UK, which is Belgium's fourth largest export market. Belgium's Finance Minister has previously called for a quick trade agreement with the United Kingdom post-Brexit to protect thousands of jobs in that country. When trade is looked at purely in terms of exports, Ireland is the most exposed country—about 13% of all Irish exports end up in Britain—and the Netherlands also has a large reliance on the UK for exports and GDP.

At the same time as the proportion of Britain's exports to the EU has fallen, we are trading more with other partners around the world. We export a huge variety of commodities—for example, we sold £22 billion-worth of food, feed and drink abroad in 2017. In the year to November 2018, we sold £33.7 billion-worth of cars, £25.2 billion of medicinal and pharmaceutical products, and £24.6 billion of mechanical power generator products—from aircraft engines to gas turbines, and from steam generators to nuclear reactors. So much for Britain not producing anything any more; we are actually experiencing a renaissance in manufacturing in this country.

We also export a great many services. We are, in fact, the world's second largest services exporter. In the year to September 2018, we sold some £82.4 billion-worth of business services, £61 billion of financial services and nearly £38 billion of travel services. Here, across the sectors, the UK has huge comparative advantage. Services account for almost half of all our exports—42.4% going to the EU and 57.6% to non-EU countries.

**Seema Malhotra** (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Lucy Powell** (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Dr Fox:** I give way to the hon. Member for Feltham and Heston (Seema Malhotra), who was the first to stand up.

**Seema Malhotra:** The Secretary of State is making a very important point about our need to increase trade deals and trade relationships across the world. He has mentioned India, and on Friday I had a very good meeting with businesses in the Indian Business Network that are keen to increase trade with Britain. Does he agree with me that the relationship we have with the EU in trade is not just about our trade with the European Union? We use about 70 trade deals that the EU has negotiated with other countries for about £150 billion-worth of trade. Will the Secretary of State assure this House that there will still be access to those trade deals after we leave the European Union?

**Dr Fox:** I am grateful to the hon. Lady for raising a very important point. Yes, the Government's intention is, of course, that we will get this deal through, in which case, when it comes to an implementation period, we will have the opportunity for automatic roll-over. However, as the House would expect us to do, the Government are also preparing, in case there is no deal, to be able to have continuity of these trade agreements. A number of them are close to being signed, and when they are signed, the Government will put them to the House so that the House can make a judgment on them.

**Andrew Bridgen** (North West Leicestershire) (Con): Will the Secretary of State confirm that when we leave the European Union we will be the biggest export market for EU goods? Probably something like 17% of all EU exports will be coming to us. Has he or his Department made any estimate of how many millions of jobs in the EU are reliant on this trade with the UK?

**Dr Fox:** That is why it is to our mutual advantage to get a free trade agreement with the European Union. I hear people say that it would be fine simply to leave purely on World Trade Organisation terms, but if WTO terms were so advantageous, we would not be looking to have a free trade agreement with the United States. It is very clear that free trade agreements are one of the ways in which we can overcome some of the restrictions on most favoured nation status. I imagine that it would be to the advantage of both parties—both the EU27 and the UK—to come to a free trade agreement of some form after we leave so that we can maximise that trade between us.

**Lucy Powell:** Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Wes Streeting** (Ilford North) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Dr Fox:** I will give way again in a little while.

World trade is at a pivotal moment. We are at the intersection of a series of major global trends—trends so seismic that they have transformed or will transform economies and societies across the world. Services are now a larger part of the world economy than ever before, and they are more easily traded across borders thanks to the internet and digital telecommunications. We live in an emerging knowledge transfer-based trading

system, where an engineering report, a 3D printer design, or new advances in machine learning can be just as valuable as the contents of a cargo container.

The transfer of services and expertise in things such as product design and software engineering are becoming ever more important. A revolution in e-commerce is now under way. It is already a major component of world trade—from some of the world's largest corporations, such as Alibaba and Amazon, to the thousands of small companies that have never before been able to trade internationally. Major new opportunities are arising in the rapidly developing commercial and consumer markets of south-east Asia, Africa and Latin America, and it is essential that Britain leverages its unique strengths to realise them.

**Lucy Powell:** Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Dr Fox:** I will give way to the hon. Lady, if only because of her patience and tenacity.

**Lucy Powell:** I thank the Secretary of State very much. Shortly after the referendum, when he first took up the post, he said that the day after we left the EU, which is now only a few weeks away, he would have dozens of trade deals ready to go. How is that going?

**Dr Fox:** Perhaps the hon. Lady was not listening to the answer I gave earlier, but that process is getting to the point where we are likely to be signing some of those agreements in the very near future, at which point we will put them to the House of Commons.

Not only has there been a revolution in e-commerce, but Britain's consumers have embraced it, with about 20% of all goods in the UK bought online. At the same time—this is less well known—of all goods sold online, the UK is third globally behind only China and the United States. Last year, one in seven global online shoppers bought UK goods. It is therefore essential that we are able to operate an independent trade policy, allowing us to access the EU market, which remains hugely important to us, without tying our hands in relation to our ability to access markets in some of the world's fastest-growing economies.

This deal enables us to develop a trade policy that will mean we can make the most of the opportunities of new technologies and the changing shape of the global economy, striking a balance between protecting the markets we already have and tapping into new and rapidly expanding markets elsewhere.

**Kirsty Blackman** (Aberdeen North) (SNP): Specifically on e-commerce, the Government promised that in early 2019, the new online service for overseas businesses sending parcels to customers in the UK would be available. Will the Secretary of State tell us when it is going to be available?

**Dr Fox:** The Department for International Trade is putting increased resources into improving the elements we have to enable businesses to operate online, and we will continue to do so.

We must have a policy that is flexible and nimble, with which we can make the most of the opportunities of new technologies and the changing shape of the global economy. We can boost productivity, raise living standards and promote competitiveness. Working with



Parliament, business, civil society and the devolved Administrations, this deal allows us to have an independent trade policy for the first time in over 40 years.

Of course, we have not got everything that we want in this deal, but neither has the EU. There is give and take in any negotiation, and compromises have had to be made. Today, however, I would just like to emphasise what this agreement and the political declaration do. They give the United Kingdom the freedom to decide for ourselves who comes here, how to support our farmers and who fishes in our waters, as my right hon. Friend the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Secretary set out to the House the other day. They also give us the freedom to open up new markets to world-class British goods and services around the globe.

The political declaration sets out a clearly agreed vision for the UK's future relationship with the EU and provides instructions to negotiators. What the political declaration does is set out an unprecedented arrangement for UK-EU economic co-operation, provide ambitious arrangements for services and investment, and ensure that our relationship is far more comprehensive than any other free trade agreement the EU has signed to date.

**Emma Little Pengelly** (Belfast South) (DUP): The Secretary of State has been a great champion for global Britain—or, as I would like to call it, global United Kingdom—but surely he must be disappointed by many elements of this withdrawal agreement, which ties our hands for the next number of years on the types of trade deals we can do. That situation is exacerbated and much greater in Northern Ireland, where we could, in the words of the Attorney General, be not permanently but almost indefinitely in a backstop that would prevent us from being part of a new UK trade deal situation.

**Dr Fox:** I will not go back over the ground that the Prime Minister went over extensively this afternoon, but I would say that we perhaps need to take cognisance of the wording of the letter that came from the two EU Presidents—of the Commission and of the Council. They have a very legalistic view, and when they say that something carries legal weight, it tends to do so. I share many of the reservations that many in this House have about the backstop, but I believe that the construction of the backstop and the relationship set out in the political declaration mean that the risk of getting to the backstop is much less than I fear the risk of our being unable to achieve Brexit is. For me, that has been one of the key political balances; Members across the House will have to make that decision for themselves.

The political declaration will enable both parties to deliver the legal agreements that will give the future relationship effect by the end of 2020, covering an economic partnership, but also a security partnership and specific agreements on cross-cutting co-operation.

There has been much speculation about what the alternative to the agreement is—that point was raised by the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), who is no longer in his place. Let me be clear: there is no alternative agreement to that which has already been negotiated. The EU and the UK have painstakingly thrashed out a deal that has been endorsed by our Prime Minister and the 27 leaders of the other EU member states. Failure to accept a negotiated deal will lead us, as I said earlier, to either no deal or, worse, no Brexit.

**Toby Perkins:** Will the right hon. Gentleman give way? [*Interruption.*]

**Dr Fox:** Why not? I will give way to the hon. Gentleman again. I am feeling extraordinarily generous.

**Toby Perkins:** I am grateful that the right hon. Gentleman could not find any better alternatives. Does he accept that the deal has been painstakingly negotiated on the basis of the red lines that the Prime Minister set out right at the start, and that if we had different red lines, we could end up at a different destination?

**Dr Fox:** The hon. Gentleman should not put himself down in that way; that is normally the business of those on the other side of the House.

It is clear that if we do not accept a negotiated deal, the two other outcomes would be no deal or potentially no Brexit, and I do not think that either of those are acceptable. The Government have been clear that we neither want nor expect a no-deal scenario, but of course the Government will continue to do the responsible thing and prepare for all eventualities in case a final agreement cannot be reached. However, the evidence is clear that the best way forward for our businesses, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Dame Cheryl Gillan) eloquently set out, and for jobs and for our collective prosperity, is to have a Brexit deal.

Some have suggested that it would be possible under article XXIV of the general agreement on tariffs and trade to maintain tariff-free trade as an alternative to the negotiated agreement in a no-deal scenario. There are two immediate problems facing that suggestion. The first is that it would require the agreement of the EU and be based on the expectation of a future trade agreement or customs union to be operable in WTO law. Although it might be argued, as I am sure many in the House would, that that would be in the economic interests of the EU27, we all know from experience that the politics of the EU can take precedence over economic pragmatism. In the political atmosphere of no deal, it would be difficult to cultivate the good will necessary for that to proceed. Secondly, that suggestion would not deal with all the regulatory issues—the non-tariff barriers—that are so important to many businesses.

**Sir Oliver Heald** (North East Hertfordshire) (Con): My right hon. Friend will be aware that last week the Prime Minister met a group of Members from all parts of the House with manufacturing constituencies. There was concern coming through from all parts of the House and from both sides of industry that a no-deal situation would be disruptive and bad for manufacturing. Does he agree that, with the assurances that have come through today from the European Union, Members in all parts of the House who want to ensure that we avoid a no-deal situation could do a lot worse than vote for the deal that is on the table?

**Dr Fox:** I think that my right hon. and learned Friend, in making his points so succinctly, has just saved himself several hours of waiting. I believe that having a deal is preferable to no deal, but I am not one of those who takes the hyperbolic view that not having a deal would be cataclysmic to our economy. Yes, it may be disruptive, but it is entirely survivable for the

[Dr Fox]

UK economy. It is just not preferable, when it comes to the choice between having a deal and not having a deal, which is why I think it is advisable for the House to vote for this agreement.

There are, of course, Members of the House who want there to be no Brexit at all. I believe that would be a democratic disaster. It would be a betrayal of the commitments given by this House to respect the result of the EU referendum and, let me remind the 80% of the Members of the House who were elected on a promise to honour the result of the referendum, the manifesto commitments. There are many who say that democracy exists on the understanding that a voter can change their mind. That is undoubtedly true, but democratic consent by the people is also founded on the understanding that the result of the vote will be carried out. Failure to do so would undermine the trust of the people. Not only that, but it would be politically unacceptable, a betrayal of our principles and, potentially, a seismic and existential threat to our political system. We should not underestimate it. It would create a chasm of distrust between the electors and the elected of an unprecedented nature—a wilful destruction of the reputation of Parliament in the eyes of the people.

**Boris Johnson** (Uxbridge and South Ruislip) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his speech and particularly on his fortitude in his attitude towards a no-deal Brexit, which I think is entirely laudable. I know that he is a great admirer of the opportunities to increase our trade with the United States. Does he agree that it is a great sadness that the ambassador of the United States was forced to point out that, under this deal, we will be locked so closely into the EU customs union as to be unable to do a deep and thoroughgoing free trade deal with the United States, or indeed with any other significant economy?

**Dr Fox:** Our freedom to negotiate free trade agreements will be dependent on the level of alignment that we have. What is different about the political declaration, compared with the previous, Chequers proposals, is that there is no specific mention of a common rulebook or frictionless trade. Indeed, it sets out an ambition that we would determine the freedom that we would have by that level of alignment. We need to look, sector by sector, at what level of alignment we would want to have, in order to maximise our freedom. For example, there was a misunderstanding that the United Kingdom would not have control over tariffs on manufactured goods, which clearly we would have and which would be a very big ask in relation to, for example, the United States' automotive sector in any potential free trade agreement with the United Kingdom.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Dr Fox:** I will make some progress. I am cognisant of the fact that some 80 Members are down to speak in tonight's debate.

In coming to these deliberations, the House should also be under no illusion that the United Kingdom could somehow retain the status quo of its EU membership. This is not possible. It was not possible even before the referendum was called, because the EU itself is changing. The EU is committed, let us remember, to ever closer union.

Even since the referendum, there have been calls to move to qualified majority voting in areas from VAT to common foreign policy. These may indeed be right for those who wish to move towards greater integration, but they are not the right course for our country. Remaining in the European Union would be either to tie the United Kingdom into a more integrationist future or to create ever more tension and friction between ourselves and our European partners.

**Sir Mark Hendrick** (Preston) (Lab/Co-op): Can the Secretary of State tell the House whether he believes that a deal with the United States would be one of the easiest in human history?

**Dr Fox:** No one who has ever done a negotiation with the United States would use the word “easy” to describe it. That is something that comes across rather quickly to anyone who has had to deal with the United States trade negotiators. It is different, however, from negotiating a trade agreement with the European Union, the difference being that if we are looking at a free trade agreement with the United States, we have to diminish the regulatory and legal differences to get closer to a trade agreement. With the European Union, we begin from identity of regulation and legislation on our trading relationship, which should technically make it much simpler.

What we do not want to do is introduce unnecessary friction and tension. Sadly, that is something that both the Labour leader and the hon. Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner), the shadow Trade Secretary, as well as the rest of the Opposition, have failed to understand.

As has been made clear on numerous occasions, there could be no joint decision making on trade agreements if the UK is outside the EU in the way that the Labour party pretends there can be. There would be no fully independent trade policy as part of the EU customs union, and the Labour party has absolutely no chance—none, zilch, zero—of negotiating a better deal than the one we have now. There is no need to take my word for it. In response to accusations that Labour's trade policy was “total fantasy”, Jean-Claude Piris, the long-serving former director general of the EU Council's legal service, said:

“Obviously this is ruled out. It is contrary to the basic EU principle of autonomy of decision making. Don't even think about it!”

The Labour party clearly has not thought about it to any satisfactory degree.

Labour's policy, in so far as I understood it following the Leader of the Opposition's interview yesterday on “The Andrew Marr Show”, is that Labour intends to hold a general election and potentially another referendum, including all the legislation that would be required for that, all within 72 days of tomorrow's vote in order to carry out their fantasy policy proposals. It is a total shambles for an Opposition. If they think they could take that to the British public in a general election, they are even more foolish and naive than I had previously considered them to be.

**Ruth George** (High Peak) (Lab) *rose*—

**Dr Fox:** I will give way to the hon. Lady in a moment.

Let me just say something briefly about two other suggestions. Some Members have raised the prospect of a so-called Norway or EEA option. Re-joining the EEA

agreement would mean that we would have to accept all the four freedoms of the single market, including free movement of people. It would not on its own be sufficient to enable our commitments to Northern Ireland to be met, including on avoiding a hard border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. We would be stuck in the single market. If this were combined with staying in a customs union, which some have advocated, we would also be prevented from pursuing a fully independent trade policy. It would also leave our financial services industry, as the Chancellor has said, exposed to a rapidly evolving body of EU regulation over which we would have no influence. In many ways, it would be worse than remaining in the European Union, leaving us with many of the restrictions but, in perpetuity, unable to utilise any of the levers of decision making.

**Ruth George:** The Secretary of State is making a case against all the alternatives, but is it not the case, as he himself has set out, that there are no legally binding certainties in the future declaration? As he himself set out, we will be seeking to please both the USA and the EU on regulatory alignment. Those things are impossible to do. All this deal signs us up to is years more of uncertainty.

**Dr Fox:** But we will be taking those decisions. That is the whole point of leaving the European Union: those decisions will be in the hands of the British Government and the British Parliament for us to determine what level of regulatory alignment we want, if any, to maximise our access to trading markets.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Dr Fox:** I will give way one more time in a moment.

There are also Members of this House who have advocated a second referendum, but there are three substantive problems with that suggestion: on practical grounds, democratic grounds and constitutional grounds. First, in practical terms, it would take time for this House and the other place to pass the necessary primary legislation. The Electoral Commission would also have to fulfil its statutory duty to assess the intelligibility of the question to be posed, a process that takes about 10 weeks. A further 12 weeks would be required between the question being determined and the referendum actually being held. It is therefore completely impractical to hold such a referendum before the United Kingdom leaves the European Union on 29 March. It is entirely possible to see such a process taking up to a year before it could be completed.

Secondly, there are clear democratic grounds to oppose a second referendum. This House voted overwhelmingly to hold the referendum to give the decision on Britain's membership of the European Union to the British people. A "people's vote" has already been held and it produced a clear, unambiguous instruction from the British electorate for us to leave the European Union. We are honour-bound to respect that.

**Kevin Hollinrake** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): My right hon. Friend is making a very impassioned speech in support of the Prime Minister's deal. I too am supportive of that deal. On a point of clarification and accuracy, when he talked about the Norway arrangement he said there would be no opportunity to influence the

rules. Are there not the powers of co-determination for EEA nations within that body to be able to at least have a say at the initial stages when legislation is drafted?

**Dr Fox:** I have to say in all candour to my hon. Friend that having spoken to a number of my colleagues in Norway, their advice was to retain the ability to have our own free trade agreement and not restrict our freedom in the way that they have.

This House confirmed that we would respect the result of the referendum when we voted overwhelmingly to trigger article 50 and begin the process of negotiations.

**Lucy Powell:** Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Dr Fox:** I have already given way to the hon. Lady and I will not do so again.

This was further confirmed by the last general election in which the two main parties, comprising over 80% of the total votes cast, promised to respect the referendum result. Let us imagine that a second referendum were held in which the remain side won, perhaps with a narrow majority but with a lower turnout. Leave supporters like me could well begin demanding a third referendum, a best of three. Where would the process actually end? We have had a people's vote and we need to respect the people's vote. Another referendum would not settle the issue or heal our divisions—quite the opposite. It would further divide our already fractious country at a time when we need to come together.

There is also the constitutional issue. If we overturn this referendum result, we will be setting a precedent that could be applied to other referendums too. Furthermore, a second referendum would create prolonged, not diminished, political and economic uncertainty.

**Richard Graham** (Gloucester) (Con): Is not the point about the future trade relationship and the opportunities for global Britain that without this withdrawal agreement there can be no negotiation with Europe, whether to achieve a Canada-plus solution or any other solution? The danger with no deal is that without an agreement at the beginning, we would never be able to structure a future free trade agreement with the European Union.

**Dr Fox:** As usual, my hon. Friend makes a very good point very clearly. There are, across the House, a number of potential destinations that Members want to see: a Norway-type option, EEA-plus, a Canada-style agreement or FTA-plus. What they all have in common is one thing: there needs to be a withdrawal agreement before we are actually able to have any of them. That is why this particular deal is so important.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Dr Fox:** I will give way one more time before I finish.

It is time to consign the divisions of the referendum to the past. It is time to raise our sights and acknowledge that there is a world beyond Europe and there will be a time beyond Brexit to build the economic opportunities that this country needs to thrive as a truly global Britain. The withdrawal agreement and political declaration are a way forward to achieve this model; to bring us together, to seize the new opportunities out there in the world economy and to lead our country to a more prosperous, stable and secure future.



[Dr Fox]

While the UK is leaving the European Union, we are certainly not leaving Europe. This agreement provides a foundation on which to build our continued co-operation with our European partners on trading, political and security matters. It will enable us to play a full and active role on the global stage, working closely with friends old and new, and building an independent trade policy that caters to the strengths and requirements of the UK economy. The deal allows the UK to continue to participate in the EU's existing free trade agreements during the implementation period, as has already been mentioned. Crucially, it will also have the benefit of being able to negotiate, sign and ratify new trade agreements and lay the foundations for future relationships with our trading partners across the world. We need to take a balanced approach, acknowledging the continued importance of our EU partners while taking advantage of opportunities beyond the borders of our continent in the high-growth economies of Africa, Asia and South America, which I believe will be key to our economic success as a global Britain.

The deal will give us the freedom to implement our own trade remedies regime, to protect jobs and livelihoods from unfair trade, to set our own trade tariffs and to take up our independent seat at the World Trade Organisation for the first time in more than 40 years. That will be a key opportunity to further our support for the international rules-based trading system and ensure it delivers free and fair trade and, in particular, to pioneer the liberalisation of trade in services.

As I have outlined, there are fundamental changes in the global economy that simply did not exist when the Uruguay round was concluded, and it is right that we position the British economy to take advantage of them. Even as the information revolution continues to transform our world at a staggering pace with the system of free and fair international trade that uplifts it and underpins it, there is still much to do to reduce existing and emerging tariff and non-tariff barriers to trade that already pose a serious threat to global growth. Britain can play a key role in that.

We have an abiding duty to do what we believe is right for our country. Members will take different views, and, as I said at the outset, I respect their ability to do so. I do not in any way undermine their patriotism in taking different views. The agreement carries out the democratic will of the British people to leave the European Union, as expressed by the referendum. It allows the United Kingdom to take back control of our borders, laws and money and delivers a close and co-operative partnership with the European Union but, crucially, outside it. It delivers for the British economy.

No negotiated agreement is likely to deliver everything that anyone wants—perhaps no agreement ever could, but for our communities, our prosperity and for future generations, I believe this agreement is the right thing for the United Kingdom. I commend the Prime Minister's deal to the House.

7.12 pm

**Barry Gardiner** (Brent North) (Lab): For many months, we have been confronted with a series of choices and a series of false choices. The country had to choose

whether to leave or remain. Those in the Cabinet had to choose whether to leave or remain in the Cabinet. For many Government Members, the choice has become whether to leave with or without a deal. For many Opposition Members, the choice has been whether to call for a second referendum or to accept the first.

Many famous figures have been quoted since we started our debate back at the beginning of December, but these are the words that keep coming back to me: it is not our abilities in life but our choices that define who we truly are. For all the heart searching and the division that these questions have caused, I am convinced more than ever that the real divide in our country is not between those who voted to remain and those who voted to leave but, as the leader of my party said last week, between the many who do the work, create the wealth and pay the taxes, and the few who set the rules, reap the rewards and so often dodge paying the taxes. The real choice is choosing whose side we are on when we see injustice, unfairness and inequality. In answer to that question, my party—the Labour party—has always throughout its history had one and only one answer. As the party of the many, we seek to heal the appalling divide that we now see in our society.

The speeches that have moved me in the long course of our debate since December were those like that of my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Gareth Snell), who explained that his constituents were not interested in the processes and the amendments. He said:

“They want to know how they will feed their kids and heat their house, and how they will get to work if there is no bus. How will they make ends meet if they have to move from their current benefit on to universal credit?”

That view was intriguingly echoed from the Government Benches by the hon. Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer), who said:

“The vote to leave was in no small part a *cri de coeur* from millions of people who feel that the powers that be in Westminster no longer know, let alone care, what it feels like to walk in their shoes...At every level, there was a direct correlation between household income and the likelihood to vote for leaving the EU.”—[*Official Report*, 6 December 2018; Vol. 650, c. 1144-1159.]

The social divide in our country is real. I agree with my colleagues who say, “That was not caused by the European Union.” That is true, but nor did the European Union provide a shield against it. It will not be solved if we become poorer by leaving the EU, but while our country has been a member of the EU, the experience of those millions of people has been the loss of secure jobs, the hollowing out of their communities, and years of austerity and harsh social policy. That is why remaining in the EU does not appear to them to be a solution to the inequality we face.

*Cri de coeur* it may have been, but those people will feel nothing but anger and disgust for us as politicians if we turn around now and patronise them by ignoring and reversing on the message they gave us in the referendum. My good friend the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central (Chi Onwurah) expressed that with an eloquence we rarely hear in the Chamber when she said:

“The right to be heard is a key battleground in the history of our country, and it is at the heart of the age-old division between those who labour in silence and those who speak from a gilded platform.”—[*Official Report*, 4 December 2018; Vol. 650, c. 832.]

My God, I wish I had said that.

When the referendum result came in, those who voted to leave finally felt that their voices had been heard. The House has to understand that despite the social chapter and the good will of our MEPs, the EU did not present itself as a champion of the voiceless. It was against that backdrop that the Prime Minister had an opportunity to put together a future that met the aspirations of those voters. She could and should have recognised that when our fellow citizens are divided 52% to 48%, it is the time not to go back in the political bunker but to reach out. She should have reached out and tried to build a consensus across Parliament that would have united our country. That would have been leadership, but instead she doubled down, put her party interests before the country and tried to appease the European Research Group.

I do not deny that the Prime Minister has shown steel and determination, but there is a point at which steel and determination become obstinacy and recklessness, and she has gone far beyond it. The Labour party consistently argued that before triggering article 50, Parliament must be properly consulted on, and fully involved in, the impact assessments, the right to a meaningful vote, the deal and the financial modelling. We argued that Parliament had the right to see the full legal opinion prepared by the Attorney General. The Prime Minister's refusal at every stage was a blunder that resulted in an achievement unique in 1,000 years of our history in this place: a Government being held to be in contempt of Parliament. That is ironic, given that Brexit was supposed to be about restoring the sovereignty of Parliament.

**Charlie Elphicke:** The hon. Gentleman talks about the importance of uniting the House. Will he unite with me in rejecting the idea of a second referendum? We need to honour the referendum mandate and leave the European Union.

**Barry Gardiner:** I will conclude on exactly the point that the hon. Gentleman raises, because it is at the heart of the conundrum facing the House and the country. If he gives me time, I will get there.

**Dr Fox:** I am grateful for how the hon. Gentleman is setting out his arguments, but if he feels that he was ill informed when article 50 was triggered, why did he vote for it?

**Barry Gardiner:** The Secretary of State makes a bewildering point, because I did not talk about being ill informed about the triggering of article 50, but he makes his own point and perhaps he understands what he means.

Now that the Prime Minister has finally brought her deal back to the House of Commons, it is hardly surprising that Members on both sides do not believe it to be in the best interests of our country. I know that she is now reaching out to her rather unlikely new-found friends in Unite and the GMB, and even to Opposition Members, but colleagues will recognise that this is a paradigm of too little, too late. Workers' rights and environmental standards and protections are a vital part of Labour's concern about the future relationship. We cannot agree that the UK should be in a situation in which we might fall behind our EU counterparts. The principle of non-regression from current levels makes it almost impossible to take action against the loss of a

specific right but, as the TUC has made clear, what is required is not vague assurances but the binding long-term guarantees that working people need. These are not, even now, being offered.

On 10 December, the Prime Minister called a halt to the first part of the debate. She acknowledged that the package of the withdrawal agreement and the future political framework, as it stood, would not gain the support of the House. She undertook to change it and to come back with legally binding assurances on the backstop after listening to Members' objections. Indeed, the Secretary of State for International Trade went as far as to say:

"I think it is very difficult to support the deal if we don't get changes to the backstop... I'm not even sure if the cabinet will agree for it to be put to the House of Commons."

Well, here it is, and here he is, but the only thing that has changed is that the Prime Minister has lost yet more votes, and more of the confidence of Members and of the country. The letter from the EU that she has brought back is a long way from the significant and legally effective commitment she promised last month. It is a reiteration of the EU's existing position. She has delayed proceedings in a futile bid to run down the clock but, once again, nothing has changed.

Before the intermission in our debate, when the Prime Minister was trying to press her Back Benchers to support her, she claimed repeatedly that there was no possibility of renegotiation, but then, when defeat seemed inevitable, she scrambled back to Europe in a vain attempt to do precisely that.

**Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg** (North East Somerset) (Con): You are criticising—*[Interruption.]* I do apologise, Mr Speaker; Even Homer nods. The hon. Gentleman said that the Prime Minister told us that she could not renegotiate, but now criticises her for coming back saying she could not renegotiate, as she said. That seems a little unfair.

**Barry Gardiner:** The hon. Gentleman is extremely courteous and always punctilious about the truth of what is said in this Chamber. I simply stated the fact that the Prime Minister had said it was impossible to renegotiate but that, when she faced defeat, she tried to do what she herself had said was impossible.

The Government could have used some of this time to respond to the Treasury Committee by providing proper economic assessments containing an analysis of the Northern Ireland backstop and setting out the short-term economic impact of the Prime Minister's proposed deal. On 11 December, the Committee published its report on the withdrawal agreement and the political declaration. It concluded:

"The White Paper scenario, which is akin to the Chequers proposal, represents the most optimistic and generous reading of the Political Declaration, insofar as it is consistent with it at all. It does not represent the central or most likely outcome under the Political Declaration. Therefore, it cannot be used to inform Parliament's meaningful vote on the Withdrawal Agreement. The information provided includes no analysis of the Backstop, and there is no short-term analysis of any of the scenarios, including on public finances and on regional and sectoral job losses and gains. The Government has only provided long-term analysis, which does not show how the economy will transition to a new trading relationship, or the path taken by inflation and unemployment".

[Barry Gardiner]

The Chair of the Committee, the right hon. Member for Loughborough (Nicky Morgan), commented:

“The aim of this report is not to recommend how MPs should vote, but to ensure that MPs are as informed as possible when it comes to choosing a division lobby. Yet the Government has made this difficult to achieve. The Committee is disappointed that the Government has modelled its White Paper, which represents the most optimistic reading of the Political Declaration, rather than a more realistic scenario. The Committee is also disappointed that the Treasury has not analysed the backstop and fails to include short-term analysis of any of the scenarios, including impacts on public finances and on regional and sectoral job losses or gains.”

In the Chancellor’s letter responding to the Committee, he revealed that

“there is not yet sufficient specificity on detailed arrangements for modelling purposes, and therefore the provisions of the backstop have not been included in the analysis.”

Indeed! Members are being asked to take one of the most important decisions for our country on the basis of inadequate financial information, and it is precisely this lack of specificity that has left Members across the House unable to have confidence in the Prime Minister’s deal.

**The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr Philip Hammond):** Will the hon. Gentleman acknowledge that the cross-Government modelling to which he refers looked at the situation 15 years out? Of course it does not reflect the inclusion of the backstop. The backstop, if it were used, would be a temporary arrangement, so it is completely irrelevant to the stable state 15 years out.

**Barry Gardiner:** Of course it was right to look at the 15-year long-term assessment. Nobody is disputing that. Indeed, I will quote later from precisely that analysis. The problem is—and this is not just my criticism but the all-party Treasury Select Committee’s criticism—that these crucial elements of how we will transition to the future relationship have not been analysed or presented to the House.

**Charlie Elphicke:** As a member of that Committee, I share the hon. Gentleman’s concerns about the modelling, and I do believe that the Treasury needs to get better at listening, but would he agree that Labour’s various Brexit tests are not worth the paper they are written on? Indeed, I believe one member of the shadow Cabinet used a profanity in describing Labour’s Brexit policy not so long ago.

**Barry Gardiner:** Oh dear, Mr Speaker!

It is precisely this lack of specificity that has left Members across the House unable to have confidence in the Prime Minister’s deal. I probably should not call it a deal, because the future political framework document is no more than a placeholder for the future trade and security agreements that the Government hope eventually to conclude. It is both this lack of detail and the fact that the Prime Minister has wound down the clock that have significantly reduced the ability of Parliament to be properly involved in the most important decision facing our country.

When my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), the shadow Brexit Secretary, fought and won the battle for a meaningful vote, which is now scheduled for tomorrow, he made it

clear that the word “meaningful” must imply both a level of detail and clarity about what was proposed and a timeliness that would enable Parliament to amend the proposal and the Government to respond appropriately. We should not forget that originally the Government quite correctly wished to pursue the negotiations on the withdrawal agreement and the political framework side by side, but they agreed the chronology set out by the European Union.

That, I believe, was a mistake, but it made it all the more important that the negotiations on phase one be concluded expeditiously. The Government failed to do that. As a consequence, they ended up agreeing to everything that was vital to the EU in the withdrawal agreement and leaving everything about the future trade, security and political agreement that is vital to the UK to fall into a thin wish list, with words such as “the parties envisage”, “the parties will explore”, “the parties will use their best endeavours”.

The truth is that the real negotiations that will affect our economic life and our citizens’ future security have not yet properly begun. Look at the provisions for data protection: we have lost our place on the European Data Protection Board. The Prime Minister said in Munich that staying on it was one of her objectives so that we could continue to influence the rules and development of the general data protection regulation regime that we had been so influential in setting up. We will still have to comply with the scheme, but under the political declaration the EU will “start the assessments” of whether it should recognise the UK as a fit regime and will endeavour to reach a decision by 2020.

It is the same with REACH and the chemicals regulations: these are areas in which the EU is leading the world and in which we were leading the EU. No longer—our chemicals industry has spent more than half a billion pounds registering more than 6,000 chemicals with the EU’s database. The Government are now asking it to re-register every single one with our own Health and Safety Executive because we will no longer have access to that EU database. It is the same for financial services, where we are talking about equivalence, not even mutual recognition: the EU will start assessing whether it can declare our regulatory and supervisory regime is equivalent only after the withdrawal date. Then it says that it will try to reach a decision before the end of June 2020. Well, how very good of it.

The hon. Member for East Surrey (Mr Gyimah) spoke with great clarity and from his own bitter experience of negotiating with the EU when he advised the House:

“We must be clear-eyed as we go into these negotiations because they have been set up for failure. The EU will manage the timetable, it will manage the sequencing of the negotiations, it will set the hurdles and it will tell us when we can progress to the next stage. That is what happened in the first phase of the negotiations and that is what will happen in the second phase. We will always be in a position in which we have to walk away or fold”.

The hon. Gentleman was clear about what he thought would happen, from his own experience of negotiating Galileo. He said:

“we will always fold because the clock will be ticking.”—[*Official Report*, 5 December 2018; Vol. 650, c. 920.]

I agree. If we give the green light to the Prime Minister’s proposals tomorrow, we will end up not with the unique agreement that the future framework dangles before us,



but with a free trade agreement dictated to us by the EU. We will have a long and difficult road to a future trade agreement that will not solve the economic problems we face or heal the divisions in our society. In the weeks since the Government called a halt to this debate, the US ambassador put to bed any idea of a quick and massive trade deal with the Americans. I do not usually find myself in agreement with the Trump Administration, but the assessment made in Washington that there will be little scope for a major trade deal with the United States is one with which I wholly concur.

The future political framework sets out that “the United Kingdom’s commitments on customs and regulatory cooperation, including with regard to alignment of rules, would be taken into account in the application of related checks and controls”.

There is nothing remarkable there, really—it is what we in the Opposition have been pointing out for a very long time. If we want a strong trade relationship, the facility of market access must be proportionate to regulatory alignment.

**Ruth George:** Does my hon. Friend agree that the problems of regulatory alignment with very different actors such as the United States of America and the EU, with which we will both seek to do a free trade agreement, will make it extremely difficult for us to conclude agreements with both? We will have to prioritise one over the other. The USA has asked for access to our internal health markets and says that we will have to align our food standards down to theirs, so our having to choose might be a very good thing.

**Barry Gardiner:** I am pleased that I gave way to my hon. Friend, who has said what it is critical to understand on both sides of the House: we cannot simply have deals with everybody that are as good with everybody. We will have to pick and choose.

For my own part, I have never been star-struck by the prospect of a trade agreement with the USA; even under President Obama, it wanted us to weaken our food standards so that it could increase access for American agri-foods to the UK.

**Boris Johnson** *rose—*

**Barry Gardiner:** I will give way to the right hon. Gentleman in a minute—and quicker than his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development did.

Ten days ago, I had the pleasure of attending the Oxford farming conference. It was clear that the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, who had spoken to them the day before, had got farmers seriously concerned. They were pleased that he confirmed that our food production standards in the UK would not be reduced, but incensed by his refusal to deny that food from the USA and elsewhere, which had been produced to lower standards, would be allowed access into the UK to undercut them in our domestic market. That, according to the Government, of course, is not a lowering of our standards in the UK but simply consumer choice and the pursuit of free trade. I now give way to the former Foreign Secretary.

**Boris Johnson:** I admire the tone in which the hon. Gentleman is making his remarks. May I ask him about the free trade deals that he says Labour would like

to pursue? I am puzzled to hear that. It was my impression that Labour had abandoned its policy of coming out of the customs union and was instead preparing for us to remain in it as a paying, participating member, setting the same tariffs. Will he explain exactly how that is supposed to work?

**Barry Gardiner:** I am delighted to say that the rest of my speech will be doing precisely that; I hope it will satisfy the right hon. Gentleman.

Alignment of standards is key to trade. That was properly recognised by the Minister for Trade Policy himself—sadly, he is not in his place at the moment—when he said:

“If we come out of alignment with EU regulations in this area, then there is a penalty to be paid in terms of frictionless trade with Europe.”

Of course, the idea that this particular American President is not going to demand greater access for American healthcare businesses into our NHS is simply a fantasy. So yes—I would love to do more business with the USA. It is already our major bilateral trading partner as a country rather than a bloc, but whatever benefits a trade agreement with it may bring must be weighed against the corresponding losses in our existing or any future trade agreement with the EU.

**Lucy Powell:** Is my hon. Friend aware that, before the referendum, the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) said that staying in the single market was “essential and deliverable”?

**Barry Gardiner:** I am glad to say that the one thing that I can honestly claim I have no responsibility for are the words of the right hon. Gentleman.

When listening to some of the more extreme proponents of Brexit, it has often amused me to hear them say that trading with the European Union on World Trade Organisation terms would not be the slightest problem for us; in the same breath, they insist that to achieve our destiny we cannot possibly trade on WTO terms with the United States—and that that is why we need to break free from the EU.

The simple truth is this—I hope it answers the right hon. Gentleman’s question: it makes good sense to have good trade agreements with everyone, but to have the best trade agreements with our closest trading partners. For us, that is the EU, with which we do 53% of our trade and which takes 44% of our exports.

**Boris Johnson** *rose—*

**Barry Gardiner:** No, I will not give way again to the right hon. Gentleman.

I move on to immigration, which was a key part of the referendum debate. Like many Members, I was outraged by the dog-whistle politics of the Vote Leave campaign’s very own “Project Fear”: that millions of Turkish citizens would be queuing up for entry into the UK. That was a lie, and those Members who associated themselves with that campaign should feel ashamed.

I also want to express my disgust at those who have sought to paint leave voters as ignorant racists; it is that sort of demonisation of our fellow citizens that is so damaging to the discourse around Brexit. It precisely obscures some of the real concerns that leave voters did express, and had every right to. Their concerns were about the lack of housing, the strains on the NHS, and

[Barry Gardiner]

being undercut in the workplace by unscrupulous employers who often exploited migrants and paid them less than the minimum wage. All those issues are about public services and domestic enforcement. They will not be solved by our leaving the EU, but they will also not be solved by our remaining. What is needed is a change of Government policy, or, better still, a change of Government.

Immigration is a vital element of our economic growth, and of our trade and trade negotiations. We need migration. The Government's own economic assessment shows that European migration contributes 2% of GDP to the UK. The Government's proposed £30,000 salary threshold would actually preclude three quarters of EU migrants. I am not referring simply to seasonal agricultural workers or careworkers; even some junior doctors do not earn more than £30,000 a year. The Government's supposed skills threshold is really a salary threshold, and it would do serious damage to our economy.

The irony is, of course, that EU net migration is coming down. Statistics published just last month record the number as 74,000. The Government have been complaining that free movement gives them no control over those people. Presumably they mean the sort of control that they have always been able to exercise over migrants coming from the rest of the world. Is it not strange, then, that the figure recorded for net migration from the rest of the world is 248,000?

This is why politicians are not trusted. They tell people that we need to abolish freedom of movement to bring migration down to the tens of thousands when our own rules, over which the EU has never had any say, are allowing three times that number. What we should be explaining to people is that net migration should go both up and down in line with the needs of our economy. As long as we have fair rules and competent and reasonable management of migration, this country will be better off. The trouble is that we have had lies, arbitrary targets that bear no relation to our economy's requirements, and, frankly, administrative incompetence.

As with regulatory alignment, so with the exchange of people. The deeper the trade deal we want, the greater the need for an exchange of people. Foreign companies that invest in the UK want and need their indigenous workers to get visas, and the harder we make that process, the less investment we will secure. When the Prime Minister went to India two years ago to secure a trade deal, she was rebuffed on precisely that issue. *The Times of India* summed it up on its front page with the headline "You want our business. But you do not want our People".

**David T. C. Davies** (Monmouth) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Barry Gardiner:** No. I have not spoken for as long as the Secretary of State and I do not intend to, but 80 Members wish to speak, so I will make some progress.

Our universities and colleges represent one of the greatest exports that our country has: education, which contributes hugely to our economy, not just through fees but through the industrial spin-offs from our world-leading research. That depends on our bringing top brains from all over the globe, and encouraging them to

see the UK as their intellectual home. However, the bogus colleges scandal, and the way in which we have treated students whose colleges are closed down or go into receivership, has been a disgrace. They are victims of fraud because our system of certification has been so poor, but we treat them as if they were the criminals. They are given just 60 days to find another college, often in the middle of an academic year, and then to pay another full year's fees before they are classed as illegal overstayers. No wonder students from key future trading partners in China and India are now turning to Australia, Canada and the US as their first choices for higher education and research. [Interruption.]

The Under-Secretary of State for International Trade, the hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness (Graham Stuart), asks why I am running down our education service. If he had listened carefully, he would have heard me talk about our world-leading research and our top-quality universities. What I ran down was the incompetent administration of the certification of bogus colleges, and the incompetent administration of the immigration rules thereafter.

**Mr Mark Prisk** (Hertford and Stortford) (Con): Give way.

**Barry Gardiner:** The hon. Gentleman may not have noticed, but I did give way.

Students should never have been part of our net migration figures, and immigration should be proclaimed loudly by every Member to be an important and hugely beneficial resource for our economy. Yes, free movement of people will end when we leave the EU, because it is a function of the treaties of the EU, but that does not mean that we should not operate a system of immigration controls with the EU that allows broad and reciprocal access to all our citizens in a way that maximises the benefits to all our economies. That is what our businesses need: access to skills.

For all that, however, some businesses are willing to accept the Prime Minister's deal. They have expressed grudging acceptance of it, and some have even written to their Members of Parliament asking them to support it. Well, there is the proof that "Project Fear" works both ways. The Government are holding a gun to business's head with the threat of no deal, and, given this Hobson's choice, some have been blackmailed into acquiescing in the Prime Minister's proposal. I am sure that their acquiescence will have been cemented by the cheery words of the Secretary of State this morning, when he advised the nation that he did not regard no deal as "national suicide", and that, although he grudgingly accepted that it would "damage our economy", he thought that it was "survivable"—and this from the man who once said that a trade deal with the EU would be

"the easiest in human history".

It is so good that the Secretary of State and the Chancellor are sharing the debate. I had some little hope that the Chancellor might have sat with him and taken him through the economic analyses. With no change in migration, no deal would see the UK's GDP 7.7% lower than it would otherwise be. According to the estimates of the Office for Budget Responsibility, that is £164 billion if translated into the current fiscal year. With zero net EEA worker inflows, no deal would

see the UK's GDP 9.3%, or £198 billion, lower than otherwise. That is a heck of a lot of Brexit buses for the NHS: 565.

Unfortunately, during the first part of the debate, the Secretary of State told the House effectively to ignore all the Chancellor's carefully prepared scenarios and analyses. Back in December, he said:

"It is not realistic to expect that there would be no potential shift, if necessary, in Government fiscal policy, or in the Bank of England's monetary policy, or changes to what the Government will be able to do on tariffs. We have to be realistic and try to understand what those things are. To try to confuse forecasts and scenarios, intentionally or otherwise, is not helpful to the debate."—[*Official Report*, 6 December 2018; Vol. 650, c. 1203-4.]

**Conor Burns** (Bournemouth West) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Barry Gardiner**: No.

Actually, what is not helpful to the debate is to dismiss the existing economic modelling without presenting any credible alternative, to fail to provide any analyses of the short-term consequences of the Prime Minister's deal, and to fail to carry out any analysis at all of the Northern Irish backstop arrangements—and then to have the audacity to expect the nation to blindly trust that no deal is not "national suicide".

**Conor Burns**: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Barry Gardiner**: I will.

**Conor Burns**: Will the hon. Gentleman concede that it is entirely possible that the current Treasury forecasts will prove to be as accurate as the ones that it made before the referendum?

**Barry Gardiner**: I think we should look at what actually happened, and it is relevant to the point that the Secretary of State was trying to make back in December. People are very fond of saying, "There were predictions of disaster and financial meltdown, but nothing happened." Well, actually, something did happen: I think it was called "£70 billion of quantitative easing", which the Treasury put into the economy in order to stop the problems.

Of course the Secretary of State once believed that his friends in the Anglosphere would be queuing up to do new trade agreements that would replace any lost GDP growth. The Bank of England has quantified the potential value of those deals at just 0.2%—not 2%, but 0.2%, or one fifth of 1%, or £4.25 billion. Nice to have, but by my reckoning the Secretary of State would still owe me about 533 Brexit buses.

The Prime Minister is fond of saying that her deal is the only one on the table. Well, of course it is; she is the Government, and only the Government are able to negotiate with the EU. That does not mean that there could not be a different deal. The Brexit negotiations have been constrained by the Prime Minister's red lines. We know that had the red lines been different then the deal would have been different also.

The Father of the House, the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), reminded us in his admonishment of the Home Secretary that

"if we are maintaining an open border where there is a land border, it can only be done in a modern economy by having some form of customs union applying to both sides of the border".—[*Official Report*, 5 December 2018; Vol. 650, c. 900.]

That is why we on the Labour Benches have been calling for a new permanent customs union with the EU in which we would have a say over future trade agreements.

When the shadow Chancellor mentioned this previously in our debate the Secretary of State was really rather rude and he reinforced that disparagement today. He reminded the House that under article 3 of the treaty on the functioning of the European Union the EU shall have exclusive competence with regard to the customs union. Of course it does: the treaty binds the member states of the EU and gives the Commission that right to negotiate the terms of any agreement with third-party countries. It does not stop the EU concluding agreements with third-party countries where there is joint control.

**Greg Hands** (Chelsea and Fulham) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Barry Gardiner**: No.

Perhaps I can read from article 8 of the TFEU:

"The Union shall develop a special relationship with neighbouring countries, aiming to establish an area of prosperity and good neighbourliness, founded on the values of the Union and characterised by close and peaceful relations based on cooperation.

2. For the purposes of paragraph 1, the Union may conclude specific agreements with the countries concerned. These agreements may contain reciprocal rights and obligations as well as the possibility of undertaking activities jointly."

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Barry Gardiner**: I will not give way as I am moving to my conclusion.

A new customs union in which the UK would be able to reject any agreement it believed was concluded to its disadvantage—however advantageous it might be for the 27 EU member states—is a vital way of securing the open trade border, avoiding the problems of the backstop and respecting the referendum mantra of taking back control. It should have been part of our negotiating mandate from the beginning.

So often it has seemed, on both sides of the Brexit divide, that the point of listening has been to prepare one's counter-arguments and rebut what the other person is saying, rather than any genuine attempt to understand their fears and concerns, so I want to conclude by sharing with colleagues my own fears and concerns about the position we are in. It seems to me that we are caught between two competing and equally important principles: our responsibility to protect the economic wellbeing and livelihoods of our constituents; and our democratic responsibility to accept the result of a referendum where we promised to respect the result. The first principle is often invoked by colleagues who say, "Nobody voted to make themselves poorer or put themselves out of a job," and that is true. The second principle is often invoked by colleagues who say that we will damage our democracy and increase cynicism about politics if we turn round and pat the electorate on the head and basically say "There, there! You didn't understand. You were lied to. We will give you another chance to see it our way."

I have found myself genuinely torn apart by these competing claims, as I know many colleagues have. It seems to me that it is simply not good enough to insist either that we remain or that we leave no matter the cost. Both these positions are absolutes, and while we may campaign in black and white, we must govern in



[Barry Gardiner]

shades of grey. Each absolute side of the debate must be able to have a credible explanation for the roughly 50% of their fellow citizens who profoundly disagree with them as to why they should not be taken into account.

I know what I promised my constituents at the last general election. It is right here in our manifesto:

“Labour accepts the referendum result”—

not that we would respect it, but that we would accept it.

“We will prioritise jobs and living standards, build a close new relationship with the EU, protect workers’ rights and environmental standards, provide certainty to EU nationals and give a meaningful role to Parliament throughout negotiations.”

That is the rejoinder to those who pretend that our Brexit position has not been clear. It has been there, consistent and unchanged in black and white, since the general election. That is what this Government should have done; it is what we—[*Interruption.*] That is what this Government should have done; it is what we would have done and what a new Government now need to do.

And one thing more. We said that we would

“seek to unite the country around a Brexit deal that works for every community in Britain.”

The Prime Minister’s deal does not, and that is why Parliament must reject it.

7.56 pm

**Mr Iain Duncan Smith** (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): I recognise that time is short, so I will not go on for too long and I will not take too many interventions—but you never know, you might get lucky.

I appreciate the excellent speech of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, but, while I wanted to agree with it all, I have to tell him that I did not wholly agree with it, and I want to address a couple of points. I do not doubt for one moment his sincere desire to make sure that this country is able to strike trade deals around the world and thus make the greatest advantage from the big decision taken back in 2016. The question for me is: are we going to be able to do that, and what does this agreement do to help us—or does it help us?

Alignment is a very big and important issue in the agreement, and we have conceded too much to the EU, which will hamstring us in our future trade agreements. I think my right hon. Friend has actually said that elsewhere, and as he knows, the US ambassador also made that point clear recently. We may want to do financial services deals with other countries, but many other countries, including the United States of America, will want to do more on agricultural and mechanical exports. Agriculture is a big deal in the States and they would like to do that, but in our country there has been a rather supercilious and pointless debate about things like chlorinated chicken. We tend to get a bit arrogant and think that somehow we are fantastically superior—[HON. MEMBERS: “We are.”] Well, on the issue of so-called chlorinated chicken, America has a lower level of death and illness from campylobacter or salmonella than us here in the UK. That is because some of our chicken imports come from way outside the EU and are less than great. So we should not be so arrogant about thinking our standards are higher than everyone else’s.

I want to make three main points about why I am concerned, and then I will conclude. The first concern is the backstop; the hon. Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner) referred to it, and we have all referred to it. My concern about the backstop is twofold. First, if we go into the backstop it will trap us and take our ability to leave out of our own hands. It will be the first time that, as a sovereign nation, we will have agreed to let others decide whether we can stay in or leave an international agreement. We can leave NATO, we can leave the UN if we wish, and we can even leave the EU at our vote, but in this case we will not be able to leave; there will have to be a joint agreement about departure, and there is no time limit to it.

I was therefore very interested to see what the Prime Minister would come back with on the agreement. I see that the letter from President Tusk and President Juncker to her says, “It’s very, very good and important because it is in fact internationally legally binding,” but they know and we know that that is not the same as being bound in by the terms of the agreement. The agreement overrides every other purpose. It was interesting that when the previous Prime Minister was negotiating, prior to the referendum, he claimed the same about his agreement, but again, it did not override European law. The letter from the European Union actually says:

“As you know, we are not in a position to agree to anything that changes or is inconsistent with the Withdrawal Agreement”.

Even more important than that is what the Attorney General has said about this. There was a great moment here when the Prime Minister quite legitimately said that the Attorney General had spoken about the balance and said that we were now accepting that there was some kind of lock in legal terms, but what she did not do was read the last sentence of the paragraph in the Attorney General’s letter, which deals with the EU’s conclusions in relation to the withdrawal agreement, and states

“albeit they do not alter the fundamental meaning of its provisions as I advised them to be on 13 November”.

That fundamental advice was simply this:

“Therefore, despite statements in the Protocol that it is not intended to be permanent, and the clear intention of the parties that it should be replaced by alternative, permanent arrangements, in *international law* the Protocol would endure indefinitely until a superseding arrangement took its place, in whole or in part, as set out therein.”

That really reminds us that there is a fundamental flaw in this.

I do not fear us going into the backstop. My real problem is that, when it comes to negotiating our future trading arrangements, the European Union will have a very big stick to hold over us. President Macron made that clear recently when he talked about grabbing back some of the fishing rights that we may well have taken in the course of the early withdrawal agreement. He said that he would simply wait until we got closer to the backstop, because at that point we would do almost anything to avoid falling into it. I do not disagree with him. It would be appalling if we ended up in the backstop. The EU knows it and we know it, and that is the major problem.

That is in line with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State’s earlier remarks, on which I have already complimented him—I have no doubt of his determination to drive these points through. Also, it is small wonder that my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelsea and

Fulham (Greg Hands) said in an interesting intervention the other day that he had carefully read many interviews in German and that Mr Selmayr had made it clear that the European Union had got all its objectives for the withdrawal agreement happily sorted out. Clearly that must mean that we did not do so. That is the major problem. It is important not to be in the backstop, but the most important thing is that not falling into it is what changes the pattern of the political agreement and of how we negotiate the trade arrangements. Therefore, with respect to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, it is a major problem.

My second point is that we have agreed to pay £39 billion. I am not against us agreeing to pay the European Union in order to stand by further agreements, if they exist. After all, I believe that the EU said £100 billion to begin with, and we have now come down to £39 billion, which suggests that there were not quite so many absolutes in the set of things that we were supposed to be engaged in. I do not want to be mealy-mouthed about this, but £39 billion is a lot of money. One section of that relates to the two-year interregnum, which I accept would cost us money. That is a total of £22 billion over the two years that we would owe the EU—that is part of the budget. The rest is about the future arrangements.

My concern is that, according to this arrangement, the EU would get that money regardless of whether we reached a satisfactory agreement. That is quite an important feature. Back in December, I said on record that I thought the Government would be mistaken to agree to both the backstop and the money without having any idea of what the trade position would be. The Government said, “Don’t worry, we will come on to trade immediately and it will open the door.” Well, it did not open the door, and we only got on to trade a few months before Christmas. We have given the EU the most important negotiating position we have, and it has left us with very little with which to drive the EU into the next element of this, which is the thing we really want—namely, trade.

I do not resile from the point that we want a trade deal with our nearest trading partner. Of course we do. We do not want to end up in some kind of spitting war with the EU; we want a decent, reasonable arrangement, but we also want other arrangements around the world. As it stands, the problem is that the £39 billion is hinged on nothing at all, and the EU will get it regardless. There is not much incentive for the EU to produce the sort of trade arrangement that we would want, and that is what worries me.

**Rebecca Pow** (Taunton Deane) (Con): My right hon. Friend is making some good points, and he has a great deal of experience from his previous Department, the Department for Work and Pensions. I put it to him that this money is important for keeping our relationship with Europe going and for getting the negotiations that we want. I would not call £39 billion small fry, but I did a calculation last night and found that it equates to just 74 days of DWP spending. So in the grand scheme of things, it is not a huge amount of money for what we are getting out of it and for the relationship that we need to build.

**Mr Duncan Smith:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention, and I know that it was well meant, but I speak as someone who eventually resigned because

we had to make a £12 billion cut to the welfare budget, and we are now saying that we will spend £39 billion on something else. I think that those two bear a slightly different comparison. I will simply say that there is nothing small about £39 billion. I honestly believe that one of the reasons we voted to leave was to take back control and get most of our money back from the European Union, and to use it for the sort of things that my hon. Friend might well be suggesting. As I said earlier, in principle, and providing that we get something really good from the EU, I am not against meeting our requirements. However, I am against doing that without any commitment whatsoever. That is where my major, and I hope gentle, criticism of my hon. Friend lies.

My third point is about state aid. This issue has not really raised its head much, and those on the Front Benches might want to pay attention. A lot of people think that state aid is just about a few provisions stopping people giving their domestic industries a head start. I have always had a concern about this in democratic terms. I know that many on my side will say, “Oh, it’s terrible; we’re not in favour of giving industries a boost.” Well, we might not be, but we live in a democracy and in reality, others might wish to pitch for a different position. I accept that fully, but I really hope that the public never vote for that. I believe we have a better provision, but there is a democratic problem involved.

However, that is not my main issue, which is the width with which state aid is now being interpreted. I made a speech about this back in 1993 or 1994, in which I said that the Commission knew very well that no matter what it did and failed to get, the Courts would mop up after it because the Courts were bound by one thing and one thing only, which was always to find in favour of ever closer union. Of course they are; that is what they were set up to do. That is very clear, but many in this House do not seem to recognise that fact. The Courts always pick up the pieces. We have only to look at social security spending on people coming into the UK under freedom of movement. Originally, that spending was never in the treaty. It is the Courts, through a whole number of cases, that have widened the provisions to allow those coming into the UK to claim benefits exactly in line with people living in this country. That was not done by the Commission or the Council; it was the Courts.

That is exactly what is happening now. The Commission has had real problems with tax harmonisation. That is its objective for the eurozone and generally for the European Union. The Courts are now entering this area and using the provisions on state aid to find against countries that find new tax advantages. That is where they intend to go, and when we read the summaries of some of the judgments, we can see that they are already moving into this area. I therefore say to colleagues who think that it is all right to sit back passively for two years that there is already a plan to drive that process harder. I have also heard that eight of the 12 people responsible for monitoring the EU’s provisions on state aid have now been moved to cover the UK in the two-year period before we strike a trade deal. I warn my colleagues on the Government Benches that we should be careful what we wish for, because those state aid provisions will bite us on tax harmonisation and of some of the changes we might wish to make in future Budgets.

[Mr Duncan Smith]

I will conclude now so that others may speak. We have had a series of scare stories about a whole series of problems that could arise if we do not strike an arrangement. I want to have an arrangement—don't get me wrong; I absolutely want it—and I think that the Government are in the right place to want to get it as well. I just do not think that this arrangement delivers on the minimum that we require to be able to negotiate and deliver a proper trade deal.

I say to my hon. Friends that we really need to pack up this idea about a total disaster that keeps being pumped around. As my right hon. Friend the International Trade Secretary said from the Dispatch Box today and has made clear before, he does not believe that a no-deal Brexit would be a disaster; he believes that we will manage our way through it one way or another.

The other day we were told that there would be huge queues at Dover because Calais, according to the contingency executive, will have to check every single lorry, taking 10 minutes each time. What did we hear from the man who runs Boulogne and Calais? He said, "We have no plans to and will not check every lorry. We will do nothing more than we are doing at the moment. Any phytosanitary checks will be done 12 km behind the border." Those on the continent do not want what we say we fear, because it would damage them and their business, and they know that they would lose it. That is just one example of some of the nonsense that has gone on with "Project Fear" over the past few years. It has been constantly banged on about. Far from making people concerned, however, it has made people angry about what politicians do to try to threaten and worry them. Let us treat the people like grown-ups and talk about matters properly instead of trying to frighten them.

**Richard Graham:** My right hon. Friend says that his concerns over supporting the Government's deal and the withdrawal agreement Bill relate to the position that they would leave us in for future free trade agreements. However, without the withdrawal agreement Bill, there can be no future trade agreements. What is his position on that?

**Mr Duncan Smith:** My position is that we go back and get a better deal. That is the reality, because I believe that that is how the EU works. The EU got everything it wanted first time round, but if it knows that we are not going to take this deal, it will have to discuss it. When I visited the European Commission and met Mr Barnier and Sabine Weyand and their team, it became clear, before we signed up to this deal, that they were fully expecting to take things further once pressed hard—that is to say, they expected that this deal would not pass. They have been waiting for this vote to know exactly where they are going. I genuinely think that the Government will be in a better place to go and say, "Look, this stuff that you've given us and this stuff that we've got is simply not acceptable, and we will not get it through." Therefore, if we genuinely want to reach an agreement—I believe that the EU does—we must strike a harder deal with them, and they have to accept that and will do so. That is where we are.

Back in 1992, I realised that the plans under the Single European Act and Maastricht were taking us to a place that we would never be in, because this country

would never accept that it would eventually be fully locked into a supranational organisation that was taking powers away from individual Parliaments. That is why I feel upbeat about the referendum vote. I am tired of being told that it was some sort of disaster or accident. When I campaigned to leave, I genuinely and passionately believed that this country would do incredibly well whatever the arrangements. I just wish that many more in this House would stand up for those who voted to leave genuinely—not stupidly and not because they hated people, but because they wanted something to change. They wanted to take back control of their country, and that is what I want to do here.

8.12 pm

**Kirsty Blackman** (Aberdeen North) (SNP): It is an honour to speak for the Scottish National party on the second-to-last day of our second meaningful vote debate. The SNP positions on Brexit and the Prime Minister's deal are probably pretty obvious to everybody in this House, but I will explain them just for the avoidance of doubt.

The Prime Minister said today that she wants to deliver on the result of the vote. The people of Scotland voted to remain in the EU. Therefore, the SNP will continue to fight for us to remain in the EU. We want to deliver on the vote that Scotland took in that referendum. The best future for us all is to remain a member of the EU. If we cannot remain a member of the EU, we need single market and customs union membership. I know that many Members from across the House believe that that would be the best way for us to go forward economically, and the Prime Minister needs to go away and extend article 50 so that we can have a people's vote. We should give the people the choice to remain in the EU, because the SNP believes, as do many across the House, that they would make a different choice.

I want to talk about several things, many of which have been mentioned today, but I will start by discussing the economy, as the House would expect from the SNP's spokesperson on the economy at Westminster. Mark Carney from the Bank of England said that Brexit has already cost each family £900. Given that we have had so many years of austerity, that is £900 that few can easily afford. The Chancellor himself said that remaining in the European Union would be a better outcome for the economy, and that is absolutely the case. We will be poorer as a result of the UK choosing to leave the EU, which is why organisations such as the CBI say that they are looking on in horror at the foreseeable economic catastrophe that the UK is choosing to bring upon itself and the ham-fisted way it is going about it.

An awful lot of people have come out with an awful lot of stats around Brexit, and I want to highlight a few of them. The Bank of England said that, with the Prime Minister's deal, we are looking at a potential interest rate of 4%, and I want to unpack that a little bit. People who are my age, people who are a little bit older than me, and people who have been in the property market for a relatively short period of time have never seen interest rates anywhere like 4%. It is incredibly difficult for young people nowadays to buy property as it is. If we see a massive increase in interest rates, it will be absolutely and completely impossible for the vast majority of young people to buy property—even more than it is



today—because it will be difficult for people to borrow money. That will have an effect not just on individuals, but on companies that are looking to borrow money. Our small businesses will therefore be less able to trade and to grow as a result of the changes that are potentially coming.

Speaking of businesses, the University of Bristol said that the decision to leave has meant that the value of UK companies has already been reduced by 16%. We have not even left the EU yet, but the value of UK companies has been reduced by 16%, and we are continuing to go down this route. Jaguar Land Rover has already cut 1,500 UK jobs and is looking to cut another 4,500, most of which will be in the UK, and it has cited Brexit concerns as a major factor.

On the subject of car manufacturing, I want to talk about what just-in-time manufacturing actually means, because it is quite difficult for people to get that concept into their heads. Does it mean that the car production plants or factories have maybe a day's worth of widgets sitting there that can be put together to make a car or whatever is being made? No, it means that they have an hour's worth of widgets. If Honda wanted to have nine days' worth of stock for its Swindon plant alone, it would need a UK warehouse of roughly 300,000 square metres. It would be one of the largest buildings on earth, and that is for nine days' worth of widgets in order to make cars. It would be absolutely impossible for the UK to find enough warehouse space to store all the widgets that it would need for all the manufactured things that we produce. The Secretary of State for International Trade was talking earlier about all the brilliant manufacturing that is done in Britain, but a huge amount of that is done with components imported from the EU.

**David T. C. Davies:** In the early 1990s, I worked in the haulage industry as a lorry driver making just-in-time deliveries of brake parts for Lucas Girling across the whole of Europe—in and out of the EU. There was never a problem, because the paperwork could be turned around in the time it took to have a coffee and a cigarette. It was not a problem then, and we did not even have a computer in the office.

**Kirsty Blackman:** Things were a bit different in 1993 from how they are now. We have customs checks that are required to be done. We have these production lines, and the storage time is much shorter because we have frictionless movement. If frictionless movement is so unimportant, why have the Government been prioritising it in the potential future relationship with the EU?

This is not just about the EU. The UK Government have also failed to set out exactly what the future relationship with Turkey is going to look like, for example. Will widgets still be able to come in from Turkey in the event of a no-deal scenario?

The Secretary of State for International Trade was pressed earlier on whether free trade agreements with third countries will roll over. The UK Government have absolutely failed to let us or businesses know which countries have agreed to sign up for their free trade agreement to be rolled over in the event of a no-deal Brexit. Given that the largest manufacturing companies are preparing for a no-deal Brexit, the Government need to be up front and honest about how many of

those free trade agreements will actually roll over. I have heard that, potentially, only 10 of them are ready to be rolled over. If that is the case, the Government need to tell us which 10 so that the companies exporting to or importing from those countries can make plans.

**Seema Malhotra:** Does the hon. Lady agree it is surprising we did not have a clearer answer on that from the Secretary of State? This is of paramount importance for businesses like those in my constituency that are trading under multiple trade agreements and exporting across the world.

**Kirsty Blackman:** I agree that it is absolutely vital. It is interesting that the Secretary of State was unable to give that answer. I have a named day question on this subject and am expecting a response tomorrow. I am aware of at least one organisation that has been asking the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy for the list since November and still has not received it. If the Government intend us to leave the EU on 29 March, and if they intend that we leave with no deal if this deal is not voted through, they need to tell companies about the scenario in which they will be operating after we leave the EU in those circumstances. The Government are wilfully making the situation worse by their refusal to come forward with this information.

**Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP):** My hon. Friend is making a powerful speech. Following BMW-Mini and Toyota, the Honda plant in Swindon is preparing for six days of closure as a result of this Brexit deal. Does she agree this is complete chaos and that the Government now need to end any opportunity for no deal?

**Kirsty Blackman:** It is complete chaos. It is ridiculous that businesses are having to prepare for a no deal because the Government continue to hold it over us, which is why Members on both sides of the House have signed a letter saying that a no-deal scenario is completely unacceptable. As has been said previously, opposition to no deal is one of the few things on which there is a majority in this House.

On the subject of free trade agreements, and on the subject of fantasy economics, the Government's paper on the deal scenario, the no-deal scenario and the analysis of Brexit costs talks about the potential for signing free trade agreements with the US, Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia, Brunei, China, India, Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait and Bahrain, plus rolling over all the FTAs on their current terms. The paper says that all the new free trade agreements will be signed on the basis of there being zero tariffs on everything in the scenarios that were modelled, and of all the FTAs being rolled over despite the bizarre assumptions that no sensible person would think are ever likely to happen. We are not going to have a free trade agreement with India with zero tariffs on everything within 15 years. That is absolutely not going to happen.

Despite all those bizarre assumptions, the UK Government still predict that our trade reduction will be 2.2%. So despite the most ambitious assumptions possible, which no realistic person would think could even vaguely happen, the Government still predict that our trade reduction will be 2.2% of GDP. I do not know how anyone who supports Brexit could stand up and

[Kirsty Blackman]

say that we will benefit from increased international trade when it is absolutely clear that we will not, even in the best possible scenario.

One of the things that the Secretary of State for International Trade is very good at is talking about the increase in our trade with countries like South Korea, with which we trade through the EU's free trade agreement.

**Stephen Gethins** (North East Fife) (SNP): My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech on the perils. I wonder whether the Chancellor would agree with a huge amount of what she says. It strikes me that the Scottish Government have outlined their economic analysis of what will happen, yet the UK Government have tried to keep their secret. Does my hon. Friend have any thoughts on why that is the case?

**Kirsty Blackman:** I think the UK Government are trying to say as little as possible about the economic analysis because they know that Brexit will damage the economy.

I am specifically focusing on the economy, but I will talk about other things in a few moments. Investors have pulled \$1.01 trillion out of UK equity funds since the 2016 referendum. That is an eye-wateringly large figure, and it comes as a direct result of the referendum according to Emerging Portfolio Fund Research, a data provider.

The Scottish Government have said that our GDP would be £9 billion lower under a free trade agreement—that is not under a no-deal scenario—than if we stayed in the EU. Amazingly, the figure is significantly more than even the most Unionist of commentators said that independence would cost the Scottish people. We are stuck with the UK, which is making terrible decisions and cutting more off our GDP than even those least in favour of independence said that independence would cut from our GDP.

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): My hon. Friend is making a fantastic point. Is not the core of her argument that nobody, however they voted in the 2016 European referendum, voted to become poorer? That is all the more reason to put this to the people again in a people's vote so that folk can have their say now that they know what the consequences of Brexit actually are.

**Kirsty Blackman:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. People were told stories about unicorns and mermaids. They were told that there would be amazing economic largesse in the event of Brexit, and they have been told that for a huge number of years, and not just in relation to the Brexit vote. People have been told by politicians that those who choose to come to live and work in this country make us poorer, which is an absolute lie. Those people contribute to our GDP, they contribute to reducing our public sector net debt and they contribute to our economy, and that is without going into the cultural and social benefits.

**Hannah Bardell** (Livingston) (SNP): It is interesting to watch the faces of Conservative Members as my hon. Friend lays out, in stark detail, the impact on the economy. I have met Hologic, a life sciences company in my Livingston constituency that does diagnostic testing, a number of times since the Brexit vote, and it has

raised significant alarms. The company tests the safety of medicines for consumers not just in the UK but in the EU, and it has highlighted to me the catastrophic effect of the UK Government's plans. Does she agree that we are heading towards catastrophe if this Government continue going this way and their motion is passed?

**Kirsty Blackman:** My hon. Friend must have read my mind, because I was just about to move on to medicines. The Nuffield Trust has said:

"The longer term arrangements envisioned in the agreement and political declaration generally entail leaving the single market. Unless negotiating positions fundamentally change, this will produce extra costs for medicines and other supplies."

Every single month 37 million packs of medicine travel from the EU to the UK, and 45 million packs of medicine travel from the UK to the EU. If we are outside the single market and the customs union, that medicine will take longer to travel across the border in both directions. That medicine will require extra testing in both jurisdictions. If we do not test it, when we are outside the single market and do not have a common rulebook, we would be putting individuals at risk by allowing them to use medicine that has not been tested and does not fit with our regime. A no-deal scenario would be disastrous and cannot be allowed to happen.

I wish briefly to mention a couple of things that will not be ready in the event of either a deal or no deal. I have mentioned the online system for those exporting from the EU to the UK via postal packages. It is important that the Treasury gets itself into gear and sorts this out. It promised to do so in a VAT notice that was put in place in August, but it needs to establish this online system so that individuals or companies exporting from the EU to the UK by post can do so. It was particularly telling that the International Trade Secretary talked about e-commerce, given that he proposes to take us out of the digital single market—that was unfortunate.

Let me move on to other things that are not ready. The postponement scheme for VAT does not appear to be ready, or if it is ready, companies do not how to use it. Again, the Treasury and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs need to get that scheme set up so that VAT that is changing from acquisition VAT to import VAT can be postponed, meaning that companies will not have to pay that money up front, because otherwise the situation will spell financial disaster for a huge number of companies.

Lastly, the customs declaration system is also not ready. It has not been widely rolled out—it has not been rolled out to everybody yet—but companies will have to use it. Some 145,000 companies have never exported outwith the EU and they will be reaching this system for the first time. It is important that they use it, and that everybody is able to use it before April so that any glitches in the system will be gone. It will not be a situation involving queues of lorries—we will not even be able to load the stuff on to lorries if this system does not work, so it needs to be fixed in advance.

I wish to talk a little more about the human cost. Last week, the British Retail Consortium announced more figures on the cost of food after Brexit. It has said that a no-deal scenario would see households in Scotland paying £55.30 more each week for food and that the least well-off 10% of households across the UK would be paying £38.50 more each week. That would represent

a 6.4% increase in the amount of their income that they would have to spend on food. Given the Government's squeeze on families at the bottom of the pile, it is incredibly important that the Government do what they can to ensure that no deal is taken off the table. I do not know why we are even still discussing this. Why is no deal still on the table? Why does the Prime Minister not just say that if her deal gets voted down tomorrow, which it will, she will not have no deal happen to us and that 6.4% increase for people will not take place.

I have not yet touched on migration. The 2017 Red Book said that reducing net migration by 20,000 would increase public sector net debt by 0.2% by 2022—that is a fact. Presumably the Government stand by the fact that it is a fact, because it was in their Red Book. People who choose to live and work in this country—on these islands—are net contributors to our economy. As a group, they are net contributors to our economy. They make a contribution, so we will be poorer—economically and fiscally—if net migration is reduced by any significant number. The hospitality sector needs 100,000 new EU entrants per annum—some people go away, so that is not a net figure. If we are to be a global Britain and a country that wants people to come to enjoy it as tourists, we need people to work in that sector. Given our ageing population in Scotland, we need people to come to live and work in our country even more. That is why the UK Government must change their plan on the £30,000 cap and the cap on numbers. If they are unwilling to do that, they must devolve immigration to Scotland. If they do not devolve immigration to Scotland, they make the case for Scottish independence ever stronger.

There are EU workers in our care, manufacturing and agri-food sectors, and those sectors rely on them. Today, NFU Scotland said:

“We cannot feed our nation without this labour.”

That is incredibly serious. If we do not have enough people coming to work in our agri-food sector, we will lose the ability to be the world-leading country that we are. We will lose the ability to feed even people who live here, let alone to export and to bring in the tax revenue that we get from exporting.

Free movement of people is a good thing—a brilliant thing. People my age and younger have benefited from it. We have been able to live and work in EU countries. People from those countries have been able to come to live and work next door to us, and we have benefited from that. It is devastating to think that this Government propose that my children should not benefit from the same rights of freedom of movement as we have had. I do not believe that any Member should reasonably be celebrating the end of freedom of movement, as its end costs us our rights and money in the Government's coffers. As the Archbishop of Canterbury said, proceeding with Brexit caused a moral issue, and the biggest place where that moral issue stands is that politicians—not all, but some—have done what they can to demonise immigration and people who are born in other countries. We would not be in the place we are today if that had not happened.

This situation is an absolute shambles. I was pleased to see that the Financial Secretary was in the Chamber earlier. I hope he managed to find some food, given the note he had saying “No food” and “No channel tunnel” when he left the earlier Cabinet meeting. I hope that those things are slight exaggerations, but given the increase in the cost of food in the event of no deal, no

food would be a reality for many families. We cannot operate like this. As the CBI said, businesses are watching in horror. The Prime Minister needs to remove the threat of no deal. The Government are limping on and the whole world is watching in horror. There is no good being done in this place just now. No other things are being done here—we are entirely focused on Brexit. We are not able to do the things that a global Britain should be doing. We are unable to have any kind of positive impact on the world because we are so unbelievably inward looking, fighting in this place.

The word “thrown” is used in the north-east of Scotland—it sounds slightly different depending on where you are in the north-east. Someone who is thrown is determined to proceed with something, in the face of all opposition and all sanity, and despite all evidence to the contrary and every expert telling them that they are wrong, because they have said they are going to do it. Someone who is thrown is trying to go through with it because they cannot bear going back on something they have said. I have said a number of times that the Prime Minister needs to remove the threat of no deal. When she comes to speak to us tomorrow, she needs to say that in the event that her deal is voted down, she will go to the EU to ask for an extension of article 50 in order for a people's vote to be held, so that we can remain in the EU and we will not have this economic, social and cultural catastrophe put upon us.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. A further 72 right hon. and hon. Members are seeking to catch my eye in tonight and tomorrow morning's debate, on account of which there will have to be, with immediate effect, a five-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches. I counsel colleagues that that limit will, in all likelihood, have to be reduced in due course.

8.38 pm

**Joseph Johnson** (Orpington) (Con): I had never rebelled against the Government before this month. I wish to use the brief time I have to set out four reasons why I shall vote against the deal tomorrow.

First, I believe that the Government are selling this package to the House on the false premise that we are somehow going to have a trade deal in place by the end of 2020. As Sir Nick Macpherson, the former permanent secretary to the Treasury, made clear last week in a tweet, that is a highly unlikely scenario. A deal even by the end of 2022—the possible period by the end of which we will have finished the transition period—is exceptionally unlikely. In his view, it is conceivable that we will have a deal in place by the mid-2020s. It really is, as the former permanent secretary to the Treasury said, “time for some honesty” from the Government. Forget all the flowery letters that have been exchanged today. Were the Government really being straight with the House and with the country, they would come clean and admit that we will have many years of the purgatory of the backstop ahead of us.

Secondly, any trade deal that we eventually strike will be worse for the economy than our current arrangements. As the Bank of England has noted, Brexit is a unique experiment. There is no precedent for an advanced economy anywhere in the world withdrawing from a trade agreement as deep and complex as the EU. Although



[Joseph Johnson]

it is not legally binding, the political declaration does set a direction of travel for the negotiations, reflecting the Prime Minister's red lines of ending freedom of movement and securing an independent UK trade policy. Those red lines necessarily mean that we have to leave the single market and any form of customs union, as foreshadowed by the Chequers White Paper. The political declaration accordingly prioritises "comprehensive arrangements" for goods, and scandalously neglects services, on which all we are aiming for is in effect bog-standard third-country market-access terms. We are fundamentally a services economy and our services sector is being thrown under a bus.

Let us take financial services—one of this country's few globally competitive sectors and one that is very important to many families in Orpington. The Centre for European Reform reckons that a free trade agreement would reduce financial services exports by almost 60%. The consultancy Oliver Wyman reckons that will mean a hit to the Treasury's revenues of around £10 billion. So much for the Brexit dividend.

Thirdly, this package leaves the deck heavily stacked against us in the negotiations that will come. The political declaration starts by giving the EU most of its goals on its strong point, which is goods exports, for which the EU had a surplus with us of £95 billion in 2017, but it offers very little to our crucial services sector, in which we had a surplus of around £28 billion. Given that we have necessarily already conceded the £39 billion financial settlement in the legally binding withdrawal agreement, we now have little leverage left with which to secure concessions from the EU in the months to follow. If the EU chooses to play hardball with us, it will simply let the UK enter the backstop in December 2022 then wait until our services sector pressures the Government into accepting a deal—any deal—that will remove the EU's feet from our windpipe and restore some measure of privileged market access to a sector that is so important to our economy.

Approval of this deal will lead to many years of excruciating trade negotiations—talks that will trigger waves of fury from Brexit campaigners and leave voters throughout the country at each inevitable UK concession on issues such as fisheries, Gibraltar and eventually, of course, freedom of movement itself. The package that the Prime Minister has negotiated simply sets us up to fail as a country. It is better that we all realise that now, before it is too late.

Finally, this deal is bad for our sovereignty. During the referendum, some implied that they were prepared to let Britain suffer economic damage in return for greater sovereignty and greater control. Of course, one of the great paradoxes is that the deal is remarkable in offering a double whammy: both economic harm and a loss of British sovereignty. That is one reason why many prominent Brexit campaigners are saying that this deal is worse than staying in the EU. There is now no single Cabinet position on what to do next, let alone one backed by the Conservative party or Parliament as a whole. Such is the farce that this has become that I believe we have no choice now but to go back to our constituents and ask them, reluctantly, to provide further guidance.

8.43 pm

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I hope the House will forgive me if I speak to the global context; after all, we are debating the European Union (Withdrawal) Act.

I come from the generation that was stung by Dean Acheson's saying in 1962:

"Great Britain has lost an empire and has not yet found a role."

I was lucky enough to get into the House when a generation was still here of people like Denis Healey and Ted Heath, who had actually fought on the beaches at Anzio and in the Normandy invasion against Hitler. Those people were still here. That generation had seen two world wars, and they created, not just in Britain, but across the western world, the United Nations, NATO and the European Coal and Steel Community that became an integrated Europe, and they did so to keep the peace, to keep the prosperity and to face up to the challenges of that global environment.

In my time in this House, I have seen that global environment becoming more challenging, more frightening and more terrifying. Indeed, it is the most terrifying time to be a Member of Parliament. We are responsible for looking after our constituents when their jobs are being undermined by different kinds of contracts and uncertainties, and when the old certainties are being swept away for us in the United Kingdom.

I believe passionately that our country has to be part of that global community and to be leading that global community. When we joined the European Union in 1975, it was thanks to the bravery of people such as Ted Heath who led the Conservative party and changed it from being anti-Europe to pro-Europe. His generation was one that, cross party, I admired. It produced a breed of politicians who, for their time, stepped up to the plate and showed that leadership.

What I am very concerned about is that we are now entering into an unknown world. Our withdrawal from the European Union has implications for our membership of the United Nations and there are questions over whether we will hold on to a seat on the Security Council and whether our impact or our force in the world will be very substantial at all. The fact of the matter is that we had found a new role in the world—as an active member and leader of the European Union. I judge this debate today on whether, as I want, our country is successful—successful in terms of meeting the challenges economically and meeting them politically. We can do that only through very close-co-operation across Europe in the European Union. That is why I cannot support anything that takes us out of the European Union. I campaigned to remain and I remain convinced that we should be in the European Union.

On a micro-level, on a bottom-up level, my sacred duty as a Member of Parliament is to come to this place to make sure that the health, welfare and prosperity of my constituents are not harmed in any way—that they are improved. Every piece of evidence that I have seen from the Bank of England, the London School of Economics, and the independent think-tanks convince me that I was right when, as Chairman of a Select Committee for 10 years, I believed that evidence-based policy was the best kind of policy. All the evidence

shows that my constituents, on any deal, will be worse off and poorer out of the European Union than in the European Union.

This deal does not deliver what we need or want. The Chancellor is looking at me carefully. He has criticised me in the past for synthetic passion. This is not synthetic, Chancellor. This is me with a heartfelt plea about our global position as a nation. I am speaking from a Parliament that should be representing the people from our constituencies. I do not want a poorer Britain. I do not want poorer constituents. This deal will deliver both those sad outcomes, and I urge the House to vote down the motion.

8.48 pm

**Dr Sarah Wollaston** (Totnes) (Con): This deal simply does not deliver on the will of the people—it cannot do so mathematically. It is unwanted by the 48% who wanted to remain, and it is unloved by a very significant proportion of the loudest voices for leave. More importantly, it does not have the valid consent of the people. To give consent to an operation, people need to understand and have set out for them what the procedure involves, so that they can weigh up the risks and benefits. I am afraid that it is only now that we truly know what Brexit looks like out of the very many versions of Brexit that were presented during the referendum campaign. And I am afraid that it looks very far from the sunlit uplands with which we were presented at that time.

We cannot say that there is valid consent until people have had the opportunity to weigh up the risks and benefits of this deal—of Brexit reality—and we should take the time to pause in order to give them the chance to give that consent. The Secretary of State said that that would take a year, but that is not the case. This could be done in 24 weeks, and we know that the European Union is prepared to suspend article 50 to allow that process to go ahead. I do not agree with the often stated claim that this would somehow be a travesty that would somehow let down our democracy. Since when was democracy a single, one-off event? No one said it was a travesty when we had a further general election in 2017, just two years after the 2015 election. Surely the worst argument of all for refusing the British people the opportunity to give their valid consent would be to say that it might upset the far right—a group of thugs outside the gates of Parliament. Since when did this House give in to the demands of fascists?

We have heard powerful speeches by my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Joseph Johnson) and the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) about the scale of the harms this deal will inflict on our constituents. All Members in this House have a duty to say it as it is. In an age of populism and fake news, we owe it to our constituents to tell them how it is and not to bow to that populism.

We should be very careful if we are going to ignore the very real concerns that have been set out regarding the conduct of the original referendum campaign—concerns that part of one of the biggest donations in British political history could have come as laundered money from abroad. We have also heard about the serious concerns and the fines imposed by the Electoral Commission for cheating; we are talking about more than half a million pounds diverted to support the murky activities of AggregateIQ. These are very serious

concerns. If, in the years to come, there is a public inquiry looking back on the conduct of the campaign, it will ask why those concerns were not taken more seriously at the time.

**Alec Shelbrooke** (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): I know that my hon. Friend is a supporter of a second referendum, so let me take this opportunity to ask her what she believes the question would be in a second referendum.

**Dr Wollaston:** My hon. Friend makes a valid point, but the point is that if this House agreed to a referendum Bill, those decisions would be made by this House. My feeling is that it should be a choice between, “Is this what you meant by Brexit? Do you want to proceed on the terms of this deal—the only realistic deal on the table?” and “Do you want to remain?” It would be up to this House to decide whether a further option was included, but what would be wrong would be to deny people the opportunity to discuss that.

**Angus Brendan MacNeil** (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): But effectively the deal will be dead tomorrow, so the premise of the people’s vote will be dead tomorrow, leaving only a hard Brexit or revocation of article 50. That is what we are down to now.

**Dr Wollaston:** As it happens, I do not agree, but I do not think that any of us should pretend that it is for us, right now, to decide what the referendum question would be. We now know what the deal is. This is the only realistic deal on the table. It would be unconscionable for members of the Government to impose no deal. We have heard what the consequences of no deal would be, and I am afraid that they would be highly damaging for all the people we represent. It would not be damaging so much for big interests; it would be the most disadvantaged in our society who would pay the highest price.

**Angus Brendan MacNeil:** If Parliament voted down the deal tomorrow, the deal could be resurrected again for the people’s vote. That is a perplexing situation.

**Dr Wollaston:** If the deal does come back to this House—and once the Labour party has gone through its processology and is able to deliver on the wishes of its own members to back a people’s vote—then many former clinicians, including me, will be bringing forward an amendment to make it conditional on informed consent and obtaining that through a people’s vote. That would be the right thing to do, in recognition that, as we can all see, this House has reached an absolute impasse. That is the simple truth of the matter. There is no consent for any of the versions of Brexit. Now we have reached that point, absolutely the right thing to do, and the ethical thing to do, is to be honest about it and take the decision back to the people with a simple question: is this what you meant by Brexit or would you rather remain on the deal that we already have?

8.55 pm

**Ms Karen Buck** (Westminster North) (Lab): The result of the 2016 referendum left me absolutely devastated, but I hoped that we would be able to find a consensus for the way forward. It left me devastated because the whole backdrop to my adult life has been the positive internationalism that the European Union represented, for all its flaws. That stood in contrast to the history of depression and conflict that had scarred Europe for the

[Ms Karen Buck]

first half of the last century. In a new era of instability characterised by the behaviour of Putin and Trump, that hopeful internationalism seems to be even more important than it has been in recent decades. I regard the freedoms of the European Union, including the freedom of movement, as a triumph of modern politics—something that we should celebrate rather than fear. I understand the frustration at messy compromises and sclerotic decision making within the EU, but I fear that future trade negotiations will be characterised by many of the same frustrations and compromises on sovereignty.

I represent a constituency that not only voted overwhelmingly to remain but is one of the most diverse, international and outward-looking communities not just in Britain but probably in the world, and which has one of the highest proportions of EU nationals. It is an area of arrival that has, over centuries, accommodated waves of new communities, done so with extraordinary success, and helped to build a capital city and a country of creativity, cultural openness and economic success. Westminster, like London and many other parts of the country, has drawn on the contribution of EU nationals who have started businesses, contributed, and staffed our public services.

When my constituents write to me, as they do in their thousands, the overwhelming majority frame their arguments in those terms, often doing so with movingly personal stories of their lives not as separate communities but as husbands and wives, sons and daughters, fellow employees and business partners of British nationals. There is disappointment, anxiety and pain expressed every day, and bafflement as to how we could choose to close down rather than open up our options and our freedoms, and complicate our relations with our closest and largest trading partner.

It is also worth saying, because so often the remain argument is presented as one of middle-class affluence posited against the poorer communities that voted leave, that my constituency is the 15th poorest in the country on working-age poverty. Of course, I hear, as a result, the voices of some leavers too—the minority but none the less there. I agreed on one thing with the Secretary of State, which is that we should not patronise leave voters by saying that they did not know what they voted for. People did know what they voted for, but none the less a range of destinations was expressed in the leave vote.

That is why it is so important that, as the Brexit debate unfolds and the options have become clearer, we give people a further choice to express their opinions. Just as the EU was not responsible for many of the grievances that drove leave voters, leaving the EU will not rectify those grievances. Above all, it will not do so if this country is made poorer as a result—and it would be the poorest communities and individuals who had to carry the consequences of that.

There is no point in speculating about whether a different Government could have bridged the gulf. We can only deal with the reality of what we have. There is no point in speculating about whether the Government could have brought about a different outcome with more imagination, openness and generosity than they have shown over the last two years. That did not happen. It may have been possible early on to negotiate a

compromise built around the customs union and the single market, possibly with the Norway model, but that door has now shut.

We have only the deal in front of us, which is the start of an agonising process stretching as far as the eye can see. We have only a deal that is worse than membership of the EU and will leave us poorer, with reduced influence. I will not rule out any option to avoid the worst possible consequence, of crashing out with no deal, but I believe it is time to seek an extension of article 50 and put the decision back to the British people, so that we can hear their views.

9 pm

**Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): The hundreds of constituents who have written to me demanding that I vote down this deal divide into two kinds: those who urge me to reject it so that we can leave the European Union without a deal—their preferred option—and those who urge me to reject it so that we can stay in the EU. They both cannot be right. There will have to be some management of expectations.

I have made my own dislike of this deal plain, and it is based largely on the fact that we do not know what we will be getting. The political declaration might deliver anything from Canada-minus to Chequers-plus, and where in that spectrum we might land depends upon the negotiations that will follow. There will be no end to the uncertainty for some time.

We have delivered ourselves into the weakest possible position during those negotiations, first by making the financial settlement up front, and secondly by abandoning one of the most important principles to any negotiating position—the ability to walk away—because we have agreed that we will agree and that we will stay in a state of limbo until that agreement is reached. Such is the toxic nature of that limbo that I fear we would probably agree to anything in order to avoid getting there in the first place.

I disagree passionately with my correspondents who say that this deal is worse than staying in the European Union. I have campaigned to leave since the referendum of 1975, and I am not prepared to see that opportunity lost. This deal is better than staying in the European Union. We will be out of the common fisheries policy, out of the common agricultural policy and out of the relentless momentum for political integration. I am very much aware that the events and votes of last week pose a present danger to Brexit, and I will have to consider carefully over the next 24 hours whether I want to share a Division Lobby with those who are there because their strategy is to prevent Brexit.

9.3 pm

**David Simpson** (Upper Bann) (DUP): It is good to follow the right hon. Member for New Forest West (Sir Desmond Swayne). I want to speak about a number of issues in relation to Northern Ireland. Members will be well aware of my party's position.

In February last year, I asked the Prime Minister a question that was referred to last Wednesday by the shadow Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. I said:

“I ask the Prime Minister to reinforce her earlier comments, given the imminent publication by the EU of the draft legal text arising from December's joint report. Will she confirm that she



will never agree to any trade borders between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom?”

The Prime Minister’s answer was:

“We continue to stand behind all the commitments that we made in December, and my negotiating team will work with the Commission to agree how they should be translated into legal form in the withdrawal agreement.”

**Emma Little Pengelly:** In line with what my hon. Friend has said, just after the Joint Report back in December 2017, I asked the Prime Minister in this Chamber whether, although the statement said that there would be unfettered access from Northern Ireland to GB, she could clarify for the House that there would also be absolutely unfettered access from Great Britain to Northern Ireland for goods, and she confirmed on the record of this House that that was the case. Yet we now have 68 pages in an annexe of further checks that would put a border within this United Kingdom and sever our single market.

**David Simpson:** My hon. Friend is correct.

I will continue with the Prime Minister’s answer:

“The hon. Gentleman is right: the draft legal text that the Commission has published would, if implemented, undermine the UK common market and threaten the constitutional integrity of the UK by creating a customs and regulatory border down the Irish sea, and no UK Prime Minister could ever agree to it. I will be making it crystal clear to President Juncker and others that we will never do so.—[*Official Report*, 28 February 2018; Vol. 636, c. 823.]

I do not know what happened from that time to now, but as we say in this country, we are where we are.

Northern Ireland and the people I represent in my constituency feel very despondent. They feel that they have been made the sacrificial lamb to placate the Irish Republic and the European Union. That is exactly how they feel. If we are to believe everything we read or everything we hear, EU officials have been quoted as saying that Northern Ireland is the “price” that the UK will pay for Brexit. I am a Unionist—and a proud Unionist—and I listen to some of the comments in the media and to the scaremongering from Ministers and Government officials when they go out to proclaim the doom and gloom, but my constituents are concerned about the Union of this Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

**Kevin Hollinrake:** I guess the question I have for the hon. Gentleman is this: what is the alternative? Michel Barnier said on 11 October last year that, in the event of no deal, there would be checks at the border for all live animals and produce of animal origin. What effect would that have on Northern Ireland and on the integrity of the United Kingdom?

**David Simpson:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention, but it is very interesting that, a week or 10 days ago, the papers released from the European Union and from the Republic of Ireland never mentioned the words “border checks” and never mentioned the land border in Northern Ireland. They mentioned the ports and the airports, but they did not mention this hard Brexit or this hard deal. We hear so often about this hard Brexit and this problem with the border. Who is going to implement this? The British Government have said they are not going to do it, the Irish Government have said they are not going to do it and the European Union is not going to do it, so who is going to enforce this hard border and this hard Brexit?

**Kevin Hollinrake:** Specifically, Ireland is part of the European Union, and the European Union has said very clearly that it would implement those checks at the border.

**David Simpson:** With the greatest respect to the hon. Gentleman, he has been long enough about this House to know that what the Europeans say and what they do are two different things. We have seen the history of the whole of the European Union, although when it comes to the midnight hour, things may change.

My constituents in the Upper Bann constituency voted to leave, and they are very clear that they want a deal, but they want the right deal for the best of the whole of the United Kingdom—and that is the bottom line. Certainly as it stands at this moment in time, I could not support this deal tomorrow, and neither can my party. I think that the way that the European Union has treated the fifth largest economy in the world is an insult, and I cannot support it.

9.10 pm

**Boris Johnson (Uxbridge and South Ruislip) (Con):** I will be as brief as I possibly can be; these points must be made. When people around the world look at the debate that we have been having, there is one big question that they always ask me, and will particularly ask after the interventions that we have heard this afternoon. They ask, “Is Britain really going to leave?” Do we really have the courage and the self-belief to deliver what people voted for and seize the opportunities—independent, democratic self-government, real free trade deals, pioneering regulation that maximises the strengths of our economy, and an open and outward-looking economy that attracts people and investment from around the world on the basis of laws made in this country and not in Brussels? Are we really going to embrace that future, or are we going to be intimidated by the kind of speeches that we have heard this afternoon?

I fear that if we vote for this deal, we will be blatantly negating many of the potential benefits of Brexit, because as a result of the backstop trap, we will be faced with an unthinkable choice: sacrifice Northern Ireland, as we have just heard, or stay locked in the customs union and regulatory alignment, so that we cannot do free trade deals but remain rules takers and end up disgorging £39 billion for nothing in return, and without even the certainty that is claimed. As my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Joseph Johnson)—my brother—rightly said, we have yet to begin the negotiations, and the only certainty is that the EU will keep us locked in the backstop until we comply with its wishes, and the whole debilitating wrangle will go on for years, which is why we have to get it right now.

The answer is not to have a second referendum. The answer is not to clamber back, or to attempt to clamber back, into the EU, because all this while it has been evolving in an ever more federalist direction. As we have been agonising about Brexit, it has been talking about more tax harmonisation and creating a Euro army—precisely the moves towards a United States of Europe that may attract some Opposition Members, but which have been decisively rejected by the British people and which are not right. We cannot go for the Norway option, for reasons that have been extensively chewed over in this House—we would end up taking even more rules from Brussels.

[Boris Johnson]

I do not think we can seriously contemplate delaying article 50, because after two and a half years of procrastination, the public would accuse us in this place of deliberately setting out to frustrate their wishes. They would conclude that there was some plot by the deep state to kill Brexit, and that is precisely—[*Interruption.*] That is what many people would conclude, and that is precisely why we cannot now treat the public as idiots and get snarled in delectable disputations about Standing Order No. 14, because they will see this stuff for what it is: public school debating society chicanery designed to get round their wishes.

If and when this deal is voted down, let us not continue to flog this dead horse. I am sure we are all grateful to Monsieur Juncker and Monsieur Barnier for the various comfort letters that they have provided, but we know that they are legally worthless. Instead of another fig leaf from Brussels, I hope that the Government will come back to this place with a plan that is in fact the Prime Minister's original plan, as it would go back to her principles outlined at Lancaster House, banking that which is sensible in the withdrawal agreement, scrapping the backstop, agreeing an implementation period in which to negotiate a zero-tariff, zero-quota free trade deal, holding back half the £39 billion at least until such a free trade deal is concluded, pledging what is obvious to all—that there is no plan, intention or need for a hard border in Northern Ireland—and getting on now, with zeal and enthusiasm, with preparations for no deal.

I am sure that whatever the bureaucratic, technical or logistical difficulties there may be, as Monsieur Puisseuseau of the Calais-Boulogne ports has pointed out, they can be overcome with a spirit of optimism and determination. That is the spirit we should now be applying to Brexit.

We can muff it. Yes, of course we can muff it. We can flunk it. We can vote for this deal, thereby confirming the worst suspicions of the British public about the cynicism of the elite, or else we can get it right and seize the opportunities before us. When we look ourselves in the mirror we can say that when this House came centre stage again, four years after we asked the British public to settle this profound question of their destiny, we did not miss our cue and we answered their request.

9.15 pm

**Gordon Marsden** (Blackpool South) (Lab): If this Brexit debate does not cover the bread and butter issues for my Blackpool constituents and for all our constituents—decent jobs, maintaining living standards, enough food on the table to feed their family—it will be for the birds. The truth is that they are already paying the price for the Prime Minister's botched negotiations. Her deal would make those bread and butter issues worse: there no safeguards over employment and environmental rights—unenforceable under her Brexit deal—and her last minute, panicked, fig leaf approach to our trade unions and Labour MPs will fool very few.

The Government's own statistics show the Prime Minister's deal reducing the size of the UK economy by at least 3.9%—a £100 billion hit compared with 2016, with jobs lost and growth stalled, a grim prospect for us in Blackpool and for other small towns; no Brexit

dividend for public services or the NHS, which that mendacious bus promised; and now the British Retail Consortium points out, as we have heard, that no deal could lead to price rises in Blackpool, for example, ranging from at least 9% to mid-20%. No one in my constituency voted to be worse off from this scenario or for the no deal she is already wasting millions of pounds on.

Our major north-west industries, such as BAE Systems and its ongoing supply chain, with hundreds of jobs in and around Blackpool dependent on them, would suffer from no deal. On top of that, the Government have failed to secure any deal beyond 2020 for the tens of millions of pounds and hundreds of jobs dependent on university research programmes within the EU. There are no opportunities for our students and apprentices to continue to benefit from the Erasmus programme, and an end to EU social and regeneration funding, which has benefited us strongly in the north-west. The universities closest to my constituency—Lancaster, Central Lancashire, Edge Hill and our own excellent Blackpool and the Fylde College—would be put in severe jeopardy.

It takes a rare sort of political genius to disappoint almost all sides of opinion across the United Kingdom, but by goodness the Prime Minister has managed it—everyone from the Mayor of London to the Democratic Unionist party. Instead of reaching out to heal the scars and divisions of failed austerity, she has been obsessed by the divisions in her own party. The huge irony is that her deal is now unwanted by two out of three Tory party members. Not since Chamberlain went to meet Hitler at Munich and came back waving a piece of paper saying “Peace in our time” has a British Prime Minister had so inept or ignoble a conclusion to negotiations.

This deal undermines the aspirations of the young and the security of the old. It has let down our NATO friends and allies in central Europe and the Baltics, when this country supported them so strongly to access a democratic 21st century Europe. And then there is the future of peace and prosperity in Ireland. The Prime Minister's failings over the backstop and other elements have stirred up suspicion on all sides. It is no surprise the DUP fears being shunted into an endless groundhog day on the backstop. The Government's bungling threatens to undermine the Good Friday agreement. Have we so soon forgotten the terrible price the whole of the UK and the communities of Northern Ireland paid through the troubles? As a young man, I remember the Birmingham bombings, hearing a bomb going off round the corner from my London office, and a press trip to Northern Ireland being cut short by worried checkpoint guards after the murder of two British corporals in Andersonstown. Given all that suffering, how could this Prime Minister take a chance that jeopardises the Good Friday agreement?

The Prime Minister talks up global Britain, but as a result of her bungling must we end up, instead of being a linchpin for Europe between our allies, north America and the Commonwealth with all the soft power that gives us, being reduced to being an offshore island with her deal that satisfies no one's aspirations? This has come about because she lacked the leadership or ability to look through the other end of the telescope, a similar failure to that which led the Roman historian Tacitus to put into the mouth of a Scottish chieftain the bitter words:

“They make a desert and call it peace.”

That is what she will create if her deal is accepted: a desert for those who want Brexit to be a new start, but also for those who wish to reform the EU; a desert for those on all sides of the House proud of our international achievements; and a desert of sterility to which we shall be chained for years to come.

I accept that the Prime Minister has displayed stamina in pursuing her deal, but that does not compensate for the lack of foresight or empathy. As one of her own MPs told her, stamina is no substitute for strategy, but so boxed in has she become that she is convinced she is some form of 21st-century Joan of Arc, hearing voices instructing her what to do. She is not Joan of Arc, however. She has not heard heavenly voices, and if she is walking to a Brexit stake, it is one of her own construction. If she cannot see that, this House should remember another occasion when the national interest overrode a Prime Minister, when Leo Amery challenged Neville Chamberlain by quoting Oliver Cromwell's words:

"You have sat here too long for any good you have been doing...In the name of God, go."

9.20 pm

**Mrs Helen Grant** (Maidstone and The Weald) (Con): There are two particular matters that I would like to raise. First, I will refer to the vast international opportunities that await our nation if we deliver Brexit. Secondly, I will touch on what I see as the responsibility of all Members of this House to ensure that we grasp those opportunities.

I am in no doubt that a great future awaits the United Kingdom after we have left the EU. I saw that myself when I led a trade mission to Nigeria at the end of 2017. Being the country of my father's birth, Nigeria is very close to my heart, but it is also a nation of huge opportunity, rich in history and culture with vibrant and charismatic people. It also has a growing service industry and manufacturing sectors. While there, I had numerous meetings with large and small businesses, Government Departments and agencies. They all expressed a massive willingness to do more and huge excitement about the opportunities that Brexit will bring, allowing our two nations to trade more closely. It was a glimpse of global Britain in action, spreading the rule of law, boosting prosperity, sharing our expertise and engaging fully with Commonwealth friends and international partners.

Grasping those opportunities as we leave the EU is not inevitable, however. Our future success is not a given. It will require effort and spirit from us all. Such effort and spirit should be burning brightly like a beacon in this Chamber right here and now, but it is not. On day one back in Parliament last Monday, colleagues returned to ugly discord in this House and on the streets surrounding it. My right hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry) was subjected to abuse and harassment by a mob outside on College Green. The night ended with a viewing of the Channel 4 production, "Brexit: The Uncivil War". That title says it all. It was a reminder of the horrible referendum campaign and how the tactics of both sides whipped up dangerous anger and division.

This week, we have a chance to stop the madness. We must be more respectful towards each other. We have got to work harder to be more understanding of different viewpoints. I regret the fact that pragmatism and compromise seem to have become dirty words. In fact,

they are crucial ingredients to success. For those of us who have spent significant periods of time in the outside world prior to entering politics, compromise is perhaps more highly valued. In any negotiation where there is a reasonable balance of bargaining power, no one ever gets everything they want when they want it, and it is our duty and responsibility as parliamentarians to find the solution to the Brexit deadlock. We were elected to find answers to difficult problems and to make difficult decisions in the best interests of our country. We cannot shirk the issue and we cannot avoid it; we have to play the hand we have been dealt.

The answer is not a second referendum with ghastly division and uncertainty, and the answer is not no deal, which threatens to bring havoc to so many. The answer is certainly not kicking this most important of cans ever further down the road. The nation needs us to stand up and deliver and really be together. We owe it to the electorate, who we will be failing if we fail to do that. The answer, therefore, has to be a compromise solution—a solution that honours the referendum result by providing greater control over our borders, laws and money, a solution that preserves our economic and security partnerships with the EU, a solution that delivers for all our constituents. Despite the obvious imperfections, the withdrawal agreement on the table delivers for this country, and, for that reason, I will vote for it.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Just before I call the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin), I must point out what some Members will have noticed—namely that, most unfortunately, the timer display to my right is not functioning, which is gravely to the disadvantage of Opposition Members. I have been advised, I am afraid, that it cannot be repaired while the House is sitting, so I would encourage Members to—

**Greg Hands:** Come over here.

**Mr Speaker:** No, not to cross the Floor of the House—it was a nice try by the right hon. Gentleman, and I do not blame him for making the attempt, although whether they will be inspired by the prospect of sitting near him is a matter for legitimate speculation and conjecture. I was saying that Members should try to take account of exactly when they started speaking, and they may be assisted by their Whip as well. I know that it is imperfect, and I am glad that the right hon. Gentleman has kept his sense of humour at this time of night, but we will have to keep going to the best of our ability.

9.25 pm

**Nic Dakin** (Scunthorpe) (Lab): Last year, we commemorated the centenary of the end of the first world war. It was a sombre remembrance. Last month, we celebrated 100 years since the first election in which women and working-class men voted. Both anniversaries remind us of the progress we have made, but progress is not inevitable. This year, we remember 80 years since the outbreak of the second world war—just 21 years after the war to end all wars. It is a shocking reminder of the fragility of peace. The last 70 years have been ones of peace, freedom and prosperity driven by positive relationships with our partners in Europe. The 70 years before were ones of war, oppression and economic depression driven by negative relationships with our



[*Nic Dakin*]

European neighbours. Peace, freedom, prosperity—things worth having, things we take for granted when we have them but whose loss we regret when they are gone.

We had a second referendum on our relationship with the EU in 2016. Many in this debate have reminded us of its outcome—17.4 million, or 52%, for leave and 16.1 million, or 48%, for remain—but there is another way of looking at the result that helps to explain why we are finding it so difficult to deliver the will of the British people: 62% of eligible voters, or 29 million people, did not vote leave. No wonder we are struggling! People voted to come out, not to lose out.

Northern English industrial, commuter and market towns such as Scunthorpe, Bottesford and Kirton, which I represent, voted overwhelmingly leave—2:1 in my area—and it is no wonder. They are fed up with the change to their communities, as migrant workers take jobs in agriculture, food production and small manufacturing. They see this as depressing their wages. They see their high streets change and shrink. When things close—the courts, the banks, the shops—it always seems to be ours that close. When investment is made—in roads, in rail, in shiny new projects—it always seems to be the big cities, London and the south-east that benefit.

Communities such as the ones I represent are right to feel neglected because they are, despite our best efforts. There is a growth in the number of those just about managing and people using food banks. We saw that over Christmas. There are cuts to real incomes and welfare support as a result of the ideological pursuit of austerity. We used to sing that things could only get better. At the referendum, people said things could not get much worse. They wanted change and to take back control, and they still want that. They want to be listened to, they want their NHS to deliver consistently for them, they want to see their schools funded properly and they want to see investment in local jobs, and they are right to want these things.

Brexit is the magic bullet that'll do the trick—fingers crossed! We are told that Brexit means Brexit and that nothing is agreed until everything is agreed—meaningless drivel! Like the Emperor's new clothes, it looks wonderful until you see through it, and that is where we are now—the point at which the clothes are properly looked at and the Prime Minister's deal properly examined. Pretty much nobody likes it. That is what my email traffic says. British Steel, the largest local private sector employer, is desperate for certainty, horrified at the prospect of no deal and urging me to vote for the Prime Minister's deal, but there is little support for this. Although the deal would get us over the current bump in the road, it would not be long before the other bumps and new uncertainties came into view. That is the problem.

The PM has not listened to the people. In 2017, she asked for a larger majority to push through a hard Brexit and the people said, "No thank you!" Afterwards, she should have reached out to all the Opposition parties, not just the Democratic Unionist party, in the interests of national unity to find a way forward. Instead, she has dug into her bunker, behaving as though she has a huge majority even though she leads a minority Government. That is what has got us to today: a Government of headless chickens running round in ever-decreasing circles of Dante's "Inferno".

We need to protect the Union of the United Kingdom by preserving the Good Friday agreement. We need to be in a customs union and have access to the single market while restricting freedom of movement. We need to listen to the 62% as well as the 52% and take positive action to address regional inequalities. If we do that, the next 70 years will build on the legacy of peace, freedom and prosperity of the last 70 years through strong and positive relationships with our European neighbours and the rest of the world.

**Several hon. Members** rose—

**Mr Speaker:** I am afraid that the limit has to be reduced to four minutes.

9.31 pm

**Suella Braverman** (Fareham) (Con): I am grateful to be able to speak in this historic debate before what will be one of the most important votes of my career, if not my lifetime. It brings me no pleasure whatever to make this speech: I have never rebelled against the Conservative party and I have never taken a stance against my leader. But my duty to my constituents and my contract with the nation mean that I must speak frankly and vote with my conscience against this deal. It is the reason why I resigned as a Minister from the Department for Exiting the European Union in November.

The simple truth is that this deal is not Brexit. It is neither what a majority of voters in Fareham voted for in the referendum nor what 80% of voters backed at the general election. But we are being told that, yes, it does honour the referendum and take back control of our laws, our money and our borders. Call me a pesky lawyer, but that does not stand up to scrutiny. I have been called worse: a jihadi, an extremist, a racist. Most recently, I was referred to—by, it has to be said, my very good friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs—as a swinger at a party waiting for Pierce Brosnan to arrive. Mr Speaker, you will know that I got married about a year ago; I have to inform you that our relationship is going well and we have not quite got to that point.

The legal reality is very different from the slogans. The deal continues our subjugation to EU laws during the implementation period and the backstop: the UK will have no say whatever on those rules and regulations. After the backstop, we have no guarantee whatever that the UK will be able to diverge. The jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice will persist thereafter and our courts will not have the final say on many matters.

There have been pledges to end the free movement of people, but I do not believe that they stand up to scrutiny either. After exit day in March 2019, the free movement directive and its principles will substantially continue to apply. We have no promise, again, that free movement will categorically end after the implementation period—merely the promise of a labour mobility agreement. Mr Speaker, if you know what that means I would be grateful to hear your thoughts. I certainly do not—and that is after having worked for a year at the Brexit Department.

After we technically leave the EU in March, we will be legally bound to pay £39 billion for many years thereafter. For what? Nothing. We have failed to secure any guarantee that we will get a free trade agreement in return for the very large price we are paying.

My parents emigrated to the UK from Kenya and Mauritius in the 1960s. They were born under the British empire and admired the United Kingdom. The UK that inspired them was confident in the world—pioneering in statecraft, and fearless in the face of adversity: a Britain that led the way for others and contributed so much good to the world. That is the vision of Britain that I have inherited, and in which I profoundly believe. At this crossroads in our history, we are being fed a diet of doom and pessimism—a choice between surrender and catastrophe—but our nation is greater than that. We can salvage Brexit before it is too late. We can ditch this deal: we can honour the British people for our great nation.

9.35 pm

**Danielle Rowley** (Midlothian) (Lab): I have received hundreds of emails, letters and calls from constituents over just the last few weeks, as other Members on both sides of the House will have done. Some have been from people engaging with their Member of Parliament for the very first time. That is at least one positive thing to have emerged from the last two and a half years of chaos, but I find it sad that people are becoming engaged in politics through anger, disbelief and frustration rather than through hope or positive change.

A large number of my constituents have urged me to vote against the deal. They think that it pleases no one. It does not protect jobs or the economy, it does not preserve key protections and rights at work, it is bad for the environment and for consumers, and it is bad for standards for our food, our health and our safety. It puts our country's future and prosperity at stake. One of my constituents recently told me:

“What I think is immoral, is the idea that somehow British people have given their consent to a process that will cause huge economic hardship to large sections of the population.”

I agree with him. We have a critical responsibility in this place, not least to the poorest and most marginalised in our society, to protect our economy and public services. However, that does not mean telling people that their choice was wrong. We need to look at the reasons why people voted as they did, explore the root of those problems, and then work to secure genuine change for people while protecting them and respecting their choice at the same time. That is their duty, as was highlighted perfectly by my hon. Friend the Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner).

A number of constituents have also expressed concern about the rights of EU citizens. People who have contributed so much to this country are feeling unwelcome, and some have left as a result. A local business told me:

“We employ skilled engineers from around the world and see dangers ahead if we close our doors”.

The Government's proposed immigration policy measures skill, and therefore visa type, by pay level. Given that those involved in research and technology are often highly skilled but poorly paid, that is not fair.

The Tories say that they have given clarity to EU nationals, but my European constituents do not agree. One told me, “I am worried about my future”, saying:

“As an EU national who has lived in Scotland for over thirty years... I feel that the explanations as to what 'settled status' entails in practice have been lacking in clarity”.

The Prime Minister must think again and do better by people who are have worked here, lived here and contributed so much.

In many ways, this deal would undermine opportunities for young—especially working-class—people. Youth services in the UK have been disproportionately slashed, and have experienced the impacts of austerity over the last eight years. Over that time, EU funding has significantly helped to plug gaps, but there is a real lack of provision to protect those funds. The findings of a panel of young people in Scotland brought together by the organisations Children in Scotland and Together raised the need for continued contribution to Erasmus with an extra grant, and the need for workers' rights to be protected. It seems to me that young people have a clearer view than the Government about what we need as a country.

We cannot have a no-deal Brexit—we absolutely cannot—but we also cannot be held to ransom and forced into choosing a bad deal. Labour is the only party that is trying to heal the divisions in our deeply divided country. In contrast, the Government have only made those divisions worse. Brexit has shaken the establishment. We need to listen to what people are telling us, but we also need to protect them, and to protect and restore public services and our communities. On behalf of the people of Midlothian, I will not be voting for this deal.

9.39 pm

**Dr Phillip Lee** (Bracknell) (Con): The task before Members of this House is simple: we must deal with reality not fantasy; we must be honest with ourselves and our constituents; we must decide to lead, not be led; and, above all, we must each make judgments about what is in the best interests of our constituencies and our country without fear or favour. The issue at hand is too important to do otherwise.

I cannot vote for this withdrawal agreement for many reasons, but this evening I will concentrate on just one: neither this Brexit nor any other practical form of it measures up to what was promised in 2016. The fact is that people voted to leave because they were told that by doing so the country would be richer. They were told about £350 million for the NHS, easy access to the single market and easy, deliverable trade deals with the rest of the world. They were told that there would be less immigration, specifically fewer Muslims, as evidenced by the use of a false position on Turkey in the accession process. Finally, they were told that they would regain sovereignty.

I have not been even remotely persuaded that any of these Vote Leave promises have been shown to be deliverable, and neither have an increasing number of my constituents, if recent sophisticated polling is to be believed. Also, I am convinced that our countrymen and women chose leave without really knowing many of the implications. To be honest, I was one of them. I was one of those ignorant people who did not understand the implications, and I point Members to our lack of membership of the European Medicines Agency and the impact that would have on access to new drugs.

If we had gone out and said to the public, “Vote for this deal,” do we really know for sure what the result would have been? I suspect our people would have been less than enthusiastic. In fact, I suggest that the response would have been, “Up yours,” and rightly so. That is why I strongly believe that it would be a supreme act of political fraud to proceed with any practical or legally deliverable form of Brexit without first getting the

[Dr Phillip Lee]

legitimacy of public consent. Hence I want no part in this act of self-serving political chicanery, or indeed any other future attempts to deliver softer forms of Brexit.

This deal does not do it for me. However, neither does so-called Norway-plus. Norway does not control its borders, Norway pays into EU programmes and Norway is not at the table when the rules are drawn up. Hands up those who think that not controlling immigration or regulations, and paying for the pleasure, was what won the referendum for Vote Leave? For any responsible parliamentarian to contemplate supporting a no-deal Brexit without giving ourselves at least a decade to adjust to that reality is beyond reckless.

**Dr Wollaston:** Does my hon. Friend think that any responsible Government could in all conscience inflict no deal on their people?

**Dr Lee:** No, I do not, to be blunt.

There is only one way out of our mess: ask the people to decide and have the final say, and, unlike in 2016, give a choice between two legally and practically deliverable options. It is to say, “We know you wanted to leave and we respect that. However, leaving means this—is that okay?” This time, there should be no tortuous process of subsequently trying to interpret a result. This time, there should be a decision that will be acted on within 24 hours of the result. The clinical equivalent would be to say, “I know you wanted an operation, but having done some further tests, we’ve now realised there is a significant risk that you will be harmed. Do you still want it?”

The Government have clearly worked hard to respect the 2016 referendum vote and to deliver a workable Brexit, but their mandate is exhausted. They need the legitimacy of a new vote. In response to the argument of some colleagues, it is not true to say that the public will never forgive us if we do not deliver Brexit, but it is certainly the case that if we deliver a bad deal, the public should never forgive us. If the public vote for this Brexit, fine, but I am not voting for it, because there has not been informed consent to it, it is not in my constituents’ interests and it is not in my country’s best interests.

9.44 pm

**Sir Mark Hendrick** (Preston) (Lab/Co-op): The Prime Minister, in interpreting the outcome of the referendum and handling negotiations with the EU, has fought to keep everyone in the dark for most of the past two years. It was only late on in the process, when beginning to look at negotiating the withdrawal agreement, that she came forward with the so-called Chequers plan. The plan was clearly meant to strike a balance between what her Brexiteer Back Benchers would accept and what she felt she could successfully negotiate with the European Union. The final outcome clearly satisfies the latter—hence the deal, which has enraged a large proportion of her own party and certainly the vast majority of Opposition Members, who want a much closer economic and political relationship with the EU. That is not currently on offer.

If the Prime Minister had sought to engage with Parliament over the past two years rather than simply saying what she felt the referendum meant to her, and if she had informed Parliament towards the end about what she was doing, we would not be in the mess we are

in today. Any progress on this matter will require consensus across the House, and not the take-it-or-leave-it approach amounting to blackmail that the Prime Minister is trying to pursue. The political declaration following the withdrawal agreement is deficient in terms of its commitment to the UK and the single market, and it also contains no mention of the customs union. To vote for this deal tomorrow would be to approve an approach to the negotiation of a trade deal in which the likely outcome with regard to the single market is unknown and in which the customs union has clearly been ruled out. This is clearly leading to a hard Brexit.

As other Members have said, the clock is running down and we have little time to come up with an alternative before 29 March. It is therefore essential that the Government seek an extension to article 50 to give us more time or, if necessary, even revoke article 50 until Parliament or the people of this country have finally decided what sort of an arrangement with the European Union this country should have. The people of this country who voted in the referendum in June 2016 could not have known all the consequences of their vote at the time, or the likely impact on jobs and prosperity in this country. Any politicians who tried to warn them of this were described as scaremongers or pursuers of “Project Fear”. Much of what the remain campaign said at the time has either become true—including a heavily devalued pound, the flight of capital from the country and job losses in key industries—or it is on the way to becoming true, should we leave on 29 March.

When the Prime Minister’s deal is rejected at the end of this debate tomorrow evening, we will be in a situation in which, in the past, a Prime Minister would have considered resigning or calling a general election. I do not expect either of those events to take place, because this Prime Minister’s track record is one of stubbornness and disregard. However, I do expect her to come forward sometime soon after with her plan B, which must include either the extension or revocation of article 50. In addition, there must be a genuine attempt to involve Parliament in finding a way forward that can form the basis of further discussions with the European Union around realistic arrangements for UK access to the single market and membership of a customs union. The European Union has said that this deal is the final deal and it will not negotiate another one, but it would say that, wouldn’t it? If Parliament can come to a consensus and the Prime Minister can respect that consensus, the EU must give serious consideration to that consensus. The Prime Minister should continue to work on that basis. If she cannot do so, she should call a general election and let the people decide.

9.48 pm

**Sir John Hayes** (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): I want to speak about the exercise of political authority, the character of entitlement and the nature of expectations. Political power has one virtuous object: the defence and welfare of the people, and the advancement of their interests. For that to be true in practice, the exercise of power must be accountable. The European Union is esoteric, obtuse and obscure, so far as most of our constituents are concerned—they neither hold people to account nor understand how it works. I barely understand it myself, even after all those years in government. What I do know is that in every single Government Department in which I served, at some



point a civil servant would come to me and say, “It’s bad news! There is a directive from Europe. How can we get round it? How can we get out of it? How can we dilute it?” Never did anyone come to me to say, “This has arrived from the European Union and it is good news for Britain.” Because the British people knew that, they voted to leave.

There are those in this place who have a deep sense of entitlement. They believe that they were born to rule. More than that, they believe that they are entitled to dictate the views of all those around them and to proscribe views that do not fit in with their globalist, liberal establishment preoccupations. They neither understand the British people nor truly care about them. They are determined to frustrate Brexit and to use every process to corrupt every possible method to do so. We must stand in their way: for the people against that liberal establishment.

I know that the Prime Minister has done her best. I am not one of those who thinks that she has failed, but she must do more. She has the national interest at heart, but the backstop cannot be sustainable, and the reason is straightforward—it could continue in perpetuity. It could create a contractual, treaty-based relationship with the European Union that we could not get out of even if this Parliament believed that it was in our national interest. The Attorney General told us so in December when he said:

“There is therefore no unilateral right for either party to terminate this arrangement. This means that if no superseding agreement can be reached within the implementation period, the protocol would be activated and in international law would subsist even if negotiations had broken down.”—[*Official Report*, 3 December 2018; Vol. 650, c. 547.]

That brings me to my third and final point. We now stand ready to deliver the expectations of the British people or to frustrate them. Our power in this place and power in government arise from the legitimacy conferred on us by those people who elect us and to whom we answer. If we frustrate them and let them down, I would be reminded of the words of Benjamin Disraeli, who said:

“Duty cannot exist without faith”,

and if we breach the faith of the British people in our integrity, we will do a disservice not only to this Parliament at this time, but to our very democratic system of government. I am not prepared to do that, and I know that Members across the Chamber are not prepared to do that, so I ask all my colleagues—wisdom does not reside on one side of the House or the other, by the way—to live up to what the people ask us to do. Do not support the deal tomorrow night, but back Brexit and ensure that we leave the EU lock, stock and barrel.

9.52 pm

**Peter Kyle** (Hove) (Lab): There was nothing inevitable about reaching this impasse. In reality, the Brexit we have before us in this deal is the Prime Minister’s creation and hers alone. The Prime Minister’s approach to the Herculean task of negotiating Brexit has been astoundingly out of touch with the needs of both Parliament and the public. The crucial first step of when and how to trigger article 50 hardwired acrimony into Brexit from the outset—acrimony between Parliament and the Executive and within and between the communities we represent. It set us on a course on which failure to

command a majority within Parliament or among the public was inevitable. The Government spent £10 million of public money going all the way to the Supreme Court to stop us in Parliament having a say on the triggering of article 50. Do we imagine, had the Prime Minister won that case, that her intentions were to be more inclusive of Parliament, to be more consultative, or to be more driven to listen, learn and engage? Of course not.

I voted against triggering article 50 because there was no evidence that the Government were prepared for the negotiations—and they were not. What followed was 18 months of negotiations within the Tory party, all the while pretending that that had the same effect as negotiating with our partners in the EU. There was no Chequers moment for the EU, because its negotiating principles were signed off by all 27 nations, the European Parliament and the European Commission three months after article 50 was triggered. Our Government—the ones who started this process—spent three quarters of the negotiating time rowing among themselves. The Prime Minister survived every row by telling each side exactly what they wanted to hear and never putting anything in writing. It is an unholy coalition held together by smoke and mirrors, so it was no surprise that the wheels came off the moment she published her deal in legally binding text. It need not have been that way.

When the Prime Minister took office, giving that remarkable first speech on the steps of Downing Street, she had the opportunity of a lifetime to reconcile our country and heal our politics. She could have toured our nations to listen to people from all areas and all backgrounds. She could have established ways to include the public in solving the Brexit challenge.

The Prime Minister said that she pulled the vote at the last minute because she had listened to this House and needed to rework the backstop, but even that fails the truth test. If she had truly listened to this House, she would have heard that concerns about security were raised more frequently than the backstop, as were immigration and citizens’ rights. And the most heavily mentioned concern in those debates, raised three times as often as the backstop, were economic security and trade. What has she done to deliver on what Members demanded last time? Nothing. Another wasted month of precious article 50 time.

The Prime Minister says we must not let the great be the enemy of the good when it comes to a Brexit deal, and there we have it. With this deal, she has literally taken the “great” out of Great Britain. There is no plan B to unite the House if the motion fails to secure agreement tomorrow. The very fact that no single option has galvanised a majority in this place is the perfect guide as to whom we should turn to help solve it. The Government may be paralysed and Parliament gridlocked. It is time we turned outwards to ask the people to guide us on the way forward.

On the steps of Downing Street, upon taking office, the Prime Minister told the nation that her Government

“will do everything we can to give you more control over your lives.”

If now is not the moment to make good on that promise, when is?

9.56 pm

**Sir Henry Bellingham** (North West Norfolk) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Hove (Peter Kyle), who voted against article 50 and is in a stronger position than his Front Bench. It is also a pleasure to follow hot on the heels of my neighbour, my right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes).

My constituency, like the constituencies of my right hon. Friends the Members for South Holland and The Deepings and for South West Norfolk (Elizabeth Truss), voted overwhelmingly to leave—68% on a massive turnout. I voted leave myself, and I stood at the last election on a pledge to honour the referendum. I think it is my duty to deliver on that pledge.

Would I prefer a perfect, clean Brexit with no backstop, no ongoing role for the ECJ and a chance to break away in one swoop? Yes, of course I would. I was in my constituency a lot before Christmas and, like my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest West (Sir Desmond Swayne), I had many conversations with constituents. I was struck by how much support and respect there is for the Prime Minister and her tenacity and determination in difficult circumstances.

One chap said to me, “Henry, would you like a 100% Brexit?” And I said, “Of course I would. I voted for Brexit. Wouldn’t you like a 100% Brexit?” He said, “Yes, I would, but we actually got 52%, so it was always going to be a compromise.” After 46 years of ever-closer integration, after spending 10 years negotiating our entry into the EU, a 100% Brexit was never a realistic expectation.

The agreement before us is the result of many months of incredibly diligent work. Yes, it is easy to criticise a lot of it, and I am far from satisfied, but if one looks at some of the plus points in the agreement, 80% of the key elements on research, skills, education, cultural links, citizenship, security and intelligence were agreed with little fuss as a result of our negotiating team.

I do not accept the idea that the EU is somehow indifferent to the outcome of this agreement and whether it gets through the House. If it fails, the EU would see it as an appalling indictment of EU diplomacy, having put so much into it. As my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest West points out, the agreement stops the vast payment, closes down free movement and gives us control again of our fisheries and agriculture, and we will no longer be bound to implement future EU legislation. Above all else, it gives us a crucial stepping-stone to the next stage, which is the most important part of all—our future trade agreements and the future political relationship. Frankly, if I had been offered this agreement in 2016, when I campaigned with my right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings and many other colleagues during the referendum, I would have taken it.

Unfortunately, this is not a binary choice between this deal and a no-deal Brexit. I could live with a no-deal Brexit, but I am concerned that we have not properly prepared for it and that it could lead to a constitutional stand-off between the Government and Parliament. A second referendum would be a complete disaster. People would say to us, “We voted in the referendum, at your request. We then spoke and we asked you to implement it. You then asked us again at

the last election and 82% of you campaigned on a platform to implement the result, and now you are coming back to us to ask us again.”

I am going to vote reluctantly for this agreement tomorrow night, but I am also reminded of what a lot of constituents have said to me—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The hon. Gentleman has the benefit of the clock. I am sorry to stop him, because I enjoy listening to him.

10 pm

**Preet Kaur Gill** (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab/Co-op): In May, I gave a speech in this place calling on the Government to put aside their differences and their rigid ideologies, overcome their stubbornness and focus on what matters: a deal that works for people, families and businesses in the west midlands and across the country. It is clear that what this Government have put in front of us does not do that. This deal presents a threat to the three universities in my constituency; across the west midlands, we attract more than 8,000 students from the EU each year and employ about 5,000 academics who are EU citizens. The universities in my constituency are concerned about the impacts of this deal. What does it do to their ability to attract students and staff, and to their continued ability to collaborate with other institutions in Europe? This deal does not answer those questions.

Having spoken about those universities, I am pleased to reference the report ‘The NHS and Health Law Post Brexit’, written by the academic group The UK in a Changing Europe’, which includes researchers from the University of Birmingham. The report was launched in Parliament in December 2018. So what does this Brexit deal mean for the NHS? The report raises fears about the likelihood of medicine shortages taking place across the UK and its authors are rightly worried about the lack of a guarantee of continued access to European Union-wide public health networks and vigilance systems which facilitate the protection of patient safety. The Government have not adequately addressed any of those things, and the damaging effect of this deal on the NHS will be felt around the country if it goes through.

According to analysis commissioned by Birmingham City Council’s Brexit commission, one in 10 registered nurses in the west midlands is from the European Union. In a sector that already has a high level of vacancies and a low retention of nursing staff, they fulfil vital roles, working in older adult nursing homes, and providing help and support for some of our most vulnerable citizens. I ask for a guarantee from Ministers that those so called “low skilled” or “unskilled” workers will still be able to come from the EU.

Despite the much delayed White Paper, which finally slipped out just before Christmas, we still have a Cabinet and Government at odds over their future immigration policy. So let me say that blindly following an ideological desire to severely cut EU migration will damage our economy and leave vulnerable industries, already heavily hit with large numbers of vacancies, like social care, even closer to breaking point. Charities and civil society groups have come to me worried about the Government’s intentions of replacing the EU structural and investment funds with a shared prosperity fund. The lack of detail, coupled with indications and rumours about how the funds will be distributed, is worrying, and these vital

organisations are hesitant about planning for the medium and long term. This anxiety about the future is also true of these organisations and aid agencies based in the UK but operating abroad. They are already experiencing the impact of the Government's lack of clarity over Brexit, with currency fluctuations resulting in funding shortfalls for overseas work. There are also serious threats to their future programmes and jobs that this Government have not addressed.

The Greater Birmingham chamber of commerce evidence showed that almost a quarter of west midlands-based businesses export exclusively to the EU. These businesses need continued access to the EU, and this deal does not guarantee this. Meanwhile, small and medium-sized enterprises have already experienced problems as a result of the failure of the Government's negotiations. According to the Federation of Small Businesses, one in five small businesses employs someone from the EU and seven in 10 small employers rely on mid or low-skilled staff, so there is a real danger of Brexit making the current skills gap much worse. These SMEs do not trust this Government to get it right; according to the research done by Ed Balls and Peter Sands, they are

“deeply dissatisfied that this was the choice they were being offered”.

That is because the deal does not

“provide the detail, certainty, and guaranteed future proximity to the EU that most businesses want.”

Just last week, we witnessed the negative effect that the Government's mishandling of Brexit is having on businesses in the west midlands, with Jaguar Land Rover's announcement that further job cuts are expected. It cites post-Brexit uncertainty and a lack of clarity as one of the reasons for these proposed redundancies. This is a serious concern for many of my constituents who are employed by Jaguar Land Rover and also for the region as a whole.

10.4 pm

**Dame Cheryl Gillan** (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): Representing a constituency that voted mostly remain, but having voted leave myself, I have been particularly careful to listen to the hundreds of representations that have come in to my office. Over the past few weeks, the variety of views that have been expressed to me have not either crystallised opinion behind one course of action or another or, indeed, delivered a cohesive picture, but they have indisputably confirmed that the constituency remains divided, as do the country and this House. It is sad that my correspondence has also reflected the unedifying spectacle of people who are trying, by hook or by crook, to reverse the decision of the electorate, or who are pursuing some perfect exit outcome, and in the course of so doing are dragging down people's opinion of this place and the people who work here.

Two themes have emerged. First, almost everyone I talk to wants MPs to stop setting procedural tricks and traps for their perceived opponents and just get on with leaving the EU, as was promised. Secondly, they recognise the Prime Minister's Herculean feat in bringing back a deal for us to vote on at all, but it has proved to be one that cannot be unequivocally backed by a large number of people in this House. For example, the backstop provides a great barrier for me in making my decision.

I voted to leave because it is quite obvious to me that the EU is going in the wrong direction for this country. It intends to subjugate this country and its other member states. It wants a European army and ever closer political union, it would like to drag all its members into a common currency, and its leaders are still unelected. I cannot continue to advocate membership of a grouping that will undermine NATO and would further diminish this Parliament and our democracy, which we all claim to be champions of.

I really want a country that is led by Queen and country, not by people from abroad. Quite frankly, I would like to have walked out the moment the referendum result had been declared. That is actually what most people think should have happened. However, I have to make a risk assessment of my decision, based on the options that are on offer. For me, to honour the referendum result is vital; anything less is a betrayal of the electorate. I cannot agree that moving the article 50 date is going to help us in any way whatsoever—it will only perpetuate divisions in this House—and a second referendum will divide this country even more.

I have talked to businesses that do not have a vote but provide the prosperity and jobs in this country that are so important. My local businesses, including The Entertainer and GE Healthcare, have all advocated support for this agreement. I cannot gamble with our country's future. If I do not support this withdrawal agreement, I feel that I will be gambling with the country's future in a reckless fashion. After last week's shenanigans, it is obvious that there are people in this House who would frustrate a no-deal position, and that that is now a huge risk to Brexit itself. That is not something I can countenance while still keeping faith with the electorate. I will therefore support the Prime Minister in the meaningful vote, as this deal appears to me to be the best option available to deliver the next stage of Brexit successfully.

This is not the end of Brexit; this is the beginning. There are negotiations to come, and this will provide a firm foundation for our future negotiations, in order to secure our economy and realise the opportunities that Brexit truly does offer this great country of ours.

10.8 pm

**Deirdre Brock** (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): The UK Government seem to be repeating on a loop cycle after cycle of inane attempts to pacify their own party and satisfy some rabid newspaper owners, with no consideration given to the best interests of the people the Government are supposed to represent. There has been trip after trip to Brussels to tell the other member states what the UK wants out of its resignation from the EU; return after return, trying to explain why there has been no advance made, no advantage gained, no real progress at all; statement after statement made in this Chamber, blaming the other states for having the audacity to stand up for their collective and individual best interests and for the interests of their people.

Time after time, we have been treated to demonstrations of just how little understanding of the EU there is in the Government ranks. The last trips have been shining examples of just how impotent the UK has become, how out of touch with reality the Government have become and how much influence has been lost in the past couple of years. A Prime Minister went looking for



[Deidre Brock]

help with domestic problems to find that there were no longer helpful faces around the table. Her inability to articulate an argument in favour of clarification of terms already agreed on is the dirty mirror to the long and pointless succession of meetings held by her Ministers who also managed to walk out of the room with nothing.

It is just a few weeks before the UK leaves the EU and the new imperialists of Brexit are having to face up to the uncomfortable truth that the UK is now, at best, a middling power in the world. No longer does Britannia rule the waves; these days she is queuing up for a ticket for the ferry. Shorn of the muscle of the EU, there will be some serious reckonings to come, not least of which will be the WTO shocks. It is repeated so often that it has become a political meme: we can trade on WTO rules and all will be well in the world. There is a fond imagination that WTO rules are like the rules of a club. They are rules that everyone obeys, like gentlemen should, and no one would think of going outside the letter and the spirit of those rules.

The truth is that the WTO is a bear pit of contrasting interests and competing economies. The sacred rules are little more than guidelines for the battles in the WTO panels, dispute settlement body and appeals process. It is economic muscle that matters in these consultations and political muscle that counts in the dispute resolution. We are losing both by leaving the EU, so the WTO will become a far less welcoming place for us to take trade disputes. It will become a place where we will learn to take defeat, a place where the Brexiteers' dreams of adequacy will come crashing down.

Let me just illustrate that with an example: hormone-treated beef that the United States wanted to sell into the EU. The US complained in 1996 and the WTO ruling was in its favour, but horse-trading of quotas and tariffs between the EU and the US has meant that we have been able to keep our food chain free of that adulterated beef. The UK simply does not have the strength to resist that ruling. It has no way to offer the quota for high-quality beef without harming our own farmers and it does not have the economic resilience to soak up the tariffs.

The WTO is the dystopia of free trade, a baleful and distorted place where profit is king. Yet there we head, this ramshackle handcart gathering speed, driven by a Prime Minister who cannot control her own Government, far less her own party, egged on by a Labour party leader who has a similar lack of control over events on his side. A Tory Prime Minister deferring defeat for a month and a bit in the hope of finding some magic beans over Christmas was watched by a Labour Opposition leader frightened to bring her down in case he has to face up to some of those issues.

10.12 pm

**Conor Burns** (Bournemouth West) (Con): In common with many others on both sides of this House, I sent out an email on the eve of the referendum to thousands of my constituents, not to tell them how I thought they should vote—they knew well enough how I thought they should vote—but to urge them to participate in this referendum where every vote would count. I said in that email:

“There are men and women of goodwill and common decency on both the Leave and Remain sides. Many I disagree with are my friends, and we disagree in goodwill and with good faith. When it is over the result must be respected. For it will be the collective judgment of the British people. As democrats that demands our respect.”

After the referendum, all parts of the House lined up to tell the public that they would respect the result, but as the urgency of that instruction of June 2016 has faded with the passage of time, people have now started to come out of the woodwork to indicate that they do not actually respect it. There is an undercurrent here of people saying that those who voted to leave were perhaps a bit thick or mildly racist and that it was impossible to comprehend that someone could be international and global in outlook, liberal, tolerant, decent and pro-immigration and be in favour of leaving the European Union.

Then we got the calls for the so-called second referendum. We have already had the second referendum. We had the first referendum in 1975 and the second one in 2016. If people want to articulate the case for a third referendum, I say bring it on, but let 41 years elapse between the second and the third, so stick the date in your diaries. We will have the third referendum in 2057. We cannot make a once-in-a-generation decision every three years. The agreement itself is fundamentally flawed.

**Richard Drax** (South Dorset) (Con): The agreement is flawed in many ways, not least because we would be subject to the binding rules of the ECJ, despite what we are told by those on the Front Bench.

**Conor Burns**: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We were clear during the campaign that the areas over which we wanted to take back control were our laws, our moneys and our borders. This withdrawal agreement fails in many ways, not least regarding the backstop, which is absolutely toxic for our friends from Northern Ireland.

Part of the problem is that we sort of approached these negotiations as if we were renegotiating the terms of our membership, not trying to agree the terms of our departure. We have been led by so many people in this process who fundamentally cleave to the messages they put out during the campaign—that it was a disaster and that there were no merits in leaving the European Union. I saw that up close and personal when I was a Parliamentary Private Secretary at the Treasury and latterly in the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. This must be the first time in history that the terms of the peace have been written by the losing side.

This House has focused for too long now on the process of Brexit. I would like to say a word about the causes of Brexit, and I agree with so much of what the shadow Secretary of State said on this. Yes, the slogan was, “Take back control.” Yes, it was about leaving the European Union. Yes, it was about the opportunities beyond our shores to sign global trade deals, and the recognition that the EU's share of world GDP has fallen from 23% in 1980 and is likely to fall to 15% by 2020. It is not that the EU economy has shrunk in size, but that the rest of the world has grown faster and will continue to do so.

I think Brexit was a great cry from the heart and soul of the British people. Too many people in this country feel that the country and the economy are not working

for them, and that the affairs of our nation are organised around a London elite. They look at the bankers being paid bonuses for the banks that their taxes helped to rescue. They look at our embassies in the Gulf that are holding flat parties to sell off-plan exclusive London properties, when they worry about how they will ever get on to the housing ladder. They worry that they may be the first generation who are not better off than their parents, and they want to see a system back that spreads wealth and opportunity.

Brexit was a challenge—a rebuke to this place—but it represents an opportunity to take this country on a different path. I passionately believe that this nation is yearning for us to get back on to the domestic agenda. The people voted to take back control, and they want us to use that control to help them improve their lives and enrich this country.

10.17 pm

**Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab): The referendum in 2016 was an event that I assumed would be followed by the new Prime Minister reaching out to the losing side across party boundaries to obtain its acceptance of and consent to the result. But that did not happen, and it became clear to me that the Prime Minister had no intention of pursuing that approach. It is deeply ironic that, just today, she tried to invoke the close 1997 devolution referendum in Wales in her Stoke speech, claiming that all parties accepted and backed the result at the time, when the Prime Minister is one of many on the Government Benches, including the Secretary of State for International Trade, who now say that a second referendum would be an abomination but who voted against implementing that referendum decision back in 1997.

The problem is that today's faux pas is so typical of the approach that the Prime Minister has taken. Right from the start, she failed to seek to embrace the 48% who were on the remain side and instead sought to pander to the most extreme Brexiteers in her party. In doing so, she characterised the negotiations with Brussels as a sort of poker game. I am afraid that that was always a false analogy. I voted against triggering article 50 because it was clear to me that this was not going to be like a card game at all. A better analogy would be a football match, where the other side is leading and all they need to do is to take the ball to the corner flag and hold it there until the final whistle blows.

We wasted the time available on internal Tory squabbling when the Prime Minister should have been seeking and securing consent. The definitive proof of that was a snap election, called for party political advantage in the middle of the process, that backfired spectacularly. The new Commons arithmetical reality meant that the Prime Minister would have to reach across the Chamber for an agreed way forward, but she did not—well, except to the DUP, but on purely transactional terms—and so she continued on. No effort of real substance was made, until desperation set in, to appeal to voters who supported remain. All those who questioned the wisdom of taking this road were to be labelled as traitors, saboteurs, remoaners or elitists, and today the Prime Minister talked of a subversion of democracy.

When there was a narrow victory in the Welsh referendum, a real effort was made to reach across to those who voted the other way to ask them their ideas,

to build safeguards for the new institutions, and to assuage concerns—to the extent that a decade later a second referendum was held in which people voted overwhelmingly to increase the Assembly's powers. The Prime Minister, in contrast, regarded a narrow referendum result as permission to interpret Brexit however she wanted. As a result, we have a leadership that has led us into a constitutional crisis.

Over the weekend, I read reports of a 64 metre-long fatberg in Sidmouth in the county of Devon. I apologise to hon. Members for this analogy, but what we are facing here is a sort of political fatberg that has to be dealt with. It will be unpleasant and smelly to do so, but it has to be cleared up. It is increasingly clear to me that clearing the blockage may require putting the options, including the option to remain, back to the people for a final say—if we are not to have a general election. Nothing has changed in the Prime Minister's approach in all this time. That is why we need a new Prime Minister and a Labour Government to clear up this mess.

10.21 pm

**Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg** (North East Somerset) (Con): The problem with the withdrawal agreement is that it does not do what the Conservative party said we would do. In our manifesto, we said we would leave the customs union, but annex II, under the backstop provisions, would keep us in the customs union. We have had endless guarantees that the United Kingdom would not be divided, but the whole appendix divides Northern Ireland from the rest of Great Britain—something that Unionists are opposed to in principle, not just as the details of a treaty but because it seeks to divide our country.

The Conservatives and those who campaigned for Brexit always said that we must be free from the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice. Why? Because it is a political court as well as a legal court, and because, Mr Speaker—I know you think this is very important—it could overrule this House and overrule our democracy. It could make laws for us that could not be stopped by Parliament—unless of course we withdrew altogether, which is what we are doing, with the purpose of taking away its authority to rule over us. For all this—for potentially being locked in a customs union, for dividing our nation up, and for allowing the European Court of Justice to continue—we are going to pay our European friends £39 billion of taxpayers' money. For that we get nothing in return—no guarantee of any trade deal in future, but a vacuous political statement that could mean anything to anybody.

In the detail of this treaty and its failures, and its inability to deliver the Brexit that people voted for, perhaps we forget the economic benefits that come from making decisions for ourselves. We know from our own lives that the decisions we make for ourselves are likely to be better than those made for us by other people, but that is true as a nation as well, because any decision made in this House is accountable to the British people. The aim for us as politicians in all parties is to see the standard of living of the British people improve generation after generation, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth West (Conor Burns) said. That is something we seek to do. In the Conservative party, it was one of the founding principles that Disraeli followed—the “condition of the people” question.

[*Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg*]

The advantage of leaving the European Union is that we can once again make these decisions for ourselves. We can have a trade system that opens us up to the world, rather than being the fortress that the European Union has created to try to maintain its standard against the winds that blow from the rest of the world and have made the rest of the world grow so much faster than Europe has managed in recent times—a Europe that is mired in recession and economic failure.

**Mr Steve Baker** (Wycombe) (Con): I can reassure my hon. Friend that if he takes just a minute longer, he might persuade me to join him in the Lobby.

**Mr Rees-Mogg**: I am delighted to hear that. I think there will be a cascade of Members going into the Lobby to vote against this bad deal, because it denies us the opportunities that will make Brexit a success. It takes us further away from the ability to open up our economy to the benefits of free trade and the benefits that would allow the prices of food, clothing and footwear to be reduced, increasing the standard of living, most particularly of the least well-off in society. Instead, we are tied into a protectionist racket that keeps prices high and makes our economy less efficient. The rest of the world is overtaking us and the whole of Europe because it becomes less competitive as it seeks an outmoded, anti-competitive system, thinking that it can simply protect itself.

In this withdrawal agreement, there is no end in sight to the backstop—it could go on for generations. How long did the backstop turn out to be for Norway when it voted not to join, before it got a fully-fledged deal of its own? Over 20 years. “Temporary” in European terms is, for most of us, a generation. Of course, “temporary” in parliamentary terms is even longer, as we remember with the Parliament Act 1911 and the Liberal promise never delivered on to abolish the income tax—typical of the Liberals, you might say, Mr Speaker.

We risk denying ourselves these extraordinary opportunities and, in doing so, taking ourselves away from the electorate, for whom we promised to deliver on Brexit. Ultimately, whatever we think, surely we owe it to our voters to deliver. Otherwise, why should they ever trust us again?

10.26 pm

**Rosie Duffield** (Canterbury) (Lab): How on earth do I sum up in the little time I have my feelings and grave concerns about the biggest issue to dominate our political landscape since the second world war? How on earth do I represent the outpouring of emotion and the sense of division, anger, confusion and disenfranchisement experienced by the citizens of our country and my constituency?

People are angry with us. They are angry for so many different reasons—angry because they were led to a cliff edge wearing a blindfold by a privileged and reckless few and told to jump, without knowing how soft or hard the landing would be or whether they would survive the fall; angry because of the distortion, propaganda and wilful manipulation of facts for political gain; and angry because Parliament is currently unable to function and politicians debating the issue repeat the same hollow soundbites ad infinitum, like a broken record.

Some of the few who led us here are long gone or, indeed, have never graced these green Benches themselves. They are safely and comfortably sitting back, enjoying vast private wealth reserves and watching from a distance as others are left having to untangle their legacy. Let us remember that millions of ordinary people out there have done exactly what successive Governments have always encouraged them to do—worked hard, paid their taxes and kept going when times were tough. There are families who have built and lost businesses, seen jobs come and go and watched as their communities felt the tightening grip of recession and then the nasty, strangling hands of relentless austerity. People like them feel betrayed by us, the politicians.

I am here to speak honestly for and on behalf of the people of my constituency of Canterbury, who have written to me in their thousands. I would struggle to find a single comparable constituency in terms of the direct impact that could be caused by Brexit. In Canterbury we have the University of Kent, also known as “the European university”. The University of Kent and Canterbury Christ Church University are the biggest employers in our area. They rely on their close links with Europe. Strong academia relies on exchange programmes, European partner campuses and freedom of movement for those who teach the next generation of British workers.

Tourism and hospitality is the biggest employer of under-30s in my area. Canterbury is often the first place that EU visitors stop when they come into the UK via our Kent terminals. Our beautiful cathedral receives about 1 million visitors every year, and our whole constituency welcomes over 7 million visitors. Those visitors stay in our hotels and B&Bs, use our restaurants, visit our independent retail businesses and study in our language schools. They drink in our pubs, enjoy our apples, and eat our local oysters and chips on Whitstable beach. They wonder at the English vineyards they drive past in villages such as Barham and Chartham, which are now producing and exporting some of the best wines in the world. Major employers such as Kent brewery Shepherd Neame, based in Faversham, and the Whitstable Oyster Company tell me that seamless import and export is vital to any post-Brexit future in our area.

Our hospitals have research departments benefiting from close, borderless co-operation with their EU partners, and local businesses in the Canterbury and Whitstable area rely heavily on the relatively easy, free flow of traffic to and from the port of Dover. Economic success is wholly dependent on there not being huge problems caused by Operation Stack or Operation Brock, with tailbacks for miles and miles down the M26, M2 and M20. One example is Barton Marine, an award-winning manufacturer of bespoke, specialist equipment used in sailing and also the theatre industry. It employs about 30 local, highly skilled people in its Whitstable factory, and the chief executive officer tells me she is uncertain of their future.

10.31 pm

**Julian Sturdy** (York Outer) (Con): I believe that, ultimately, the final Brexit settlement has to be a compromise between leave and remain, while fundamentally delivering on the decision of June 2016. Remainers have to accept that the country clearly voted to exit the European Union, having been assured the Government would



implement the decision of the referendum and, accordingly, that we have to leave. Leavers, like me, have to accept that the vote to leave was not overwhelming, as nearly half of our fellow citizens voted to remain, and the Brexit that is enacted therefore has to reflect their preference for a close partnership with Europe. This attitude of give and take is the foundation and lifeblood of any successful democracy.

Looking at the Government's deal, there are some merits: providing for an orderly exit with a transitional period, securing the rights of nationals on both sides and pointing the way to a UK-EU free trade agreement. However, like many Members, I have significant concerns about the backstop. I appreciate that this is only meant as an insurance policy, but I fear that it will be in the EU's interests to push the UK into the backstop, in which we could then be held against our will, with Northern Ireland split off from Great Britain, as there is no mechanism for us to leave without the EU's consent.

Most importantly, agreeing to the backstop risks placing our country at a significant disadvantage in negotiations on a comprehensive trade agreement with the EU. I very much want a trade agreement with the EU, but we would risk going into those talks with one hand tied behind our back and compelled to agree to almost anything it proposed either to avoid going into the backstop or to escape from it. There is a real risk of an open-ended negotiation while we remain trapped in the backstop or in an extended transition period. The deck will have been stacked in the EU's favour, making a satisfactory final relationship very difficult. Almost unbearable pressure could be placed on the UK side. A simple example of that has to be the French President's comments on maintaining current access to UK fishing waters.

Ultimately, I believe that agreeing to the deal represents a leap of faith, and that is why, currently, I could not vote for it. However, having said that, I do not believe that no deal or no Brexit are acceptable alternatives. In delivering a second referendum, we would just continue, and even deepen, the division and uncertainty with what would be an abdication of our responsibility as elected representatives to deliver a workable solution. I also have grave concerns about no deal. I believe it would lead to an economic correction. No one knows to what extent or how severe that correction might be, but there is a lot of crystal ball gazing—a gamble that could cost growth and jobs. I think it is reasonable to ask whether that gamble is worth taking.

I hoped that the Prime Minister would be able to present an agreement to the House after the pause with a formal guarantee and a mechanism that would give us power to leave the backstop. There are amendments that might be able to achieve that, and if that is the case, I will be prepared to change my position, but ultimately, as it stands at the moment, the agreement is unacceptable with the backstop.

10.35 pm

**Gerald Jones** (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab): Despite significant inward investment in our area, my constituency voted to leave in 2016, and I respect that result. We know that membership of the European Union has been and continues to be a deeply divisive issue, dividing communities, political parties—some more

than others—and even families. We also know that the EU referendum was an attempt by some to try to settle a division within the Tory party—something that has obviously backfired spectacularly.

Brexit has become the main focus of our Parliament and our country. In many ways, that is as it should be, because it is the most important issue of our time. It is something that will impact on this generation and the generation to follow—another reason why 16 and 17-year-olds should have been given the chance to vote in 2016. However, I am sure that I am not alone in finding it incredibly frustrating that we cannot focus as much attention as we should on the many other important issues of the day.

I, along with many other hon. Members, voted to trigger article 50 to allow the Prime Minister to start negotiations on a deal to honour the result of the referendum. The deal that the Prime Minister has negotiated does not do that. As we are aware, the current deal has succeeded in uniting leavers and remainers in opposition to it. Indeed, only 6% of constituents who have contacted me since 1 December support the Prime Minister's deal. The deal that the Prime Minister has negotiated does not protect jobs, workplace rights or environmental standards. It will not ensure frictionless trade for UK businesses and provides no certainty about our future relationship. It provides no guarantee that the UK will continue equivalent arrangements with key EU programmes and agencies, and the Government's own economic analysis shows that the deal will make the country poorer, with GDP falling by around 3.9% and every region of the UK being worse off.

I know that if that is the case, poorer areas of our country and communities such as mine will fare worse still. I cannot vote to support a deal that will do that to the people I represent. These are not just people I represent; they are my family, my friends, people I have grown up with and local businesses that serve the communities I have grown up in. I cannot vote to inflict greater pain and hardship.

I first got involved in politics as a 14-year-old during the miners' strike in 1984. The reason I did was that I witnessed an uncaring Government rip the heart out of my community and many others around me, and I could not stand back and do nothing. The Tory Government then destroyed whole industries and left many workers on the scrap heap because they had no plan B. History does repeat itself if we do not learn the lessons of the past. It is clear that the Tories have learnt absolutely nothing from the damage that they did in the 1980s and '90s or the damage that their austerity has done over the past eight years.

I fully acknowledge that people in my constituency voted to leave, and many still believe that leave is the best option. There are many others I have also spoken to, including individuals, small business owners and community groups, who have deep concern about the unfolding Brexit situation. EU citizens who have made my constituency their home face uncertainty, and students face uncertainty over programmes such as Erasmus+. If we get this wrong, our country will live with the consequences for decades to come.

I will vote against the Prime Minister's deal. I will also continue to vote against any attempt to take Britain out of the European Union without a deal, as I believe that this would prove a disaster for our country and for

[Gerald Jones]

the people of my constituency. When the Prime Minister's deal is defeated, I hope that she will listen to Parliament, come back and try to remedy what she has done. If she cannot or will not do that, she should step aside and make way for a general election.

10.39 pm

**Andrew Bridgen** (North West Leicestershire) (Con): I would be the first to concede that the Prime Minister did not inherit the best hand in the negotiations, with her predecessor making no preparations whatever for a leave vote in the referendum. The referendum in North West Leicestershire was not close: it was 61% to 39% to leave the European Union. In the east midlands, it was 59% to 41%.

Leave the European Union we must, but this withdrawal agreement is not the way to do it. It will not deliver the Brexit that 17.4 million people voted for. At least when we are in the European Union we can leave, whereas I think that if we get this withdrawal agreement we will never be able to leave. We will be handing over our major bargaining chip, £39 billion of taxpayers' money, for what? For the bulk of the divorce payment during the transition period, with vague promises of a future relationship which is in no way legally binding.

Many of my colleagues rightly pointed out their concerns about the backstop to prevent a hard border on the island of Ireland: a hard border that was already dismissed before it became a political issue by HMRC Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland customs and excise, when they stated that the existing infrastructure was quite sufficient to deal with the border on the island of Ireland; a border that all parties concerned—the EU, the Republic of Ireland and the UK—said they would never implement; and a border that the WTO stated is unnecessary for security concerns.

We are told that neither the UK nor the EU wishes to use the backstop, and that the EU would be uncomfortable with the backstop. Reading through the agreement, however, it looks like the deal of the century for the EU if we sign up to it. Not only will they get to keep the £100 billion in trade deficit we have with them, but they will have an agreement that prevents us from partaking in free trade deals that allow our people to access cheaper goods and services. That effectively makes the Department for International Trade redundant. No country with an existing EU free trade agreement would need to deal with the UK, and any country that does not have an existing free trade agreement would be subject to tariff rates set by the EU.

All the agreement will do is prolong the uncertainty. We could go into years of negotiations over a free trade deal. I campaigned to leave, and leave we must on the basis of sovereignty. This agreement would see our country not getting back control, but losing control and losing sovereignty. Even the Prime Minister's own Brexit adviser Olly Robbins is reported to have warned her that there is was no guarantee that Britain will be able to exit the backstop, which risks leaving us trapped in the EU's customs union indefinitely.

I am of the very strong opinion that the final relationship that the European Union has in mind for the UK, if we ever get to that point, will be very similar to the backstop. Let us remember that under this withdrawal agreement

we would be subject, if we got to a final agreement, to the veto of the remaining EU27 on the final deal. We already know that the French will want our fish, Spain will want at least joint sovereignty of Gibraltar and everybody else will want a piece out of it.

This is a bad deal. It will not get back control of our money, our borders or our laws. It will not regain our sovereignty, but lose our sovereignty. I am not walking away from the Prime Minister; she walked away from her Mansion House speech. I cannot support this withdrawal agreement. I will be voting against it. Quite honestly, my chairman rang me last night and said, "Don't bother coming back to North West Leicestershire if you vote for it—you'll be deselected."

10.43 pm

**Lucy Powell** (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op): I also rise to speak against the deal, but it is clear that the House now needs an opportunity to show what it is for, as well as what it is against. I hope that in the coming days we will have the opportunity to do that.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Peter Kyle) so eloquently and brilliantly put it, the Prime Minister's last-ditch attempts to reach out across party lines were too little, too late. Unfortunately, the Prime Minister has shown yet again a tin ear to Parliament. It is a real shame, because we did not need to be here now. She could have taken up the offers from the Leader of the Opposition to have cross-party talks. She could have taken the temperature of Parliament long before we got here. Maybe if she had done so we would not be here now.

We now face deadlock in the Commons while the country is crying out for us to deal with Brexit. I fear that entrenched positions are getting wider, divisions are getting deeper, and our political discourse is getting more and more toxic. Absolutism is ruling, when reaching out and building a compromise and consensus is what is needed. My sense, which I think is reflected in this debate, is that we are now reaching a point where there is a growing appetite for a consensus to be reached. However, there is clearly no majority in Parliament for the Prime Minister's deal and there is no majority in Parliament for no deal. While I fully respect those who advocate for remain, there is equally no majority in Parliament for a second referendum. I fear that the strategy of all those concerned is to run out of road so that one of the options becomes the last one standing.

That is why I have come to the view that we need a plan B for when the deal is defeated tomorrow. I came together with my friend, the right hon. Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon), to co-author a report seeking a common market 2.0 option with the backing of the cross-party Norway Plus Group. I completely understand that many people want us to remain in the EU—we are better off economically and politically in the EU, and I used to be the director of Britain in Europe, for goodness' sake—but I understand the sentiment that led to the Brexit vote in the first place, and I respect it. Part of the reason behind the vote was a deep scepticism about politics and politicians, so we cannot ignore or seek to overturn the result. We really cannot say, "Sorry, we cannot reach an agreement. Back to you guys." What is more, referendums do not give rise to rational decisions on complex matters, either.

“Common Market 2.0” makes the case for a Brexit that delivers on the result of the 2016 referendum while protecting the economic interests of working people by becoming part of a new common market with the existing EU. It would create a long-term partnership that keeps us closely aligned and offers us real frictionless trade through full single market access and a new customs union. It would guarantee workers’ rights and provide new controls over free movement in certain circumstances. It would allow more money for public services, as our contributions would be significantly lower, and would give us a voice over the regulations that govern the single market. I know it is not a lot of people’s first choice or ideal, but it is an option for a plan B that we all need to consider.

Ministers and the Prime Minister have said many times that they want to know what Parliament is for, not just what it is against. I hope that over the coming days, we will be given the opportunity to say what we are for, and to come together and decide that sometimes we cannot get our ideal, but we need to have a plan B.

10.46 pm

**Rehman Chishti** (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): It is a real pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell), although we disagree about how to deliver on Brexit, because while we may have differences of opinion, we are all among equals in this place.

Some 65% of my constituents voted to leave the European Union in 2016. From holding street surgeries and public meetings across the constituency, I can say that that figure has not changed. When this matter was last discussed in this place, I was disappointed not to have been called and that the vote was pulled. The question is this: what has substantially changed between then, when the question was going to be put, and tomorrow, when the matter will be put before the House? The answer is nothing.

I refer Members to the words of the right hon. Member for Belfast North (Nigel Dodds). He said:

“Despite a letter of supposed reassurance from the European Union, there are no ‘legally binding assurances’, as the Prime Minister talked about in December...In fact, there is nothing new. Nothing has changed.”

That comes from DUP colleagues who help to keep us in government. We talk about 3 million extra jobs, 3 million apprenticeships and 1.9 million more children going to good and outstanding schools in our great country. That is happening under a Conservative Government who exist because we are supported by the DUP. We have to take its views and concerns into account.

I face a difficult decision in that I have never voted against the Conservative party in my nine years in Parliament. I had to resign as a vice-chairman of the Conservative party, as well as a Government trade envoy to Pakistan, where I was born before coming to this great country at the age of six, not speaking a word of English. It was this great party that stood for aspiration and said, “You can work hard and be whatever you want to be. You can be a Member of Parliament at the age of 31 and represent your home town.” When I had to step down as a trade envoy, trade had increased by 10%, and I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelsea and Fulham (Greg Hands), a former International Trade Minister, for his brilliant

support in achieving that. Our manifesto commitment—it was on page 36—made it clear that leaving the EU meant leaving the single market, the customs union and the jurisdiction of the ECJ. What we have here does not achieve that at all.

The opportunities that our great country will have to secure those brilliant trade deals with partners around the world will be limited. I was in the United States over Christmas for the 116th congressional opening session, and our parliamentary counterparts were very clear. They want to negotiate a trade deal, but they understand that if we have European regulation intertwined with this trade deal, it will limit our opportunities to do that great trade deal with them. Apart from being our key trading partner, the US is our No. 1 country for security, whatever our relationship in relation to Brexit. For me, security is the No. 1 priority for our great country, and the US is a key partner in delivering that.

I do not think it is right at all to have another referendum. No Member of Parliament who won their seat by one vote would ever say they should not take up their seat, so we should honour and deliver the public mandate. In my constituency, it was about sovereignty: British people electing British Members of Parliament to have the final say on our laws and how our country is governed.

10.50 pm

**Dr David Drew** (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): I am eternally grateful, Mr Speaker, that you have called me slightly earlier than I thought you might. I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for Gillingham and Rainham (Rehman Chishti).

There can be few times in the history of Parliament when MPs have faced two such difficult issues as Iraq and Brexit. There are parallels. Those of us who voted against the invasion of Iraq were continually leaned on by the Executive and told that if we knew what they knew, we would vote for the invasion. That turned out to be one of the biggest foreign policy disasters that this country has known, and I fear that Brexit will become one of the biggest domestic policy disasters this country has known.

The right hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes) quoted Disraeli, but I think that if Disraeli came back to the House now, he would be struck not by differences but by similarities. There are huge divisions in the country. Two of the great novels of the 19th century, “Sybil” and “Coningsby”, explained those huge divisions and what they meant to this country and the poor of this country.

I disagree with the hon. Member for Bournemouth West (Conor Burns), but I share his analysis. Why did people vote for Brexit? They did so because of austerity. They felt that they had been left behind and ignored. And it did not have to be that way. Other countries in the EU chose a different route. The Portuguese, in particular, under the Government of António Costa, chose to take on the troika, which went in and told them they were bankrupt, and would have to cut and cut and cut more, and they chose not to. They took on the troika, and Portugal has recovered more quickly than any other southern European country.

That is why Brexit is such a poisonous debate. I believe that the Prime Minister’s deal is the wrong deal. As I said earlier, we are being given a false prospectus.



[Dr David Drew]

The idea that it is “my deal or no deal” is completely wrong. We should reject this deal and recognise that this is a race to the bottom. The hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Deidre Brock) was right about this magical idea that WTO rules will be great for our economy. We know what they involve. We need to look at the economic underpinning and what it would require us to do. It is not our salvation.

That is why we must rule out no deal, but also vote against the Prime Minister’s deal and come back with something substantive, and then test it electorally. Personally, I want that to be via a general election, but if we are driven towards a referendum, much as I hate referendums, it is something we will have to face up to in order to bring this country back together again, because the divisions have been made so great. We need to recognise that our policies are wrong and do something about it.

10.54 pm

**Greg Hands** (Chelsea and Fulham) (Con): I am not an ideologue on Brexit; I campaigned hard to remain in 2016, and do not regret having led the “Stronger In” campaign in my constituency. My strong family and other links to the continent mean that I have never been what is called a “Brexititeer”. But like my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex (Sir Nicholas Soames) and unlike my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston), I strongly believe that the referendum in 2016 was a legitimate exercise, with huge voter participation. It did not get the result that I wanted, but the result needs to be respected. I have spent the last two and a half years believing that, with the right deal, Brexit could work. Indeed, the ability to leave the EU is in the treaties themselves.

My view, however, is that as it currently stands, this agreement is one of the worst possible combinations. I am stating today for the first time that, as the deal currently stands, I will vote against it tomorrow night. Brexit is a set of challenges and opportunities, but this deal fails to address the challenges. It kicks the can down the road on EU trade until at least December 2020. It closes down the opportunities: most prominently, there is not going to be an independent trade policy of any consequence.

Some say that there are merits. The Prime Minister lauds and promotes some of them. For example, the deal ends free movement but for me and my inner London constituents, free movement has never been a particular issue. Some 11,000 nationals of EU countries in Chelsea and Fulham are all very welcome to stay—one is even my wife. The Prime Minister’s achievement in ending free movement is not much of one at all for me and my constituency.

The three principal reasons why I oppose the agreement are, first, that it treats Northern Ireland very differently from the rest of the UK; secondly, there is the backstop itself. Both those reasons have featured quite heavily. My third reason is this: I believe that embedded within the agreement is being in a customs union with the European Union for the long term, not just in the backstop. That is the stated goal in the future partnership. It is a myth that the withdrawal agreement plus the future partnership opens up all possible future trade outcomes. No: the economic partnership will

“build and improve on the single customs territory provided for in the Withdrawal Agreement which obviates the need for checks on rules of origin.”

It “builds and improves on”—that is unacceptable. There is not going to be any independent trade policy in a customs union or in any single customs territory. Indeed, Sabine Weyand, Michel Barnier’s No. 2, briefed EU ambassadors that the future partnership

“requires the customs union as the basis of the future relationship”.

That gives rise to all kinds of problems: trade agreements, the Turkey trap, and the contracting out of trade remedies to Brussels, with the effect that will have on key UK industries such as steel and ceramics. The UK will lose its say and contract out that policy to Brussels. Then there are trade preferences. How we treat the developing world is incredibly important. Those will now be a matter for Brussels. That will be a huge loss for UK influence in foreign policy.

I talked earlier today about some of the comments made by some senior EU officials. I will not repeat those now, but it is always worth while for us to study what somebody we are negotiating with is saying. Most, maybe all, of the alternatives are preferable to the agreement as it currently stands. Brussels needs a deal too, and Barnier’s mandate is to achieve a deal. Unless the deal can pass the House of Commons, it is not a deal at all.

10.58 pm

**Sarah Champion** (Rotherham) (Lab): Rotherham voted overwhelmingly to leave the EU, and I take very seriously my job to represent my constituency. I want to support this deal, but I cannot currently as it has fundamental flaws—not least, that it omits protections of workers’ rights. The political declaration is vague and non-binding. It is not a framework for a future trade deal.

To vote for the deal, I would need some assurances that are in the Government’s gift and do not require extending negotiations with the EU. My principal concerns are about women’s rights, equality and human rights. What will the Government do to ensure that those are protected?

Let me give some examples of the EU rights that we need to see. Under the working time directive, 2 million workers gained entitlements to paid annual leave and many were women working part-time. There are the pregnancy and maternity rights at work and the work-life balance directive. I turn specifically to violence against women and girls: how will the UK replicate the VAWG protections and sustained funding currently provided by the EU? European protection orders grant victims of violence equivalent protection orders against a perpetrator across the EU. Those will no longer automatically be available to the UK after Brexit unless the Government commit to opt in to the protection after 2020.

When will the Government actually ratify the Istanbul convention? Fundamentally, what measures will they take to ensure that we are keeping pace with the EU in maintaining gender equality? There is a precedent. We are currently members of the United Nations convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, under which each member state reports on the progress that it has made in respect of implementation targets. Will the Government agree to monitor and report on our standing on equality and human rights in

relation to EU legislation? The House could then debate the report, and a commitment could be made to update our legislation if that was the will of the House.

Let me now say something about human rights, and specifically about the charter of fundamental rights of the European Union. On the Government's current terms, as the UK leaves the EU the charter will no longer have effect in UK law, and the rights for which it provides are therefore at risk. I know the Government do not think that removing it will affect substantive rights, but the Equality and Human Rights Commission disagrees. Last year its chair said:

“The Government has promised there will be no rowing back on people's rights after Brexit. If we lose the charter protections, that promise will be broken. It will cause legal confusion and there will be gaps in the law.”

The reason the charter is so important is that it gives rights to us all. It gives us the right to dignity, and the right to the protection of personal data and health. It gives protections to workers, women, children, older people, LGBT people, and disabled people. I understand why the Government do not want to adopt the charter—it has the potential to override Acts of Parliament—but we should not be afraid of that. As we have seen in the case of universal credit, it is possible for the Government to get things wrong, and the safeguard provided by the charter is an excellent safety net from which we should all seek comfort.

There are a number of charter rights for which UK law does not provide equivalent protection. They include articles 20 and 21, on “Equality before the law” and “Non-discrimination”, and article 24, on the right of children for their “best interests” to be “a primary consideration” in all actions taken by a public or private institution. The charter also contains an explicit prohibition of discrimination based on someone's sexuality. I urge the Minister to take that point seriously.

11.2 pm

**James Morris** (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con): It seems many years ago that I was one of the 81 Conservative rebels who voted for an in/out referendum in 2011, when the then coalition Government were opposed to it. I did some work in the last Parliament to ensure that the 2015 Conservative party manifesto contained a commitment to an in/out referendum, and we did indeed have such a referendum in June 2016. I happened to be marginally on the Remain side in that referendum, but as a result of the outcome, I have consistently said that I will vote to ensure that we deliver Brexit for the people whom I represent in the Black country and the west midlands and for the country more widely, and I have continued to vote in the House to achieve the objective of Britain's leaving the European Union.

In tonight's debate and tomorrow, the House faces a real choice: a choice about the direction in which we want to take our country. Before I came to the House, I was an entrepreneur. I worked in business for nearly 20 years. I have always been a pragmatist, looking at how we can get things to work. On the balance of what I see before me on the political landscape and in the House, I will reluctantly support the Prime Minister's deal tomorrow, because I think it incumbent on us now to put the divisions and the debate about Brexit behind us.

What the Prime Minister's and the Government's deal delivers is the centre ground. On one hand—and I have great respect for my hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg)—we have what some would call the ideological fantasy of a pure Brexit; on the other, we have an Opposition who are obsessed with tactical manoeuvring to try to force a general election. If we do not make the right decision now, we will potentially face a constitutional crisis and years of debate in this country about the direction of Brexit. That would do profound damage to our economy because of a long period of uncertainty, and profound damage to the fabric of our democracy as those who voted in the referendum will potentially see their wishes not implemented by this Parliament, which would be a profound wound to our democratic process. I also fear that Britain's reputation in the world—Britain's reputation as a permanent member of the Security Council and as one of the world's most effective military powers—will be undermined at the very time that we should be grasping the opportunities of the future. Britain can lead the way as we leave the EU and shape our future relationship with the EU, and grasp those opportunities and exert our enduring power in the world, which has always been the British way.

We must do the right thing. We must be pragmatic. I will support the deal in the Lobby tomorrow night and I urge my colleagues to do the same.

11.6 pm

**Vernon Coaker** (Gedling) (Lab): As we reflect on this debate and those of the last few days, weeks and months—and indeed for the day or two to come—the question the public will ask and for us to ask is this: how have we got ourselves into this mess? We are weeks away from leaving the EU if the current timetable stays as it is, and we have a Government determined to carry out a vote tomorrow which by all accounts they will lose substantially, yet we carry on in a parallel universe as if that is not happening, which does no service to our country or this Parliament.

The Chancellor is to respond to today's debate, and it is incumbent on somebody to start talking about what is going to happen. Across this House we have been speaking to each other, but who has changed their mind? We are in a constitutional crisis; our country is facing a national emergency. As the Chancellor himself knows, a no deal would be a complete catastrophe, yet we cannot among ourselves decide where we should go, as my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell) and others have said.

Who is going to get what they want? My honest view is that nobody is going to get exactly what they want. Everyone in here has fundamental principles that they feel strongly about. We have heard some brilliant speeches, including from people I fundamentally disagree with, but at the end of the day the question is: how are we going to resolve this in a way that benefits our country? We have as a Parliament only at this very late stage woken up to that question.

If I wanted, I could say that this person or that person was responsible, but for goodness' sake, does the Chancellor not think that a Government facing such a national emergency should have reached out to Opposition Front Benchers? [*Interruption.*] The hon. Member for Dudley South (Mike Wood) is chuntering, and that is

[Vernon Coaker]

exactly what I am talking about. [Interruption.] There we go; let's shout at each other. What I am saying is that we need to reach a point where we seek consensus and seek to work in the national interest.

That is why there is a majority in this House for Parliament taking control and trying to deliver that. That is why Members of Parliament from all parties across the House have said that we are going to have to come together to resolve this matter. We cannot carry on talking to each other through loudhailers. We cannot carry on just saying, "I am right and you are wrong." The people of this country are fed up with it. They want this Parliament to act. They want us to reach consensus on an agreed way forward that is of benefit to this country, and they expect us to act in a mature way to deliver that.

11.9 pm

**Mrs Sheryll Murray** (South East Cornwall) (Con): A majority of the voters in my constituency voted leave in the referendum, and they have told me in large numbers that they feel insulted by the comment that they did not know what they were voting for. Many of my constituents have urged me not to support this withdrawal agreement. Indeed, some of them have told me they voted to remain but would vote to leave in another referendum. Opposition Members might like to know that some of them are lifelong Labour supporters. One emailed me to say:

"I implore you to vote against the current deal being presented to Parliament on Tuesday. Voting for it would be a betrayal of all the promises made".

The vote was not a mandate for a second referendum. It was not a mandate for delaying article 50. It was not a mandate for cancelling Brexit. However we vote tomorrow, we must leave the European Union as promised on Friday 29 March. The only question is whether we do so with an agreement or on World Trade Organisation rules. Some have implied that the closeness of the referendum result justified another vote or a compromise on leaving. This morning, the Prime Minister gave the example of the Welsh devolution referendum in 1997, when people voted by a tiny margin of 0.3% to create the Welsh Assembly, arguing that this was accepted by both sides. We can learn from that.

I want to know why Northern Ireland should be the price we have to pay for Brexit, as Martin Selmayr has said. Why have experts warned that the UK-US alliance and the Five Eyes alliance are at risk if we sign up to this withdrawal agreement? Why should we cough up the £39 billion of punishment money without any indication of a trade deal? In my view, that is unacceptable.

The fishermen of south-east Cornwall, whom I have represented in various ways for around three decades, are already struggling from the EU landing obligation without adequate bycatch to compensate them for having to bring untargeted, over-quota fish ashore. Just yesterday, I received a text message from a local fisherman with a photo of a deck full of bass. He said that this was "another failure of the CFP...How many tens of thousands of tons"—

have been—

"thrown back since November only for it to rot on the sea bed. An absolute joke!"

Brexit promises great opportunities for an outward-looking global multicultural nation—the home of engineers, scientists and artists. Our future success will be to the benefit of all our European friends, but we cannot seize those opportunities if we are trapped in backstop limbo, like in "Groundhog Day". The referendum was a wake-up call to the establishment, but the establishment keeps pressing the snooze button. It is time to wake up. I cannot support this deal.

11.13 pm

**Seema Malhotra** (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): I am grateful for this opportunity to speak in today's debate, because the prosperity of our country, our regions and our nations is at stake. I will be voting against the Prime Minister's deal tomorrow for two main reasons. First, on the Government's own analysis, it will make every region and nation of this country poorer, and that is not what people voted for. It is set to give less opportunity to our young people than we grew up with. The economic assessment of the Prime Minister's draft agreement with Brussels estimated that the British economy would shrink by 3.9%, which is equivalent to the loss of £100 billion by 2030. Trade barriers could equal 10% of the value of trade in services, meaning that the economy's biggest sector would suffer to the tune of more than £44 billion a year.

Secondly, it is a blind Brexit. We have no idea what the future will look like. No one leaves their home on the promise of a great new home with no guarantees about where it is, what it looks like, how many rooms it has or what condition it is in. However, that is what the Prime Minister is asking us to do, like an estate agent who then scarpers, leaving us standing with our suitcases. The political declaration gives no certainty or clarity about the direction of our future relationship with the European Union, and it is a gamble that I will not take.

Hundreds of residents—young and old alike—and businesses in my constituency have contacted me over the past few weeks and months. Businesses report stockpiling and concern for the future—perhaps not the immediate future, but the medium and longer term—and they should be planning production, not employee leave during April, May and June while they work out what the future looks like. Some 60% of those who have contacted me back a people's vote, and a further 20% back remain in some form. Only 10% say that we should vote for the deal or leave with no deal.

All too often I find myself scratching my head in disbelief at where we are and at the Government's kamikaze attitude towards no deal. For generations, we have had an assumption of progress—a promise as a nation about what the next generation should have and that they should do better than the last—but we find ourselves now breaking that promise. The Government are set to take our nation's prosperity backwards while turning to the country and saying, "This is what you voted for." Contrary to the "sunlit uplands" of the most eloquent speech of the hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg), under the deregulated, free-market future that many hard Brexiteers will look to, we know that the rich will get richer and the poor will see less and less of the wealth of their nation.

We cannot take progress for granted. It is something that we in politics have a duty to fight for and to protect. However, time is running out and we have



choices to make. It would be my preference to remain and reform, and I would support a second referendum between remain and a deal as agreed by this House. If we are to leave, we should do so in a way that delivers on the referendum, but with the least damaging economic impact, such as a single-market and customs-union solution—a common market 2.0—as a base from which to build our future relationship.

11.17 pm

**David T. C. Davies** (Monmouth) (Con): The remain campaign had everything going for it. It had the endorsement of all the political parties. It had money from big business. It had £9 million of taxpayers' money for a propaganda sheet. It had celebrity endorsements from luvvies, actors, singers and one overpaid football commentator. It had the churches and the charities. It even managed to enlist the Treasury to carry out "Project Fear" and still it could not win.

The people of this country voted to leave, but the remainers were not satisfied, because they then decided to deride and sneer at leave voters, describing us as racist, xenophobic, bigoted little-Englanders, too stupid to understand what we were doing. The remainers did every they could to undermine the result. They tried to overthrow it in the High Court. They tried to thwart it in the unelected House of Lords using a hereditary peer. They have used big business, with Starbucks, I believe, announcing yesterday that it would support a second referendum. Now, in this very Chamber, they are using Members of Parliament who were happy to stand on manifestos committing themselves to the delivery of the referendum result.

It is true that the deal before us is not the one that the millions of us who voted to leave would have hoped for, but some of the blame for that lies with the Members of Parliament who loudly announced from day one of the negotiating process that Britain could not possibly leave the European Union without a deal. What sort of a negotiation is it when people say that we cannot walk out of the room? They suggested that Britain, with the fifth largest economy in the world, was unable to govern without the guiding hand of Juncker and others in the bloated bureaucracy in Brussels. Having made it harder to get a decent deal, they are now making it impossible for the Prime Minister by voting the whole thing down. Frankly, I cannot believe that some of them sat as Ministers in a Conservative Government—some of them rather second-rate Ministers in my opinion—and used the Whips Office to demand the loyalty of Back Benchers when they were imposing rather questionable policies.

Having made it much harder for the Government and the Prime Minister, they now seek to vote the whole thing down, not because they want a second referendum, a Norway deal or something else, but because they do not want any kind of Brexit at all. They will, of course, be joined in voting down the motion by principled, decent Members of Parliament, like my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Richard Drax), who believe in Brexit and believe that this deal will not deliver it. All I would ask my hon. Friends, whom I respect and admire, is do they really want to be sharing a Division Lobby tomorrow with Conservative MPs who have done so much to thwart the will of the British public?

Nobody knows what is going to happen if and when this compromise deal is voted down. What will happen then? Some people say that we will get a hard Brexit, which I would fully support, but others will be doing their very best to stop any form of Brexit. All I would say is that I am not a gambler, so I will take the compromise in front of me. It is time to settle this matter once and for all, but Britain did vote for leave, and Brexit must happen.

11.21 pm

**Tracy Brabin** (Batley and Spen) (Lab/Co-op): It is estimated that 63% of people in Batley and Spen voted to leave the EU. Since then, if the recent YouGov poll is accurate, there has been a slight shift from leave to remain of about 10 percentage points, which obviously does not give either side a substantial majority. We are like so many other communities we have heard about tonight in that we are divided. That is broadly reflected in my mailbox, with revoking article 50, leaving with no deal and a second referendum all receiving significant support, and a smaller number of emails supporting the deal on the table. What is clear from all my correspondence is that the sense of feeling and emotion attached to our exit from the EU is substantial.

I have met people who have never voted before the referendum or since, but they were asked for their opinion and they gave it, not because they were resentful or racist but because they wanted a better future for themselves and their families. Our community has suffered disproportionately because of globalisation. Austerity, falling wages, insecure jobs and poor infrastructure have been the norm in our community, and those people saw a chance to make a change. For once, their opinion mattered and, whatever the outcome, the Government would implement it—to take back control, if you will—but restrictive red lines were put in place before common negotiating ground was found, and we have had one arm tied behind our back ever since.

The truth is that this House of Commons is too sensible to let us crash out, and the EU needs a relationship with us based on co-operation and sharing. Out there, away from the Westminster bubble, in a school hall in Batley and Spen, I received some testing and refreshing questions on Brexit. Clever young women such as Suffiya, Hannah, Jamila and Faeziah wanted to know what the relationship with the EU will look like and how it will affect their future education, their families' small businesses, the curriculum and their opportunity to move around Europe. More troublingly, they wanted to know whether democracy is now officially dead. The fact is that too many of those questions, and many others, cannot be answered by the deal before us.

I will not be supporting the deal, but that does not give a green light to what a no deal would bring: lorry parks, a lack of cancer treatments and the stockpiling of drugs and food. Who does stockpiling hit the hardest? The poor. They cannot afford to stockpile food, and stockpiling by others means that prices rise. My food bank has seen a 50% rise in numbers due to austerity, and homelessness has doubled locally.

Those "ifs, buts and maybes" scenarios cannot distract us from the substantive issues before us and from what we know. An economic downturn is almost inevitable. An employer of over 600 people in my constituency—PPG

[Tracy Brabin]

paint—is facing concerns on more than one front. It imports raw materials, exports to the EU and works on a fast turnaround, and it needs support.

In this febrile atmosphere, we must lead from the front with calm and purpose. If we do not, the tensions I feel in community halls and pubs across my constituency will only get louder and angrier. With religious hate crimes up fivefold in the last five years, Batley and Spen is at a tipping point. For some in Batley and Spen, Tommy Robinson is a welcome visitor. We know that the far right is increasingly emboldened by this worst of all deals. The future of our country and our democracy is at stake. With the gap between leave and remain not definitive, we must compromise for the good of the nation and call a general election.

11.25 pm

**Alec Shelbrooke** (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): There is a lot of opposition to the deal in the Chamber, and most people recognise that it is probably going to go down to defeat tomorrow night. This is the first time I have taken part in the debates on this issue; I have been involved in statements and urgent questions, but this is the first time I have spoken in the debate.

When I have looked around the Chamber and listened to the speeches, I have realised that a lot of the opposition is based on so many issues other than the actual deal on the table. It is based around whether people can get a general election, a second referendum or a reversal of the deal, or perhaps on whether it will help somebody's leadership hopes. Only a few people in here are ideologically opposed to the idea of any deal, and I respect them because it is a position they have held for a long time. They have a view that I disagree with and will try to argue against, but at least it is an honest position. The trouble is that when I talk to my constituents, I find that about 90% of them just want to get on with this. They just want the deal done and for us to move forward. Some 5% definitely want no deal, as they want nothing to do with Europe whatsoever, and 5% definitely want to reverse the deal, as they think it was terrible that we had a referendum in the first place. So 90% just want us to get on with it, and I believe that is what this deal delivers.

Do I like the backstop? No, I do not, but it is a compromise. I am willing to make the political judgment that we can move this forward, get to 29 March and leave the EU. We would be delivering on what I believe are most of the reasons why people voted to leave and, crucially, be protecting the economy while seeking the new trade deal. We can thus move things forward. I think that is roughly where most of my constituents are, too; they want to move things forward. I take issue with my right hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) for writing in *The Daily Telegraph* that hard Brexit was what people voted for when they voted for Brexit. He said they voted for no deal, but that is not true, as people were told, from the Brexit side, “You will be able to get a trade deal.”

Three areas concern me, with the first being no deal. I do not believe no deal works for this country. I look at small manufacturing organisations in my constituency, which feed up the supply chain to the big organisations

that export and that need the frictionless trade and the ability to move goods freely in just-in-time scenarios that have been built over many decades. They know that the knock-on effect will affect them directly. I honestly believe that if this decision was to be reversed, there would not be an international business in the world that would say, “Great, it is all over and done with. Let's invest in Britain.” Surely the question would be, “When are they going to change their mind again?” I also do not support a second referendum, because I do not see what it would actually deliver. This evening, I have probed Members who are supporting a second referendum and they have said it will have only two options: remain or take the deal. As I pointed out, the genie is out of the bottle. I do not think we can reverse the decision and remain; we need to get a solid trade deal and move forward.

Let me build on the comments made at the end of the speech by the hon. Member for Batley and Spen (Tracy Brabin), for whom I have great respect. She is right to say that there is a growing far right sentiment, which has been uncovered, given a platform and empowered by this. A second referendum would surely be one of the most divisive and evil campaigns we have seen. It would be far worse than the last one, because we are seeing that raise its head; we are seeing it out on College Green, and it is being exploited by tendencies with no respect for democracy. So I fear that not only would we have a very nasty campaign, but we would not solve anything. If the second referendum came back in favour of the deal, we would still be having some similar arguments in here. By backing the deal, as I will do tomorrow night, I hope we will start to move the agenda forward and we can move on to the second stage of Brexit. I believe this deal delivers for about 90% of my constituents, and I wish this House would support it tomorrow night.

11.29 pm

**Wes Streeting** (Ilford North) (Lab): When people in Ilford North and throughout the country voted to leave, they did so for many reasons, but always with the promise and expectation of something better. So when this House votes tomorrow, there is only one question that we should ask of ourselves and the Government: will this deal leave us better off than the deal that we enjoy today?

It is abundantly clear that the promises made by the leave campaign cannot be kept. That campaign was never honest about the choices, compromises and trade-offs involved in leaving the most sophisticated political and economic alliance that the world has ever seen. The hubris of that campaign was astonishing, with claims of only upsides, not downsides; that we would hold all the cards and could choose the path we wanted; and that this would be the easiest trade deal in human history. Well, political gravity came to bite just as quickly as leading leavers left the Cabinet, faster than rats fleeing a sinking ship.

The Prime Minister claims that this is the best deal on offer. She tells us it is a better deal than any other third country enjoys with the European Union. She may be right, but what she cannot say is that this deal will make us better off than we would otherwise be as a member of the European Union. Every single analysis suggests that we will be worse off than we are today. This is not

what people voted for, which is why a constituency as divided on Brexit as mine is overwhelmingly united against the Prime Minister's deal.

It is time to stop pretending that there is a better deal to be had at this eleventh hour, and it is time for the Prime Minister to stop threatening Parliament and the people with the catastrophic consequences of no deal and to stop squandering billions of pounds on a prospect that she admits would bring catastrophe and ruin to this country, even as our public services are creaking and crumbling as a result of the cuts inflicted by her and her predecessors. It is reckless, irresponsible and beneath the office of Prime Minister.

It is also time for my own party to face up to some hard choices. There is no better Brexit. There is no jobs-first Brexit. There is not a Labour Brexit. Whichever way our party turns, we risk upsetting some of our voters. I do not envy the position in which the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Cabinet find themselves, but with our Parliament and our country still divided, the Labour party has a responsibility to lead, not simply follow, events. So let us speak now with clarity and conviction: our internationalist party has never believed that our country would be stronger, safer or better off outside the European Union. The bitterness and division that we have seen in recent weeks, months and years is only a taste of things to come as we face the prospect of years, if not decades, of wrangling about the future relationship that we may or may not have with the European Union. People throughout the country are demanding bigger answers on the housing crisis, on the national health service, on the future of our education system and on the future shape of the economy—an economy in which everyone genuinely has a stake, not just the privileged few.

The no deal demanded by the most hard-line leavers does not have the support of this House, and it would leave the poorest paying the heaviest price. It would be a painful Brexit. Although I respect those arguing at this late stage for a closer relationship through the single market or the customs union, that would be Brexit in name only, and it would not heal the divisions, either. It would be a most pointless Brexit.

I say particularly to Conservative Members who are cowed by constituency association chairmen what Winston Churchill said:

“What is the use of Parliament if it is not the place where true statements can be brought before the people?”

We were lied to. The promises that were made cannot be kept and will not be kept. It is time to put this issue back to the people. Let them decide between our future outside the European Union, now that they know what that looks like, and a people's vote to remain. I know which one I would choose, and I know which one I want my party to back.

11.33 pm

**Nigel Mills** (Amber Valley) (Con): With regret, I cannot support this agreement, so I will vote against it tomorrow evening. That is not because I have ever been an ideological hard Brexiteer who advocated a clean break—I have always accepted that Brexit would lead to some compromises and a trade-off between a clean break and how close a relationship we wanted with the EU—but I do not believe that this deal is in the national

interest, not least because I do not see or hear any sign of any commitment to what the future relationship for which we are trading our control will be.

This deal does not actually achieve any part of Brexit. The people who voted to leave in the referendum—as two thirds of my constituents who voted did—gave us an instruction to leave. Parliament's triggering of article 50 and approval of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act took back control. The question before us in the withdrawal agreement is how much of that control we give away again in return for the sort of relationship that we want with the EU, but the problem is that we do not have that relationship set up. We are giving away whole chunks of control—for the next two years we are giving away almost all the control that we are taking back—and, more crucially, through the backstop that we are signing up to we are giving away our control over choosing the future partnership.

At the moment, we have a unilateral right to leave the EU. Once we approve the agreement, with that backstop in place, we will not have that choice any more. My fear with the backstop is not that we will not get a deal with the EU, but that the EU will only offer us a deal that involves much too close a relationship. It will almost certainly mean a stronger customs union than the backstop has, and more single market, and that will not be the Brexit that my constituents and this country voted for.

I agree with the Prime Minister when she says that we must deliver Brexit, and that not to do so would be a betrayal of the popular vote. My fear is that if we approve this agreement, we will not be able to deliver the Brexit that people voted for, and that is the real problem with it.

Two years ago, I would not have believed that this Government would bring to Parliament a deal for us to vote on that involved our paying £40 billion and giving away some of the control that we are taking back without having a future partnership in place. I would never have conceived of voting for that or of this House voting for that, and I suspect that, tomorrow, we will not. However, I recognise that we must find a way forward. To all those who will be in discussions over the next weeks on how to take this matter forward, I say that the only way forward is to reform the backstop so that we have an exit date, or to take the backstop out of the deal completely.

It is a ridiculous situation: something that is meant to be an insurance policy for the Irish may actually be the trigger for the hard border and the no-deal Brexit that they desperately do not want. Let us all be sensible about how we avoid whatever hard border that would be. I have been through the draft withdrawal document—all 500 and something pages of it—and there is still no definition of what a hard border is so that we can work out what we have to satisfy to get out of the backstop. I spent the early part of 2018, after the joint agreement, asking everybody I could to define the hard border that we had ruled out. Over the past year, I asked the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. We even went to Brussels to ask Michel Barnier to define the hard border that we were ruling out, and nobody would ever define what it was that we were guaranteeing not to have. That is the problem. How can we trust that we will ever get out of the backstop if we do not know what the requirements to get out of it are?



[Nigel Mills]

I say again that if this is meant to be an insurance policy, it would be a perverse situation if it brought about the calamity that it was trying to insure against. As I see it, the only way forward for us to leave the EU in an orderly manner and to avoid that so-called hard border is to fix the backstop or remove it. I urge the Government to try to negotiate that and the EU to agree to it, as that is the only way forward out of this.

11.37 pm

**Stella Creasy** (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): In the past two years, Brexit has become that unspeakable subject. This Christmas, most of our constituents will have had a no-politics rule at their Christmas dinner table. We are now a divided nation—a nation where talking of shooting politicians, of violence and of traitors has become commonplace and normalised. The violence is matched with the arrogance—the arrogance that everybody is right and that, eventually, everybody else will realise that they should give in because the others were right all along. We caricature each other: the middle-class liberal elites and the northern working classes. For the past two years, this has become a country talking but not listening, and Brexit is at the heart of that. We claim that each other thinks the other is stupid, yet all the while no progress is being made. Little common ground is being found, and the public think that they hear little common sense.

There is one thing that we will all unite around. Tomorrow, the worst-kept plot twist in British politics will finally happen: we will have the vote on the Prime Minister's deal and it will not pass this place. With all the heckling that will come, all the briefing to the press, and all the WhatsApp messages, hostilities will not be suspended by that agreement; they will be escalated. Moreover, respect, the urgent virulent potion that this country so badly needs for its people and for its politicians, will be found nowhere. What effect will there be? We vote tomorrow against this deal, and nothing will change. I will be voting against this deal, but we will be no further forward as a country. Our precious time has been wasted at every single stage of this process. The can has been kicked so far down the road that it is in the rest of Europe. We have fudging, fixing, and knighthoods being promised and still the British public see the truth. They see medicines already being stockpiled, the ferries being bought, the EU citizens being made to pay to stay, the lorries being parked and the jobs being lost.

No wonder this was doomed from the start. The red lines that the Prime Minister set made getting a deal that could have a positive outcome impossible for anybody. There is no way of being outside institutions that can abolish borders without creating them ourselves. Of course there was going to need to be a backstop. The Prime Minister says that this is the best deal possible; it is really not. The entire shape of this deal has been defined by the desperate desire to end freedom of movement and leave the single market accordingly, but I know from the Chancellor's own figures what leaving the single market will do for my constituents and I know what not having freedom of movement will do for our public services and our economy. These red lines might have been red meat for the Brexiteers, but they will lead to many more of my constituents simply being in the red.

The truth is that I understand and respect everybody in this House for the views they hold and the responsibility that we all bear in finding what happens next. George Bernard Shaw said:

“Progress is impossible without change, and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything.”

It is not enough for all of us to believe that we know what is right and think that will do.

Tomorrow we will vote against this deal, Chancellor; that is a given. But the day after and the day after that, the British public deserve that we find ways to listen and to work with them and hear their voices in finding a better deal. I believe that that comes from a people's vote and a citizens' assembly—I want to work with colleagues to look at those options—but above all I know that we have to work together. This country needs and deserves nothing less.

11.41 pm

**Gillian Keegan** (Chichester) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy) in this historic debate.

The process of leaving the European Union was designed at the outset to be extremely risky for any member state wishing to exit. Article 50, whether we like it or not, is our starting point. It is what has made this negotiation difficult and it is what makes this decision difficult. In deciding how to vote, I have spoken to constituents at public meetings and consulted many businesses. I have also used my own judgment, which is informed by 30 years of experience working in the car manufacturing, banking, technology and travel industries. But as somebody who voted to remain, I have also sought to honour the decision to leave. I am not of the view that the British people chose the wrong answer; they rarely do. We may be the House of Commons, but they are the true home of common sense. They can see what we all know, which is that the European Union is not perfect. It is unwilling to listen, unable to change and has been slow to react to major crises at our borders.

This deal delivers on the result of the referendum, but at the same time does not risk the jobs of my constituents. The largest employers in Chichester are Rolls-Royce Motor Cars, and farming and horticultural businesses. They, alongside employers across the UK, have invested based on the rules of the customs union and single market, and this has driven our strong economy. They have said loud and clear that switching to WTO rules at the end of March would be a disaster. Having spent 30 years working in these industries, I believe it would be highly irresponsible. The bodies representing large, small and medium-sized businesses, plus sectors including manufacturing, technology, education, science, farming, defence, retail and many others support this deal, as it enables them to continue to invest in the UK and protect jobs. These bodies represent more than half a million businesses and we ignore them at our peril.

This deal is a lower-risk Brexit, but is not without risk. We still have to turn the political declaration into a trade agreement, and this seems to be where many opponents to the deal lose their nerve. The United Kingdom has conducted these negotiations in good faith, in a way that does our country credit. There is a worrying trend of countries walking away from international agreements and commitments. We are not one of those countries.

The Government have secured a pragmatic way to proceed that we can build on, and we still have a strong negotiating hand; we always have had. We have a lot to offer any trading partner, not least one with which we have worked so closely for 45 years, including a large consumer market, innovative businesses, the City of London, a highly trusted legal system, security and intelligence capability, our armed forces, a nuclear deterrent, brilliant scientists and top universities—to name but a few. It makes sense to sell to us, it makes sense to partner with us and it makes sense to trust us.

It is difficult to find an alternative that does not pose huge risks to the economy or break faith with the result of the referendum. There are no alternatives that either do not outsource our trade policy to a third party or require us to continue with uncontrolled freedom of movement. Why would we give up now when we have a deal on the table that is better and more ambitious than all the others?

The Brexit debate has been dominated by those who have sought to admire the problem rather than try to solve it. The Prime Minister, by contrast, has achieved a balanced and sensible way forward. We are a divided country, but this deal charts a careful path to deliver on the referendum result without damaging our economy. This deal resonates with my experience. There are no easy answers, no silver bullets, no superhuman negotiators waiting to ride to the rescue—just a long, hard road ahead to deliver on what the British people voted for. Almost nobody in the UK regrets the decision not to join the euro. I believe that in years to come we will not regret our decision to leave the European Union.

11.45 pm

**Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): The Glasgow Central constituency voted 71% to remain, and we certainly did not vote for this Government's deal and this tawdry Brexit that the Government are pursuing. I have constituents from the EU who come to my surgeries, come to my constituency office and stop me in the street, some who have been here for only a short time and some who have been here for decades. They are all deeply upset at how they are being treated by this UK Government, and they do not want any part of this. I am heartened, as well, by the numbers of constituents who are not originally from the EU—they are from Glasgow—but seek solidarity with those who are from the EU. They do not want to lose what we have gained in the city of Glasgow.

Glasgow won city of culture status in 1990, and over the decades the city has changed hugely. It has become a European city, and proudly so. Last year, in partnership with Berlin, we hosted the European championships, building on our sporting success from the Commonwealth games. We are proud to play our part in Europe. The culture of our city has been hugely improved as a result of our links with Europe. Scottish Ballet, our national company in Scotland, celebrates its 50th birthday this year, and we have many European dancers enhancing the company. Also based in my constituency is the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, which is over 125 years old, and, again, has many who come to it from around the world. They do not only bring talent to Scotland—they tour and share the glory that we have within our arts sector in the city with the rest of the world. We also have in my constituency the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland—

one of the top five institutions in the world—and the world-renowned Glasgow School of Art. Both of those institutions would struggle without access to European staff and European talent to come and share with other students.

We have Strathclyde University and Glasgow Caledonian University, which also make a huge contribution to the economy of Scotland and to wider culture within the city. There are 1,230 EU nationals working in higher or further education in Glasgow, and that is a huge bonus to our city. However, if the UK gets its way, we will struggle to continue to achieve this because there will be an 80% reduction in EU nationals coming to our country due to the thresholds in the immigration White Paper. The impact of that will be absolutely devastating for our city in so many ways.

I want to speak about the impact on young people in Glasgow. I am very proud that many organisations—youth organisations and others in schools—contribute through the Erasmus+ project. I spent some time with Pollokshields Primary School in my constituency. The pupils had more links with Pakistan than with Europe, but over the years the school has worked incredibly hard to build up its European links. I heard very passionately from pupils who had already been on exchanges with their partner school, Colegio Hernández in Valencia, about what that meant to them—how it had broadened their horizons and meant that they could go out into the world and try new things, learn new things and have new experiences.

I do not forgive this Government, and I will never forgive this Government, for making the future so much greyer for our children in the years ahead. This Government want to make this country smaller, whereas Scotland wants to look outwards to the world, to participate in the world, to send our people outwards and to bring people inwards. We want to celebrate the things that we hold dear and the things that we have in common. Scotland wants to be a part of that world. We want no part of this insular, devastating Brexit that will cause so much pain.

11.49 pm

**Bim Afolami** (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): I rise in support of the Prime Minister's withdrawal agreement, and I do so because I believe in compromise. That word is not very popular in our current politics. As the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy) said, everybody believes that they are right all the time and refuses to see where we can find common ground. In a 52:48 nation, the Prime Minister needed to find common ground and a balanced compromise, and this deal reflects that.

For those who voted remain, like me, this deal gives a two-year transition period, an unprecedented partnership on security, agreement on citizens' rights and the pathway to a deep trading relationship. For those who voted leave, this deal means that we are leaving the European Union, the common agricultural policy and the common fisheries policy and ending free movement. If we want high alignment with the European Union, we can choose that, and if we want low alignment, we can choose that too. Many Government and Opposition Members who do not want us to be part of the European Union would have bitten David Cameron's arm off if he had offered them this deal a few years before the referendum. We should all consider that.

[*Bim Afolami*]

In the time remaining, I would like to examine what happens if we end up with no deal. We have heard from many Members about how devastating that would be. I urge anybody who thinks that no deal is not necessarily a good idea but will not be that bad and is manageable to speak to manufacturing businesses, retail businesses, agricultural bodies such as the National Farmers Union and the Country Land and Business Association, and the many senior civil servants who have worked on these issues in Government and know the parlous state of things.

We must also examine what “WTO rules” really means. The tariffs and quotas would need to be negotiated individually, country by country, and we should not expect every single country to accept those unilaterally. There would be a negotiation, and that would take time. All the countries are watching this debate. They would see the difficulty we are in and may seek to take advantage of that. It would not be straightforward. Some people say, “We’ll just have zero tariffs on everything to make things easier.” We could do that, but if we did, we would need to have zero tariffs for every single country, because to do the contrary would be against WTO rules. What would that do to manufacturing in various parts of the economy and to agriculture, which would be suffering from the consumer shock of a no-deal Brexit? There are other areas not covered by WTO rules. I am sure that we could work those out over time, but they would need to be negotiated with the European Union, and how easy would the negotiation be if we had walked away from the withdrawal agreement and refused to pay the money and fulfil our agreed obligations?

Some suggest that this agreement puts us in a poor negotiating position, and I think it is fair to say that it will be a difficult negotiating position. We are one country against 27. That will be difficult. It will also be difficult to get the 27 to agree, because they will have divergent interests, but that was always going to be the case, whether it is a WTO exit or a negotiated exit such as this. In my last seconds, I would like to urge the Government to speak to Members across the House if this deal does not succeed and consider—

**Mr Speaker:** Order.

11.53 pm

**Christine Jardine** (Edinburgh West) (LD): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (*Bim Afolami*). I rise to oppose the Government’s motion and to give largely the speech that I was due to make a month ago, when the vote was pulled. My stance has developed over the past two and a half years, during which my party has campaigned consistently in Parliament and in communities across the country for the people, not the politicians, to have the final say.

As we approach the denouement of this Brexit drama—or perhaps it is a tragedy—my thoughts drift back to 24 June 2016. What prompted the country to vote for Brexit? I agree with the hon. Member for Bournemouth West (*Conor Burns*). An entire generation faced the prospect that their children and grandchildren would not be as well off as they were, having been left behind and failed by globalisation. More than two years

later, I do not believe that this Government have provided either any solutions to those issues or a coherent way ahead.

We have heard a lot this evening, mostly from Conservative Members, about delivering on Brexit. May I plead with them that actually we have something more important in this House to deliver, and that is the wellbeing of the country? When the electors go to the ballot box and send us here, it is not simply to follow an instruction; it is to have the courage to do what we believe is right for us, for them and for the entire country. That is where we are just now.

While I remain implacably opposed to any EU departure, I believe that on this decision—possibly the most important decision any of us will face politically—it was important to take the time to seek the advice and listen to the views of my constituents in Edinburgh West. My constituents voted remain, and their minds have not changed. If anything, they are firmer in their resolve that this chaotic, uncertain shambles of a Brexit is not what they wanted or deserved.

This deal, the best deal the Government could negotiate, will, even according to the Government, leave us less well off than staying in the European Union. Our constituents deserve better. All of those people who voted leave deserve better. They voted leave believing what they were told—that it would benefit the NHS—and now they discover that the NHS will lose vital staff. In Edinburgh, we have Scotland’s highest concentration of non-UK EU citizens: 39,000 people who are vital to staffing our universities and our tourist industry. Some 50% of those who work in hospitality in Edinburgh come from elsewhere in the European Union.

We have talked before about stockpiling medicines and food and about lorry jams. When I ask this Government for reassurances, I am worried not just about my health or the health of all my friends who are worried about the medicines they need, but about the health of the country. That is why, when the Prime Minister called on us earlier this evening not to block Brexit because that would be a “subversion of democracy” and not say to the people whom we were elected to serve that we were unwilling to do what they had instructed and would go against it, I say to the Prime Minister that that is not why they sent us here. They sent us here to have the courage and the wisdom to stand up for what we believe is best for the country—and that is not this deal.

11.57 pm

**Rebecca Pow** (Taunton Deane) (Con): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Edinburgh West (*Christine Jardine*).

The outcome of the referendum in Taunton Deane reflected exactly the national average—52% leave, 48% remain—and I am committed to respecting the outcome. However, I believe this means not just who won and who lost, but the balance of the vote. I hear the leave side saying there was a roar for change, but if 17.4 million people represent a roar, I put it to hon. Members that 16.1 million must represent a loud growl.

I voted remain, but I have never been fearful of leaving. In fact, I am astonished by how many people agree that this was a very difficult decision, with many shades of grey, but then suddenly seem to find it so



absolutely black and white. For two and a half years, I have listened to the same dominant voices, many of great intellect. Among these I put my hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) and my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), but look how polarised their views are. No one has a monopoly on wisdom, and no single person on either side has all of the answers.

I came into Parliament after a long career working as a team member. I believe that party politics can function properly only if we act as a team, and I am saddened that not everybody seems to see it this way. Extricating ourselves from the tentacles of a 40-year relationship with 27 other countries is no mean feat. The negotiations have been long and complex, but certainly not inept. I have yet to hear a speech in this House that convinces me that anyone would have made a better fist of it than our Prime Minister. It is clear to me, however, that we must find a way through this with good will and compromise.

My view is to support a deal that gains the most for the most people, respecting the balance of the vote—in other words, leaving—while, crucially, respecting the needs of business. Business in Taunton Deane has been at pains to point this out to me at every stage and to urge that we get on with the deal so that we can move on, while at the same time keeping close links with the EU and frictionless trade. That was stressed to me vehemently by the head of Pritex, a company in Wellington that makes soundproofing for cars. It has also been stressed by food manufacturers, the main industry in the south-west, and sheep farmers in particular, who rely almost entirely on the EU for their exports.

While the deal works for those people, it also works for the many companies that are already trading on the world stage. Many of them, such as Somerdale cheese and Sheppy's cider, want to go many steps further, and this deal also works for them. Our nine trade commissioners are at this very moment forging opportunities that we can sign up to once the deal is over the line. For me, one of the most exciting opportunities that the deal offers is the chance to leave the common agricultural policy and the fisheries policy and to recreate our own land use strategy. That is a real opportunity, and we have already started, through the Agriculture Bill and the Fisheries Bill, so let us get it right.

This deal may not be perfect, but it does enable us to move forward. I believe that I have personally moved a great way towards this deal, because I was originally a remainer, and would urge other colleagues to move forward too. Let us do it not just for the people in this House but for the young people out there too, like my son, who has just gone to university. I promised him that when he gets out in a few years' time, this will be done and dusted. He and his generation will be part of the generation that will forge a new era, for which we are paving the way right now. I urge colleagues to support the deal.

12.1 am

**Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): Seventy per cent. of my constituents voted remain in June 2016. From my inbox of about 5,000 letters and emails, over 90% take the same view. Indeed, more than 20% of Hammersmith and Fulham residents are EU27 citizens, which is the third largest proportion anywhere in the UK.

That helps to make Hammersmith a very good place to live, but also to do business. At Christmas, Novartis announced that it was moving its UK headquarters to the new Imperial College life sciences campus at White City. L'Oréal has its UK and Ireland HQ in Hammersmith Broadway. West London is the European centre of commercial broadcasting. If I take SMEs, we are proud to have Charlie Bigham's at Park Royal, employing 500 people in the UK's fastest growing ready meals business, and Jascots wine merchants, importing wine for the restaurant trade and employing 50 people in Old Oak. These are very different enterprises with one thing in common: a fear of a chaotic Brexit. Whether it is the need to stockpile drugs, planning for a weaker UK market, offshoring to meet EU licensing rules, higher trading costs, skills and labour shortages or border checks, Brexit is a disaster for UK business.

It should not be necessary to go beyond economic arguments in rejecting the Prime Minister's deal, or no deal or all the halfway houses that will make our country poorer by an act of our own will. However, there are equally compelling social, cultural and political reasons for wanting to stay part of a great project that has in a few decades transformed one of the most conflicted regions of the world into one of the most harmonious and which gives more opportunities for the next generation than any before. The EU has been an agent for peace, democracy and security within its own expanding borders. Following the collapse of dictatorships in Greece, Portugal and Spain, the EU offered an alternative and more attractive path, as it has for former Warsaw pact countries. This is a job half-finished, however, as recent events in Poland and Hungary have shown. It is one in which the UK has a leading part to play, not one from which we should retreat. In an increasingly dangerous age for democracy and human rights, when the demagogues are in charge even in the United States, the EU can be a force for rationalism and liberalism. We weaken that struggle, but we also put ourselves at risk, if we abandon our position on the international stage.

I do not believe that a majority of the British people voted to make their families poorer, to weaken employment rights, environmental standards and Britain's place in the world, to alienate 3.5 million of their fellow citizens or to deny to succeeding generations the freedom to travel, live and work freely across our continent. If the Prime Minister will neither lead in the interests of the country nor hand over to someone who will, we must ask the public to save us from ourselves, call a people's vote, and have confidence that this self-harming will end and we will make an informed choice to remain in the European Union.

12.4 am

**Neil O'Brien** (Harborough) (Con): I spent eight years campaigning against European integration. I worked for the successful campaign against joining the euro and I ran the campaign for a referendum on the European constitution. If, during those eight years, I had been told that I could have this withdrawal agreement I would have jumped at the chance. This is a deal that means we take back control over immigration, we stop paying £10 billion a year into the EU, we no longer have to follow new EU laws, and, above all, we get out of the process of ever-closer union and we stop giving away more and more powers every year.

[Neil O'Brien]

What is the alternative to this deal? I believe that if the withdrawal agreement is voted down tomorrow we will end up with no Brexit. A majority in this House will vote to keep us in the EU, as many people have argued for this evening either overtly or in a thinly disguised form. I do not like it, but that is what will happen if the deal is voted down.

Some people I respect are worried about the backstop. It seems to be something that our friends in Europe should be far more worried about using than we should. Under the backstop, we would be able to access the EU market with no taxes or tariffs, and unlike any other country in the world we would be able to do that without having to follow new EU laws. No wonder that, according to the *Financial Times*:

“EU diplomats are nervous because they fear Britain would have ‘one foot’ in Europe’s market, enjoying tariff-free access and no rules of origin, while ruthlessly undercutting the standards of the EU’s single market.”

In other words, the backstop would take us back to the idea of a basic common market and away from the political union that the EU has become.

The last two years of negotiations have been very painstaking, but the Prime Minister has delivered some clear successes. The EU originally said that the four freedoms could not be divided and there was no chance of accessing the EU market without having free movement. She has won on that. Spain originally said that it wanted to get back control of Gibraltar, but as the First Minister of Gibraltar told me in person this is a deal that protects Gibraltar absolutely. The EU then wanted to have a customs backstop only for Northern Ireland and to put a customs border down the Irish sea. Again, the Prime Minister has seen off that threat. Those are three good, big successes.

It is very striking to me that all the main national business groups in this country support the deal: the Federation of Small Businesses, the British Chambers of Commerce, the CBI, the EEF, the National Farmers Union and the Scottish Fishermen’s Federation are all backing it. The voice of business is clear: they want us to get on and back the deal. But there is more to the deal than keeping business moving, so let me finish with a bit of history.

I believe it was a mistake by Ted Heath to say there would be no loss of sovereignty when we joined the European Economic Community. In the 1980s, it was a mistake not to see the revolutionary consequences of the Single European Act, which Mrs Thatcher came to regret. In the '90s and the '00s, it was a mistake for successive Governments to push through the treaties of Maastricht, Amsterdam, Nice and Lisbon without ever putting them to the people in a referendum. If we turn down this deal, it will be another historic mistake: a mistake for those of us who oppose European integration, because the trap will snap shut and the majority in this House who want to stop Brexit will do so and we will have snatched defeat from the jaws of victory; and in the longer term I think it will also be a mistake for those on the other side, too. Imagine the bitterness of a country where 52% of people feel that their wishes had been overridden. They will feel that this country is not really a democracy anymore.

It does not have to be like that. This is a good deal. It gives us full control over immigration; stops us paying in billions every year; gives us control over future laws; and gets us out of ever closer union. On the other hand, it keeps trade flowing and gives us a framework to keep co-operating with our friends in Europe on science, culture, security and the environment. The withdrawal agreement, or something like it, is the only thing that can unite and move this country forward. I support it in the strongest possible terms.

12.8 am

**Melanie Onn** (Great Grimsby) (Lab): Like all colleagues, I have been inundated with emails from my constituents about the withdrawal agreement vote in December and the one coming up later today. For those who worry that MPs do not read their emails, I would just say: Chris from Scartho wants to remain; Pete on the Willows wants a closer deal than is offered by the current deal; I hear that Sue in Yarborough wants a clean break regardless of Northern Ireland, jobs or wages being impacted; and Christopher in the same area is telling me that I should reject this calamitous Chequers betrayal and we should just leave. I hear all those views. I hear the 70% of the people in my borough who voted to leave. I understand that, but just 11 of all the emails I have received tell me to back the Prime Minister’s deal.

I would like to touch on two specific issues and why I am disappointed by the Prime Minister’s approach with her parliamentary colleagues. On Friday, I wrote to her asking why, less than a week before her vote on the withdrawal agreement, she was apparently considering accepting an amendment that asserted an increase in assurances over workers’ rights. That consideration tells me that her agreement fails to protect people’s rights at work. In that letter, I pointed out that I gave her the opportunity two years ago to quell any fears or concerns that colleagues might have about reductions in protections for workers by adopting a Bill I had put forward. At that time, I was repeatedly and patronisingly told by Government Members that I did not need to worry, because domestic rights are greater than those in the EU and apparently the Tories are the party of and for workers. That is quickly to forget their voting against the introduction of the national minimum wage, their retrograde trade union legislation, the Beecroft report, which proposed being able to fire staff for any reason whatever, and the introduction of tribunal fees, which saw a 70% drop in employment claims.

People might see those practical examples alongside some of the comments the Prime Minister’s colleagues have made about wanting a bonfire of red tape or about workers’ rights being unsustainable or a burden. That would cause anyone to question how she could have the brass neck to suggest that her party is one for ordinary working people, let alone one to trust once the protection of overarching, worker-friendly EU legislation is removed.

Despite the best intentions of my colleagues with their proposed amendment, I fail to see how a passing reference of just a few lines can substitute for the detailed considerations and fully worked out suggestions of the full Bill that was put forward. If the Prime Minister is genuinely committed to the protections, how is it that not one person from her Government has ever sought to discuss any of those principles with me or

Labour Front Benchers? It has taken until this week for her to go and talk to the TUC and the major trade unions.

I have said to my constituents that the deal is a vague, worst-of-both-worlds Brexit that satisfies neither leave nor remain supporters. Worse than that, it fails to convince people like me, who despite campaigning for remain have said that they will respect the outcome of the referendum and are committed to getting the best possible deal for our constituents, protecting jobs, job opportunities and their rights. For my constituents in Grimsby, part of that is about seeking support for fish processing. When I last asked the Chancellor about his discussions with Norway and Iceland, he was incredibly dismissive and talked about the UK becoming an independent coastal state and failed to answer questions around the trading relationships that Norway and Iceland have, which will impact on their ability to have any kind of free negotiations with us. We will be listening from the other side of the door when they are negotiating, waiting to see what kind of scraps will be thrown to us through the transition phase.

12.12 am

**Richard Drax** (South Dorset) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn). Perhaps I just need to remind the House that we voted to leave the EU, and “leave the EU” is a very simple instruction that somewhere along the path has lost its clarity and intent. I am saddened by those who seem intent on sabotaging Brexit within this place, resorting to any tactic to achieve their aim. I am utterly confident that you, Mr Speaker, will ensure that the rules and procedures of this place are maintained and honoured.

We are potentially witnessing parliamentary anarchy from those who somehow think that their vote was more important than other people’s votes. I think they feel that those who voted to leave the EU are simply wrong, deluded, xenophobic or even stupid. They are not; they are far-sighted, courageous and aspirational. They have a vision for the United Kingdom that will once again place us in charge of our destiny. I tend to feel that remainers operate from a place of fear, apocalyptic warnings of doom and gloom spilling from their mouths at regular intervals, but I must tell them that the Brexit genie is out and will continue to roam our island nation until we eventually leave the EU, even if that aim is thwarted in the short term.

Can we not forget that we voted by 554 to 53 to allow the people of this country to decide our fate in or out of the EU? They decided, and we invoked article 50, and that has brought us here. All this did not happen by accident. Today, many of those same MPs are doing their best to thwart that vote. What a pyrrhic victory it would be for those remainers to see this place trash its reputation, integrity and honour, simply because—let me repeat it—they think their votes are more significant than anyone else’s. Trust in politics, already at an all-time low, would evaporate. Why would we bother to canvass at the next election? Who in their right mind would believe a word we said?

The Prime Minister is wrong now to threaten no Brexit at all. It used to be “my deal or no deal”; now it is “my deal or no Brexit”. Sadly, this is another example of why we are in this mess. It is disingenuous to claim

that there are only two choices. As we have heard, the deal is, I regret to say, a dog’s dinner. We would remain a vassal state, facing a serious threat to the Union itself, in the backstop, and subject to binding rules from the ECJ. Let us not forget either the £39 billion we would raid from our challenged Treasury safe, and for what? If the Prime Minister’s deal is voted down tomorrow night, she must return to the EU and attempt to negotiate a better one, for we do want one—we really do want a deal. At the same time, leaving the EU on WTO terms must be given top priority. Do I need to remind the House that this is the current legal default position?

Unless we honour the referendum result, politics in this country will suffer demonstrably.

12.16 am

**Chris Stephens** (Glasgow South West) (SNP): Good morning, Mr Speaker. I, too, was hoping to catch your eye on 10 December, but the Prime Minister saw to that when she cancelled the debate. When I saw there was a prime ministerial statement today, I wondered if it was Groundhog Day.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman), and the hon. Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner) who spoke from the Front Bench from the Labour party, on their speeches about the benefits of immigration and being pro-immigration. I hope that the Chancellor, too, will congratulate both hon. Members, because there is a real concern about the Government’s direction of travel on immigration. We have already heard of individuals applying for universal credit who have lived here for 20 or 30 years, and worked and contributed to the economy, but who, because they were born outside the UK, are being denied universal credit or are receiving questions from the Department for Work and Pensions. I hope the Chancellor will take that back.

I hope the Government will also look at the advertisements for the EU settlement scheme. It seems quite inappropriate that they are seeking to charge people to retain rights and benefits they already have. I am very concerned, too, about what the deal would do for the protection of workers’ rights. As Opposition Members have said, there are too many vague assurances, when what we actually need is a binding agreement. We need to look at the EU’s direction of travel. It is now seeking to introduce changes to improve the work-life balance of parents and to help those in the gig economy. It is far better than the timid approach adopted here in the UK. We are seeing in Europe a real determination to put in place transparent and predictable working conditions.

While the EU is going in that direction, there is a fear among trade unions here about the lack of enforcement, particularly during the transition period, when disputes will be brought to a joint committee. The difficulty with that is that individuals and trade unions will not be able to take those complaints directly to the disputes committee or the European Court of Justice.

We have heard many Conservative Back Benchers talk about the benefits of trade agreements. What will happen for individuals in trade unions, who under international trade agreements are often excluded from bringing challenges under those agreements to enforce their rights at work? It is clear to me that the Government, who spent years challenging in court the trade unions’



[Chris Stephens]

argument that tribunal fees should not be put in place, who were responsible for the anti-trade-union Act, and who take a timid approach and refuse to ban zero-hours contracts, cannot be trusted on workers' rights and protections and the EU protections currently in place.

Finally, some argue that the EU is a neoliberal institution, but a no deal would lead to even more neoliberalism. The answer to that criticism of the EU is not more neoliberalism. We saw that in the financial crash, when there was criticism of neoliberalism. We do not need more of that; we need less, and we need far more protections at work and elsewhere.

12.21 am

**Peter Aldous** (Waveney) (Con): Like most of coastal Britain, Waveney and Lowestoft voted to leave. There was a variety of reasons why individuals made that choice, but I sense that many were sending an overarching message down to us here in the Westminster bubble. Yes, economically, Britain as a whole has done well over the past 40 to 50 years, but during that time coastal Britain has struggled. In Lowestoft, the fishing industry is a pale shadow of its former self. The canning factory has closed, the coachworks have gone and the Sanyo TV factory—the last major TV manufacturer in the UK—was shut down in 2009.

The message that Brexit sent from towns such as Lowestoft is that they have not done well in this period and we need to do something different. As the negotiations and debates drag on, we must never forget that message. When it came to those negotiations, there was always going to be a need for hard bargaining, making difficult choices and, yes, making concessions. The negotiations on fishing have not been straightforward. I had hoped that the UK would resume its role as an independent coastal state from December 2019; instead, we hope to do so by the end of December 2020. That said, as matters stand, we shall control access to our waters, deciding who can access them on what terms. That is something that the EU—the French and Dutch, in particular—do not like, but the Prime Minister has steadfastly refused to compromise and it is important that she continues to do so to provide the opportunity to revive the East Anglian fishing industry.

Ultimately, I ask myself whether the deal delivers Brexit. From a pragmatic perspective, on balance, I believe that it does. I look at the alternatives. They are not particularly palatable. Leaving the EU with no deal in place has many risks. There is a push for a second referendum. To my mind, that would be very wrong. It would significantly undermine the very ethos of democracy and the very many people who voted for Brexit would lose all confidence in the democratic process.

Something missing from the Brexit debate since before the referendum is the vision for the UK in the future. This country has many immediate challenges to address such as welfare reform and housing, but there is an exciting future ahead and we must set out how we will deliver it for the benefit of all our citizens. To deliver such a vision, we need a Brexit deal in place. The one in front of us—it is the only one—is, I believe, on balance, acceptable, so I will be voting for it. That said, I sense that tomorrow it will be defeated. But it is the nearest we have to delivering Brexit, to delivering a deal, and to

honouring our pledge to the British people. In the next few days, people need to be pragmatic and work together to get the deal over the line.

12.24 am

**Justin Madders** (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): This is the issue on which I—and, I am sure, most other Members—have been contacted most by constituents. They have all asked me to represent their views, but in the time available it will simply not be possible to do all of them justice, especially given the contradictory and incompatible messages that I have received.

Wherever it ends up, this process will cause a huge group of people to feel disenfranchised and disconnected from the political process. The binary nature of the referendum has created a schism in society, splitting families and friends in a way that will take years to fix. The longer the process continues, the wider those cracks become, and many issues are not receiving the attention that they need because Brexit, and many of the causes of Brexit, are not being addressed. Those are the big issues that I want us, as a country, to tackle. Brexit has sucked the life out of all other political debate in the country, and has toxified dialogue in the process. The danger is that the position could become even worse if we cannot be seen to be trusted—if democracy is no longer seen as something that works—and my starting point is what this process means for democracy.

I voted in favour of a referendum, and I did so in the expectation that the result would be binding. I campaigned to remain, so of course I was disappointed by the result, but as a democrat I accepted it. Moreover, along with many other Members, I had been re-elected on a manifesto that had confirmed that I would abide by the result.

Plenty of constituents have expressed their frustration and anger at the posturing that goes on here. Their perception is that too many Members are using Brexit as a vehicle for their own ends. I have no issue with Members who have been honest from the start about their wish to stop Brexit—especially when that represents the overwhelming view of their constituents—but there is an undercurrent that implies that unless Members unquestioningly accept the Government's interpretation of Brexit, they are really trying to stop it. I find that insulting, I find it puerile, but, most seriously, I find it dangerous, because it says to people out there that we are insincere, that we are playing games, and that we are too wrapped up in our own egos to govern effectively. Some people say that the vote was for Parliament to take back control. That does not mean that MPs should always do what the Government want; in fact, it should mean that MPs are free to do the opposite.

We are in this mess because there was a division in the Tory party and a referendum was seen as the way to heal that division, but rather than bringing people together, it has pushed them further apart. The division has seeped out into the rest of the country, and political dialogue has become so polarised that many people with different views have stopped listening to one another. Of course, the irony is that many who voted leave and remain alike are opposed to this deal, but the reasons that they give are so diametrically opposed that any consensus will not last endure past what is now today.

A few of my constituents have said that I should support the Prime Minister's deal, but if the best arguments are about what might happen if Members vote against

something rather than giving positive reasons for them to vote in favour of it, it must be accepted that the offer cannot stand on its own two feet. I am not falling for the bluff of a no deal, and I refuse to be threatened by something that I know no responsible Prime Minister would allow.

We must restore trust, and the first step towards doing that is to be honest. We cannot pretend that this agreement is anything other than a desperate fudge, the embodiment of weak leadership, and a mish-mash of contradiction that needs radical revision if it is to be passed. It does nothing to address the fundamental issues that we need to address in order to create a society that works for us all. We must be candid and recognise that whatever route we take now, it will come at a cost. Some of the costs are easier to quantify than others, and none are certain. We will probably also need more time to sort ourselves out. However, it is up to us, here in Parliament, to show leadership and find a solution that brings people back together, protects our national interest, and restores faith in the democratic process.

12.28 am

**Robert Courts** (Witney) (Con): It is an honour to speak for a brief few minutes in this historic debate, and an honour to follow the passionate speech of the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders).

As someone who has travelled throughout the glorious continent of Europe and can be described as a member of the easyJet generation, I believe deeply in the values of international co-operation. I have long wished to be a member of a reformed EU, but when the United Kingdom tried to renegotiate the terms of its membership, it became very clear that this was an inflexible, undemocratic body that was not going to reform in the way that we would like. I therefore decided to vote to leave, on the basis that the EU was heading for an undemocratic federalism that the UK has never desired, and, above all, because I wanted to see our historic democratic parliamentary freedoms preserved.

Having become the MP for west Oxfordshire after the referendum and with 17.4 million people nationally having voted to leave, I am keen to ensure that Brexit reflects the best long-term interests of this country to ensure that our country remains open, democratic and free. I passionately want to ensure that when constituents from all parts of the country go to see their MP, that MP sits in a Parliament that is able to make change, and that we are a functioning democracy where the laws that govern the country and the country's destiny are made here by elected politicians.

The withdrawal agreement has much to commend it. There are a multitude of technical but important points that govern interconnected peoples, such as the resolution on citizens' rights, but I have decided, with the greatest pain, that I cannot support it in its current form.

The backstop is the headline act. We are all tired of hearing about it, but we must consider what it means. The backstop would see the UK remain in a hybrid customs union with the EU, whereby the UK would fully align itself to the EU's customs regime, including its external tariff schedule, and we would be unable to sign meaningful trade agreements with other countries. The UK's home market, let us not forget, is the fifth largest in the world and would become a bargaining counter for EU negotiators to exchange for benefits for

their own countries, because they would not be required to reciprocate on their trade deals. It seems to me unthinkable for a country of our standing and proud history to surrender control of our trade policy to an organisation of which we will no longer be a member and which will have no regard for our interests.

I know I will be told that this is all temporary, but even if technically temporary, the backstop has every likelihood of being indefinite, with the EU effectively holding a veto over our ability to leave. Even under article 50 we have a clear, legal, sovereign right to exit our arrangements, but not here. There is no unilateral exit mechanism from the backstop, nor is it time-limited. This is almost unheard of in international relations.

I cannot emphasise enough that I do not criticise this deal on the basis that it is not ideal, or that it is not perfect, or that I want more. This is no objection based on some ideological purity; I am a pragmatist and I want to see a deal and a compromise as much as anybody. But I cannot agree to just anything, and I feel it is best if we in this place speak our minds. We should be able to tell the British people that sometimes a compromise becomes a compromise too far. This deal gives £39 billion without serious commitments in response, divides our Union and leaves the UK at the mercy of the ECJ in practice if not in name.

We should never be ashamed to say that it is noble for a country to seek democratic, accountable self-government and live in amity with its neighbours. It is for that that we must strive.

12.32 am

**Ruth George** (High Peak) (Lab): It gives me pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Witney (Robert Courts).

The debate on our relationship with the EU has been dominated today by slogans and emotion, but it is actually about our trade arrangements, which are a very practical matter. It is business that is most affected, and what amazes me is that this Government, who constantly preach to those of us on the Opposition side of the House about not being on the side of business, never sat down with businesses to work out what they needed from our deal with the EU.

I have sat down with the businesses in my constituency, both individually and at business summits, to see what they want from our deal, and they have a wide variety of concerns. The biggest is regulatory divergence, the threat of which is already preventing companies in my constituency from tendering for contracts. They are worried about tariffs and import duties, which raise their costs, and about losing EU funding in grants and loans from the European Investment Bank, which have already reduced from £7 billion a year to just £2 billion in 2017 and will restrict investment in our businesses even more. They worry about the cost and paperwork of visas, making it harder and more expensive to access skills and for their people to move around Europe. They worry about access to the single euro payments area and the VAT information exchange system. These may be boring issues, but they are very real and very practical for all our businesses. They worry about losing their access to free trade not just with the EU but with the 65 countries to which they get preferential free trade access, with a further 25 agreements due to take effect. They also worry about friction at our borders, which will make just-in-time production impossible and lead to late payments if contracts cannot be fulfilled in time.

[Ruth George]

It is no wonder that the small and medium-sized businesses in my constituency are in despair. Several have already had to set up offices in, and transfer jobs to, EU countries to continue bidding for contracts. It was also reported last week that the banking sector has already moved almost £1 trillion out of the UK, equating to 10% of its assets. The longer we go on with no practical deal in sight, the more businesses will continue to move. So far, we have been cushioned against the full economic impact of the leave vote by the drop in the value of the pound, but we have started to see inflation creeping up and things are becoming more expensive.

Our deal with the EU affects not only businesses but people. Yes, a majority of people voted in 2016 to leave the European Union, and I respect that, but this Government did not respect those people enough to ask them what they wanted from that deal. I asked all the voters in High Peak what they wanted, and half of those who voted leave wanted to stay in a customs union and half wanted access to the single market. The Government have not listened to them, and we have ended up with a deal that is not a deal. It is simply a stopgap until the end of next year and provides no certainty for the future. The only certainty is years of wrangling over a final deal, as the Conservative party wrangles over who its next leader will be and the potential leaders offer alternative versions of our final deal. The Prime Minister can give us no commitments about that deal. She has opted out of leading us into it.

12.36 am

**Jack Brereton** (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): The choice is stark: we can either follow the wishes of the majority and deliver Brexit, as my constituents overwhelmingly voted for, or we can fail and risk holding them in contempt. We must not fail. We must deliver. However, there are now very few realistic options open to the House. I fear that there is now a growing risk of no Brexit at all, especially following the passing of a number of amendments in the past month in the name of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve). The fact that those amendments were passed shows that there is an appetite among Members to ignore and frustrate the will of the British people. Either they would leave us saddled with a horrific Norway-style deal or, shockingly, they could mean that we do not leave at all.

As an MP representing a predominantly leave seat, I can tell the House that no Brexit is not an option. It would hold the electorate and our democracy in total contempt, yet that is precisely what supporters of a second referendum are asking us to do. They are asking us to delay Brexit by at least a year, and they want to prevent us from leaving on 29 March. That is not a choice that I could contemplate, as it would involve deepening divisions instead of healing them and going back on our word instead of respecting the people's choice. It is concerning that we are seeing a rise in extremist views on both the far left and the far right. It was not easy to see off the British National party in Stoke-on-Trent, as we had to do, and I would not be so cavalier as to assume that that threat has gone away.

I will vote tomorrow to secure the Brexit that people in Stoke-on-Trent South want to see: an end to free movement, and control over our own money and laws. Essentially, that means leaving the single market and the customs union. Indeed, anyone who does not accept that Brexit means leaving the single market and the customs union is deluding themselves. Staying within the customs union would tie us permanently to the trade policies of the EU, preventing us from forging stronger links globally.

I agree that a managed no deal could be beneficial and would not have the apocalyptic impact that some have predicted, but I fear that delivering no deal in an orderly way is now far from certain. Given what has been witnessed here over the past week, the numbers in this House are quite likely to be stacked against allowing no deal. Members could obstruct the necessary legislation for managing the process, thereby frustrating Brexit. The worst case would be a disorderly no deal—crashing out of the EU—and according to a number of my local businesses, that would be incredibly disruptive for our local economy and jobs in Stoke-on-Trent. That is not what the people of Stoke-on-Trent voted for, so I am left to consider what is before us. The withdrawal agreement delivers much of what my constituents voted for: control of immigration at our borders; the protection of manufacturing; the ending of vast annual transfers of money to Brussels; and a commitment to the creation of a new free trade area with the EU, building on the global opportunities for forging new trade.

However, the backstop is what really worries me, and concerns expressed many times throughout the House must be addressed. We cannot get trapped in something that is indefinite and challenges the very being of our sovereignty. I look to support the amendment in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison), which would time-limit the backstop. The Government need to be sure that safeguards are in place.

I have consistently voted for measures to ensure that this House enacts Brexit. I must make a choice, as we all do, based on weighing up the risks on both sides, and I have spent many weeks determining my decision. The vast majority of my constituents are fed up with politicians and want us to get on with delivering Brexit. They want us to get on to pursue the fantastic new opportunities for global Britain that will benefit every community throughout our Union that has felt left behind until now. They want us to deliver the leave that they voted for, honouring the result of the referendum and regaining control on 29 March.

12.40 am

**Wera Hobhouse** (Bath) (LD): We have come a long way since June 2016. There is no more hiding from the fact that any Brexit will leave us worse off and that the best that any post-Brexit Government can do is damage limitation. If we go ahead with Brexit, we will have to find new ways of stimulating the economy. No longer bound by EU rules, those who argue for slashing regulations will quickly gain the upper hand. The race to the bottom will soon begin.

Among the first regulations on the bonfire will be those that protect the environment. The European Court of Justice, so hated by Brexit fanatics, has been an outstanding protector of environmental laws and



regulations. The Government's recent draft environment Bill does not include a watchdog with anything like the power of the ECJ, and climate action will lose out. There will be an increased incentive to support fossil fuel companies for short-term economic gain. Green energy projects are becoming increasingly affordable and promise long-term economic gain, but they still require up-front investment and will therefore be the first victims. Who would provide such investment in a struggling post-Brexit economy? Once more, climate action will lose out.

A post-Brexit Government will be under huge pressure to sign off new trade deals quickly, which will be a great opportunity for any country to take advantage of our weakened position. A trade deal with America, for example, will most likely involve opening up our economy to fracking companies. Even if we tried to build environmental protections into such deals, the reality is that commercial interests will be dominant. The case of *Lone Pine Resources v. the Government of Canada* shows what awaits us when we enter into trade deals with more powerful nations. The Government of Quebec put a moratorium on fracking in 2011, but *Lone Pine Resources* has sued for over \$100 million of lost profits under the terms of the North American free trade agreement. Outside the EU, our power to protect ourselves against the interests of large global companies will be much diminished.

The European Union is an international heavyweight when it comes to striking trade deals, but it has not struck a trade deal with America precisely because it refuses to give up its own standards in areas such as environmental protections. Thanks to its power as the world's largest and most successful trading bloc, the EU has the economic clout to walk away from trade negotiations that are not in its interest. On our own, we will have nothing near the same clout. Even if we tried to protect our environment, our resolve would quickly collapse as the urgency to find new trading partners would force our hand.

No form of Brexit will halt that race to the bottom—not the Prime Minister's blind Brexit deal, which offers no legal guarantee against future deregulation, not a no-deal Brexit, and not even the softest-of-soft Norway-plus Brexit deals. Brexit is a fundamentally right-wing project. It seeks to deregulate our economy and hand the reins to powerful vested interests. It is political fantasy to think we can go ahead with Brexit and mitigate its worst effects. In the light of the right-wing Brexit agenda, the only option for all of us who are progressive is to oppose Brexit as a project. There is no point in tinkering with it.

Climate action has always been about social justice. In the 21st century, the battle to save our planet is inseparable from the battle to limit the power of big business and build a better world for all. I call on all progressive politicians in this House to see Brexit for the right-wing project it is. We can stop Brexit, and the democratic path to it is a people's vote with the option to stay in the European Union.

12.44 am

**Kevin Hollinrake** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak after the hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse).

Too often in this place, when we talk about the implications of Brexit for business, we speak about multinationals—our car manufacturers, our pharmaceutical

companies and our banks—but perhaps not often enough do we talk about small and medium-sized enterprises. I draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

The people behind SMEs are real people with real lives who have worked a lifetime to build a business, often risking everything they have to build something for themselves and their family. I violently agree with those who see a bright future outside the European Union. Despite being a remainer, that is what I believe, too, in the longer term. In the short term, as we have been trading in a certain way for 46 years, it is unfair and irresponsible to trample businesses underfoot in a headlong rush towards the exit door. We simply cannot look at these businesses and these businesspeople as collateral damage. When we talk about ideological concepts, the more important concept to a businessperson is finding the money to pay the bank loan, to pay the suppliers and to pay the wages.

This is not about "Project Fear." I think a no-deal Brexit has real risks, particularly for those sectors that have time-dependent supply chains. Cash flow is the key element for any business. Businesses do not have weeks and months of cash flow sitting in the bank, waiting for a rainy day. For a business with a time-dependent supply chain, such as a business exporting shellfish to France, a consignment delayed by 12 hours loses 50% of its value, and a consignment delayed by 24 hours loses 100% of its value. If a business loses one or two of those consignments, it may well be out of business.

Of course some would say that there will be no delays at ports, but that is not consistent with the facts of a no deal. Michel Barnier has been very clear that, in a no-deal situation, there will be 100% checks on animal produce and livestock at the border. Even "Fact—NOT Friction" accepts that the EU may impose checks.

For Northern Ireland, in particular, this is a huge risk. A simple cottage pie ends up on a shop shelf in Northern Ireland having passed over the border in different forms—from livestock to end product—seven times. Each time it would have to go through a border inspection post. It is one of a number of cattle conundra that would have to be solved in a no-deal world.

A no deal could have significant and perhaps irreversible consequences for Northern Ireland and for the integrity of the United Kingdom, which is why I support the Prime Minister's deal. The deal is a stepping-stone to the future. Yes, there are risks, but clearly we have negotiation advantages, too. For an SME, hope is not a strategy. We should support this deal, and I urge all hon. Members to do so.

12.48 am

**Jeremy Lefroy** (Stafford) (Con): It is a great honour to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake), and I agree with absolutely everything he said.

Before Christmas I spoke in the debate on this motion and in the debate on no deal, and I outlined my position in favour of the agreement, so I will concentrate on two aspects relating to today's subject: exports and the finance of our business more generally.

The Secretary of State outlined clearly the success of British exporting over the past few years, with exports up by 38.1% since 2010, to £630 billion in the year to November 2018. This is happening when we are within

[Jeremy Lefroy]

the EU; I do not see that the EU has shackled us in our export performance in the past few years. I fully accept that there are areas where we could do still better, but we need to build on what has been achieved under the coalition Government and the most recent Conservative-led Governments, because it has clearly been successful. We need more emphasis on supporting SMEs into exports and on promoting our trade links and our trade network. I declare an interest, as one of the Prime Minister's trade envoys. We need to see a greater emphasis on the already increased amount of UK export finance, and we need to see that going to the smallest possible businesses. I ask the Chancellor and the Secretary of State to ensure that as we leave the EU we redouble our efforts on exports. Of course our businesses, particularly SMEs, will face challenges as we move into the new situation under the Prime Minister's deal, but with that support they can do very well.

The second point I wish to make is about the financing of our businesses more generally. We often hear of the great amount of inward investment we have in the UK, and that is to be welcomed, but one reason why we have so much inward investment is that we do not invest in our own businesses. The City of London is not as good as it could be in providing capital to British-based businesses so we do not see the kind of businesses that we see in Germany with the Mittelstand or in Italy with its equivalent—I do not know its name—where family businesses have turnovers of billions of pounds, euros, dollars, because they get the finance from their capital markets. We have pretty much the biggest capital markets in the world, but, with a lot of noble exceptions, they do not support British-owned businesses as much as they could. So as we leave the EU, I want to see this from our capital markets and the British Business Bank. It has been excellent in the work it has done but it could do five times more than it does, perhaps along the lines of the German Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau and other development banks. I want to see British institutions support British-owned businesses.

Along with that, we have to be absolutely sure that we invest in innovation and research, which is where the role of our universities is so vital. I declare an interest, as a trustee of one of our universities. It is vital that universities are supported in whatever way possible. If they are going to lose some research funding, that needs to be replaced—and more.

12.52 am

**Richard Graham** (Gloucester) (Con): Our duty in debating the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 this evening is not to focus on what we do not want, but to work out what we will support, in order to ensure that we respect the result of the referendum to leave the EU, but in a way that does not inadvertently cause damage and that can identify and realise future opportunities. The Act is the end of the beginning—what the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster called the “unavoidable gateway”, whether to a Canadian, Norwegian, Chequers or any other destination. It resolves crucial human issues of citizen rights, obligations and Northern Ireland, on which I have co-authored an amendment with my right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Sir Hugo Swire). The Act can also lead to stronger legislation on issues precious to many of us, including

colleagues such as the hon. Members for Rotherham (Sarah Champion) and for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn): human rights; gender equality; workers' rights; and environmental standards, where pledges have already been made. It means that this House will be able to decide whether we stick with EU manufacturing standards, go further or deviate, understanding the potential impact on frictionless trade. In the future, it will be we who decide whether to take more REACH—the registration, evaluation, authorisation and restriction of chemicals—legislation or further insurance sector rules. We will decide on immigration; as the Home Secretary said, there will be no limits on skilled labourers and there will be seasonal arrangements for agricultural workers. Those are the opportunities that this deal gives us, alongside a transition that provides for certainty before future change. It will not be easy—we have surely learned that already—but there can be advantages for these stubborn, independent-minded islands that are used to maintaining the balance of power in Europe against centralist tendencies.

Some of my colleagues prefer a no-deal solution. They believe that there is a way, as an invitation this evening put it, to open up the political space to take a different approach, but the nation's employers simply do not agree. I have spoken to manufacturers big and small, to retail and services companies, to the university in my constituency and to many other traders and investors as the longest-serving of the Prime Minister's trade envoys in the House of Commons, working with one of the fastest growing regions in south-east Asia, and not one has told me that no deal is the best way forward. Instead, they tell me that fear of uncertainty is holding back investment, jobs and apprenticeships and beginning to lose them contracts. Are they all scaremongering—the FSB, Business West, the NFU, Gibraltar, the Falklands, or even a family-owned Gloucester SME, which told me on Friday that

“customers and jobs will go elsewhere, and we are 14 weeks away from the most damaging impact on our economy for at least a generation”?

They, plus the supply chains of the aerospace, automotive and cyber sectors, cannot all be wrong. I do not believe that, faced with this evidence, any Government could take the risk of no deal, or that this Parliament would ever vote for no deal.

If we are to succeed in legislating for the withdrawal agreement—a genuine Brexit—Conservative and DUP Members, and others on the Opposition Benches who, like the hon. Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting), realise that there is no magical, better Labour Brexit to be negotiated, will all have to pull together and support this pragmatic compromise. If we cannot do that, as the hon. Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) said, some cross-party grouping will come together for a solution to gain a majority, but in all likelihood that will be a deal less attractive to those who voted leave and to those who compare it with staying in the EU, and that could lead to an even more divisive second referendum. To paraphrase Churchill on the USA, I hope that this Parliament will do the right thing after exhausting all other options over the next few days and support and pass the withdrawal agreement.

12.57 am

**Anne Marie Morris** (Newton Abbot) (Con): I am delighted to be the last Back Bencher standing to conclude the debate before the Front Benchers have their say.

I thought the referendum result was a great tribute to the British people. It was a vote for opportunity, it was a vote of aspiration, and it was a vote for freedom. Many in this Chamber would absolutely support that. My real frustration is that this withdrawal agreement does not deliver on that opportunity. It does not deliver on returning sovereignty to the British people. We will not gain sovereignty over our laws, over our borders or, indeed, over our sea. Most importantly, we will not have the freedom to trade with countries around the world, outside Europe, where the opportunity most certainly lies.

So, what to do? To support this deal is clearly not the way forward, but we must preserve that opportunity and aspiration. Should we extend article 50? No. Is a few more months or even a year going to change two years of inactivity? I do not think so. We already have the deal that everybody is searching for: the World Trade Organisation deal. That is the deal that is well formed and well prepared for. It is not the dropping out or going over a cliff edge that people talk about; it is something that will deliver the opportunity. It is what the Government, without telling anybody, have actually been working on for more than a year, as has Europe, including France. Calais is ready and Dover is ready. There are many things that we could do to make it perfect, but it is the safe option and it will deliver what British business has been crying out for: certainty.

When we have WTO rules, we know what we get. What it says on the tin is what is inside it. That is what we absolutely need. Of course, we also get the benefit of not paying £39 billion, because at the end of the day that was in effect in large part payment for that two-year extension, during which we were going to endeavour to work our way towards a final deal that was not actually Brexit. We will stay as a United Kingdom, too, which is absolutely key for me.

People say, "How will you manage to take forward that opportunity?" If Australia can negotiate three trade deals in 13 months, I think that we are certainly up for a jolly good future. We should not believe those scare stories. I have sat on the Public Accounts Committee and scrutinised what the Government Departments are doing. Those planes will fly; those trains will cross the channel; those lorries will be able to get their goods from A to B; the IT infrastructure is largely there; the food is in place; and the drugs are in place, so let us not be put off by these scaremongering stories. Better still, let us consider article 24 of the General Agreement Trade on Tariffs and Trade. Let us consider remaining with zero-rate tariffs until such time as a final deal can be agreed. What I am not saying is that WTO is necessarily the end place, but it puts us in a much better bargaining position from which to move forward to look potentially at Canada plus, plus. We will already be out and in a much better position to achieve a proper deal with Europe. At the same time, we will not have lost the opportunity of striking trade deals with the rest of the world.

For those who say that we risk no Brexit at all, I have to say that, sorry, that simply does not equate. The Executive will still control the legislature. It is not Parliament's job. At the end of the day, when we look at the detail with regard to money resolutions, Third Readings, and, finally, at the possibility of prorogation, the Executive has control. Members should not be put off; we will deliver Brexit as a Government.

1.1 am

**John McDonnell** (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): I congratulate all the contributors to today's many faceted debate. It has been a healthy and straightforward debate where people have been honest with one another and straightforward, and I welcome that.

Mr Speaker, I also congratulate you on your typical display of dedication to the democratic process of this House. You have sat through every hour of every day of this debate, and, as always, you have assiduously performed your duties and done so with fairness, good grace and good humour and I am grateful for that.

In many of the recent vox pops in the media, people have expressed some frustration with the way that Members of this House have been dealing with the response to an implementation of the referendum decision. I say mildly—very mildly at this hour of the morning—that it has not helped that some of the Executive have ascribed false motives to Members across the House with whom they disagree and have accused them of playing games. I do not believe that Members have been playing games; they have treated this matter with the seriousness that it deserves. The vast majority of hon. Members have lived up to the adjective in their title and have behaved honourably. In this debate, hon. Members are asserting the very role ascribed to them: to represent their constituents and to do so to the best of their ability; to exercise their judgment in the long-term interests of their constituents, yes, but, as we have seen from speaker after speaker today, in the long-term interests of this country as well.

For too long, Parliament has been taken for granted by successive Executives. What we are witnessing at the moment is not a coup, as was reported in one newspaper, but an overdue redressing of the balance between the Executive and Parliament and within our democratic system. It is a simple and not a very radical rebalancing and, as we have heard in this debate, the overwhelming majority of Members are seeking not to ignore the referendum result, but to make sure that we do not have imposed on us a Brexit that undermines our economy, costs people their jobs and threatens their livelihoods. Members here are seeking to do their best by their constituents and by the country. They have done that tonight with candour and, in many instances, with some courage.

Let me just turn to some of the many excellent contributions in this debate—there were so many that I will not be able to refer to them all. There are Members on the Government Benches who, with straightforward honesty and, yes, with some courage, expressed their views in opposition to their own party's position.

The right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith) expressly set out his views and concerns about the impact that this deal would have on his constituents, and his view that there is a need to go back and get another deal. The hon. Member for Upper Bann (David Simpson), on behalf of the DUP, honestly expressed the concerns of his party with regard to the backstop. He said clearly that nothing has changed in recent weeks from the promises that there might be some legal assurances that could be provided. I have some disagreement with the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson); I do not believe that this is some plot by the deep state.



[John McDonnell]

We have heard from Government Members who have resigned their positions to stand firm on their principles, including the hon. Member for Fareham (Suella Braverman). We have heard from the hon. Member for Bournemouth West (Conor Burns), who explained very honestly that, in his view, this is a fundamentally flawed deal. The hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) extremely eloquently demonstrated that, in his view, the political declaration in particular is a vacuous statement. The hon. Member for York Outer (Julian Sturdy) expressed his grave concerns, saying that this could be a gamble that could cost growth and jobs.

We heard from the hon. Member for North West Leicestershire (Andrew Bridgen), who is in his place, as well as the hon. Member for Gillingham and Rainham (Rehman Chishti) and the right hon. Member for Chelsea and Fulham (Greg Hands), who gave us the expertise that he has garnered over the years, particularly with regard to European relations. We heard from the hon. Members for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray), for Amber Valley (Nigel Mills), for Witney (Robert Courts) and for Newton Abbot (Anne Marie Morris), all of whom expressed their honest views that this deal will not provide the certainty that they or their constituents want.

A number of my hon. Friends, with some emotion, expressed their understanding of the motivation for a number of their constituents who voted leave. We heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool South (Gordon Marsden). This is the first time I have heard Tacitus quoted in this House; that was a breakthrough in itself. In fact, he quoted not only Tacitus, but Oliver Cromwell and Joan of Arc. In addition, my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin) expressed very clearly how his community felt left behind in the overall processes of investment. Similarly, my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) spoke about the divided society. My hon. Friends the Members for Midlothian (Danielle Rowley), for Preston (Sir Mark Hendrick), for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Preet Kaur Gill), for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Gerald Jones) and for Stroud (Dr Drew) all explained the impact of austerity on their constituents that had motivated people in those constituencies to vote leave.

Other Members expressed their concerns about the need for more assurances, including my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion), who made a clear point about the need for assurances over human rights provisions. My hon. Friend the Member for Batley and Spen (Tracy Brabin) mentioned that the levels of deprivation in her constituency may well have motivated her constituents to vote leave. My hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) explained to us all what our responsibilities are now—to come together, take this matter seriously and seek, as best we can, a way forward so that we can take as many people with us as possible.

We heard from others about the social consequences. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman), who set out the economic consequences. The hon. Member for Orpington (Joseph Johnson) was extremely clear about the impact that this deal would have on the financial services of this country, and said that we need further assurances on protections. The same is true of my hon. Friend the Member for

Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman), the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston), my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster North (Ms Buck), the hon. Member for Bracknell (Dr Lee), my hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Peter Kyle) and the hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Deidre Brock), all of whom explained in detail the social, cultural and economic consequences that this deal would have in their particular areas.

We heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan), and my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield) spoke about the impact on her community, particularly on the university. There were others, including my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy), the hon. Members for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) and for Edinburgh West (Christine Jardine), and my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter), who went beyond the economic consequences to discuss the social and cultural consequences in his multicultural constituency.

I thank those Members who have brought their ideas forward including those who have supported the “Common Market 2.0” proposals such as my hon. Friends the Members for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell) and for Feltham and Heston (Seema Malhotra). But I also thank those Members who, yes, have been very honest and straightforward about their view that there should be another public vote, including my hon. Friends the Members for Ilford North (Wes Streeting), for Huddersfield, for Hove and for Feltham and Heston, who all expressed our own frustration—what has been happening over the last two years in these negotiations that has brought us to this situation?

This debate has been an exemplary demonstration of this legislature performing its constitutional role. It has confirmed for me, and I believe for many other Members, the belief that the deal we will vote on tomorrow is not supported by a majority in this House, and possibly—

**Dr Fox:** What is Labour’s plan?

**John McDonnell:** I will come on to that—[*Interruption.*] I will come on to that, if the right hon. Gentleman will allow me to finish. We have maintained a level of respect in this debate so far—let us try and keep it like that.

I believe that this deal will not go through tomorrow—it will not have the support. But I think we have increasingly found tonight that we recognise that our first responsibility is to avoid the catastrophe of a no-deal Brexit. The House spoke clearly on this only recently when voting on the amendment to the Finance Bill tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper). Let me remind the House of some of the assessments that motivated that vote at that stage. We have had some reference to them tonight—it is about the impact of no deal. The Government’s own economic analysis put the potential cost of a no-deal Brexit at nearly 10% of GDP. The Bank of England said that it could cause more economic damage than the financial crisis of 10 years ago, including unemployment of 6% and a 14% hit to house prices. The CBI has warned—

**Andrew Bridgen:** The shadow Chancellor says that the prediction is that a no-deal Brexit could cost the UK economy 10% of GDP. Would he bear in mind that total trade—import and export—with the European Union comes to only 9.5% of our economy altogether?

**John McDonnell:** The consequence predicted by the Bank of England is about the long-term impact over time. Yes, we can treat some of these assessments with scepticism, but it is not just the Bank of England—it is the Treasury itself, the CBI and other representative organisations, and the National Institute of Economic and Social Research as well. The concerns they have expressed have been flooding in. The CBI has warned of a “lost decade”. We can be in no doubt about the likely consequences of a no-deal Brexit, and we cannot say that we were not warned. I believe that this House will act accordingly and reject a no-deal Brexit.

The Prime Minister repeatedly warned that no deal is better than a bad deal. She may now be regretting saying that as she tries to persuade Members of this House, including those on her own Benches, to vote for a bad deal. Because let us be clear on one thing, and it seems that the House is very likely to be clear on it tomorrow: this deal is a bad deal. The cross-party Exiting the European Union Committee—

**Mrs Sheryll Murray:** Perhaps the shadow Chancellor would like to tell us exactly what his deal would be.

**John McDonnell:** I will come on to that.

We believe that this is a bad deal because of the advice we have been getting. Some of that advice came from the cross-party Exiting the European Union Committee, which unanimously warned that the deal

“fails to offer sufficient clarity or certainty about the future.”

I quoted Mervyn King in the debate a month ago. Let me remind Members of what Mervyn King, a former Governor of the Bank of England, said. He described the withdrawal agreement as incompetence of the highest order.

The result of that incompetence is that jobs are being lost and livelihoods are already being threatened. As has been mentioned, Jaguar Land Rover, citing factors including uncertainty around Brexit, has announced 4,500 job cuts. Ford is planning to cut 1,000 jobs in Bridgend. Honda will stop production at its Swindon plant for six days in April. Government Ministers are fully aware of the consequences of their actions. We recently debated the Government’s own analysis of something approximating to the Prime Minister’s proposals. The Government themselves admitted, as has been mentioned, that the economy would be 3.9% smaller as a result of us agreeing to this deal. To put that in context, that is a cost of over £80 billion. In the long term, the damage is even greater. The Government analysis also estimated that the impact of trade barriers alone could mean an average drop in wages of 3%—£800 a year in today’s terms.

I believe that this House will not vote for a deal that damages so badly the living standards of our constituents. We must also be aware of the political damage that would be caused by forcing through an agreement that clearly does not have the support of the people of this country and that contains a backstop which, in the words of the Attorney General,

“would endure indefinitely until a superseding agreement took its place, in whole or in part, as set out therein. Further, the Withdrawal Agreement cannot provide a legal means of compelling the EU to conclude such an agreement.”

None of that has been changed by what the right hon. Member for Belfast North (Nigel Dodds) described earlier today as “meaningless letters”.

Let me be clear what Labour is proposing. Our negotiating priorities would differ from this Government’s. We would prioritise a permanent and comprehensive customs union with a say in future trade deals. We would deliver a strong, collaborative relationship with the single market, and we would guarantee that the UK does not fall behind the EU in rights for workers, consumers and the environment. Tomorrow it will be clear that the Government’s deal does not have the confidence of the House, and that a new approach is needed.

**Neil O’Brien:** The former head of the European Council’s legal service, responding to the shadow International Trade Secretary’s call for a customs union in which the UK would have a say, has said:

“Obviously this is ruled out. It is contrary to the basic EU principle of autonomy of decision making. Don’t even think about it!”

Does the right hon. Gentleman think he knows better?

**John McDonnell:** The hon. Gentleman clearly has not been listening. My hon. Friend the Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner) explained how we would, as a third country, be able to negotiate a deal that would give us that say. [*Interruption.*] If Government Members doubt that, they should give us the opportunity to start the negotiations.

Tomorrow this deal will go down, and it is now time to put the mistakes of the past two years behind us and clear away the debris of this deal and the Government’s failed negotiations. It is clear that, to break the deadlock and deliver a clear mandate for a new approach, we need a general election. It is time to let the people have their say.

If that is not achievable, this House will need to work together to secure the best compromise to protect our country, and the Executive need to recognise that Parliament must rule on this matter, not the Executive. At that stage, Members may want to confirm that new deal with the people in a public vote. People will be looking to us to judge whether we have the maturity, good sense and commitment to our country and the national interest to secure a deal that protects jobs and the economy. I believe we can live up to that, and we must.

1.17 am

**The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr Philip Hammond):** This has been a wide-ranging and interesting debate that has exposed clearly the different and passionately held views on all sides of the wider argument about Brexit. In my contribution to this debate on 6 December, I set out the economic case for a deal, the damage that would be likely to result from disruption of cross-border supply chains in a no-deal scenario, and how a deal would deliver a dividend for the UK economy in terms of both economic growth and the public finances. Those arguments remain valid, and you will be relieved to hear, Mr Speaker, that I do not intend to repeat or elaborate on them.

We have heard arguments in favour of the full range of options for both exit mechanics and the future relationship between the UK and the EU. Indeed, I think I heard pretty much the full range within the speech of

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the hon. Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner). At one moment, I thought he might be on the brink of applying for associate membership of the European Research Group.

A large group of my hon. Friends recognised in their contributions the logic of the Prime Minister's deal and the need for a compromise so that we can move on as a country. My hon. Friends the Members for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy), for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake), for Harborough (Neil O'Brien), for Chichester (Gillian Keegan), for Waveney (Peter Aldous), for Gloucester (Richard Graham), for Hitchin and Harpenden (Bim Afolami), for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow), for Elmet and Rothwell (Alec Shelbrooke), for North West Norfolk (Sir Henry Bellingham), for Maidstone and The Weald (Mrs Grant) and for Halesowen and Rowley Regis (James Morris), and my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North East Hertfordshire (Sir Oliver Heald), all made that point. I think my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelsea and Fulham (Greg Hands) was in that category as well.

My hon. Friend the Member for North West Norfolk probably summed it up best when he said that he himself would like "a 100% Brexit" but recognised that only 52% voted for it, so that to unite the country we all have to compromise. This is a time for individual sacrifice in the greater good.

Two of my hon. Friends were a little more blunt in their contributions: my hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth (David T. C. Davies) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Dame Cheryl Gillan) recognised explicitly that their motive for voting for the Prime Minister's deal was a fear that the alternative might be no Brexit at all.

**Peter Kyle:** The Chancellor is praising other people for compromise, but if the deal is defeated tomorrow, will he stick to that principle and will he compromise further with other people who are expressing other views, particularly those of us who think that the public should be brought back into this discussion?

**Mr Hammond:** The deal that the Prime Minister has presented to Parliament very clearly is a compromise between the views of people on both sides of this argument. It will not deliver 100% of what anybody wants, and the Prime Minister herself has recognised that only this afternoon.

I want to mention my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest West (Sir Desmond Swayne), because I think he summed up what is still a dilemma for many—that the middle is being squeezed from both sides—and I wish him well in his consideration of these important issues over the next 24 hours.

Opposition Members made many points. A group of them—the hon. Members for Rotherham (Sarah Champion), for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) I think, for Blackpool South (Gordon Marsden), for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin) and for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Gerald Jones)—while clearly rejecting the Prime Minister's deal, which I acknowledge, were all I think signalling that they would wish to be able to support a deal and to find a way forward, explicitly recognising that no one is going to get everything that they want.

I listened carefully to the contributions and the concerns that were expressed, and I believe that the architecture of the Prime Minister's deal is capable of accommodating such concerns if that is what we as a nation want to do. It is in that spirit that the Government have accepted the amendment proposed by the hon. Members for Bassetlaw (John Mann) and for Don Valley (Caroline Flint). However, we must distinguish between adjustments to the negotiated future relationship and seeking to renegotiate the withdrawal agreement—something that is simply not deliverable. I shall return to that theme later.

A number of hon. Members on the Opposition Benches—the hon. Members for Bath (Wera Hobhouse), for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman), for Midlothian (Danielle Rowley), for Edinburgh West (Christine Jardine) and for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman)—simply wished to turn back the clock and pretend that this whole thing had never happened. I urge hon. Members expressing that view to consider carefully the wider consequences for our political system if that were to happen. I would say to Scottish colleagues who expressed that view that their arguments would be more powerful if they could show an ability to consider the consequences for the UK as a whole, as well as the consequences for Scotland.

I thought the hon. Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell) made a crucially important point, which is that the House needs to find a way to show what it is for, not just what it is against. She went on to make, I think, the sole pitch of the evening for the Norway model.

**Joseph Johnson:** Has the Chancellor by any chance read the powerful letter in today's *Financial Times* from the former EU Financial Services Commissioner, Jonathan Hill? He said that he had yet to meet anybody who felt that the Norway model would work for the UK's financial services industry. In fact, he felt that EEA members had so little influence on the EU's rule making for financial services that they were grateful if anybody even replied to any of their correspondence.

**Mr Hammond:** I have been making effectively the same point myself for about the last year. We concluded that the EEA model would not work for Britain's most important sector, financial services. The deal that the Prime Minister has negotiated has within it good and strong provisions for financial services and will be a much better result for the financial services industry than the EEA model would be.

**Lloyd Russell-Moyle** (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op)  
*rose—*

**Mr Hammond:** I will give way briefly to the hon. Gentleman and then I must make some progress.

**Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** Will the Chancellor explain to us, then, how this deal gives our country more say in how Europe defines its financial services, which we will want to continue to trade with, compared with what we currently have as members?

**Mr Hammond:** Without wishing to digress too far, the simple point is this. Under an EEA model, the whole of the UK financial services sector and all its sub-sectors would be subject to European Union regulation in perpetuity, without any ability to opt out. Under the



model that we have agreed with the European Union under this deal, we will be able to seek equivalence where it is right for us to do so and not to seek equivalence where it is clearly not in our interest to do so, for example in the insurance sector.

A group of my hon. Friends—my hon. Friends the Members for North West Leicestershire (Andrew Bridgen), for Bournemouth West (Conor Burns), for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) and for Fareham (Suella Braverman)—made the case for what I will call an ideological Brexit: leaving with no deal and without any fear of the consequences. I profoundly disagree with them, but I respect their arguments. They are sincerely made and genuinely held.

A further group of my hon. and right hon. Friends—my right hon. Friends the Members for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith) and for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) and my hon. Friends the Members for York Outer (Julian Sturdy), for South Dorset (Richard Drax) and for Amber Valley (Nigel Mills)—made the case for getting a better deal and, implicitly, if that was not achievable, leaving without a deal. I have to say that getting a better deal is not a realistic outcome at this stage in the process. I will return to that theme in just a moment.

Finally, the argument was made by my hon. Friends the Members for Orpington (Joseph Johnson), for Bracknell (Dr Lee) and for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) and by the hon. Members for Ilford North (Wes Streeting), for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy), for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter), for Stroud (Dr Drew) and for Westminster North (Ms Buck) for a second referendum. Most of those Members were clear that, in arguing for a second referendum, what they are hoping to achieve is a reversal of the Brexit decision.

With just 73 days left before we leave the European Union, we have to recognise the basic architecture of the process we are engaged in, the constraints within which we are operating and the nature of the decision we are faced with. We in this Parliament have essentially three routes open to us over the next few weeks: a negotiated deal where both the divorce arrangements and the future relationship, as well as how we manage the process in an orderly way, are agreed with the EU, with an implementation period guaranteeing a smooth transition; an exit with no deal and no transition, where key elements of the divorce such as the financial settlement will ultimately be determined by the courts, where protections for citizens will be unilateral, with an abrupt end to single market access and other privileges of membership for both businesses and citizens, and where there will be no agreed framework for managing the process of resolving disputes, with all the attendant risks of disruption that that will bring; or the third option, a revocation of the article 50 notice and no Brexit at all.

**Wes Streeting:** I am grateful to the Chancellor for giving way. Throughout this process he has been far and away the coolest head around the Cabinet table, constantly advocating for the economic interests of the deal over some of the hotheads, many of whom left the Government. So why on earth, at this late stage, is he still countenancing the prospect of no deal? How can he justify spending billions of pounds on preparing for a no deal that he does not want, that the Prime Minister does not want, that this House does not want, that the country does

not want and that businesses do not want? It is fuelling uncertainty, it is adding to anxiety and it is costing the taxpayer. It is reckless and irresponsible. Why on earth is a serious person such as the Chancellor still persisting with this absolute fantasy? It is a disgrace. Rule it out!

**Mr Hammond:** Mr Speaker, we are engaged in a debate here and, whether the hon. Member likes it or not, a number of my colleagues have advocated the merit of a no-deal exit. I have made it very clear that I do not agree with them, but I respect their position because it is a sincerely held position, consistently expressed. While I do not agree with them, I will vigorously defend their right to express their point of view.

Those are the three possible outcomes from where we are now.

**Stella Creasy:** Will the Chancellor give way?

**Mr Hammond:** I will not give way; I need to make some progress.

It is clear to me that the majority of this House is opposed to no deal, for very good reason in my view. When the British people voted narrowly to leave the EU, they did so at the end of a campaign that had emphatically promised them a better life outside the EU. Like the vast majority of us in this House, I won my seat at the general election on a manifesto pledge to deliver on that referendum decision. So although I did not make those promises, I feel bound to ensure that we not only deliver Brexit but do so in a way that makes good on the promise of greater prosperity. A no-deal Brexit would not do that and would therefore, in my view, be seen as every bit as much a betrayal as no Brexit at all.

**Stella Creasy:** I thank the Chancellor for giving way. He has just said that it is right for this country to do Brexit in a way that would bring prosperity. Will he say which of the Brexit scenarios, which his Department has done the figures for, show this country being better off?

**Mr Hammond:** It is very clear, and I have had the discussion in the Chamber many times, that the closer our relationship with the European Union, the closer the trading partnership we are able to maintain and the less friction there is in our trading relationships, the greater our prosperity and our economic growth will be. A no-deal Brexit would not do that.

I believe we have an obligation to deliver Brexit, and to do it through a negotiated deal that protects Britain's jobs and Britain's businesses. At the other extreme, a revocation of article 50 would indeed be seen as a betrayal. It would reinforce disillusion with the political system and it would seriously risk fuelling populism at a time when we in this country can least afford it.

**David T. C. Davies:** Will my right hon. Friend confirm that all the statistics, which are being thrown around somewhat inaccurately by some in this Chamber, show that under every and any scenario Britain will be better off? It is simply a case of how much better off—that is what we are arguing about.

**Mr Hammond:** My hon. Friend is of course right. A number of hon. Members have appeared to suggest in their remarks that we might be absolutely worse off in

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certain circumstances. The analysis the Government have published shows that that is clearly not the case. The country will be better off. The economy will grow in every modelled outcome. The question is merely by how much.

I believe the great majority of right hon. and hon. Members have either come or will come to the same conclusion as me: that the only Brexit that will protect our economy for the long run while honouring the referendum decision is a negotiated, orderly agreed Brexit, with an implementation period to allow a smooth process from our membership of the EU to a future close partnership with the EU that protects the vital trade, economic security and cultural links between the UK and our neighbours—in short, a deal.

**Lucy Powell:** I thank the Chancellor for his generous comments earlier about my contribution. To be clear—I say this to offer an olive branch to the Government—the EEA, Norway-plus, common market 2.0 option would involve us voting for the withdrawal agreement, but with a different political declaration that would more closely align us with the single market and the customs union. He might want to think about that before dismissing it.

**Mr Hammond:** The hon. Lady acknowledges something that the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster said in his contribution a couple of days ago. It is important for us to remember that any form of negotiated solution requires a withdrawal agreement, and that has to include provisions around the financial settlement, citizens' rights and the Irish border. The EU has made it clear that it is not prepared to renegotiate the withdrawal agreement that has already been negotiated.

I am not suggesting that all those who recognise the need for a deal support the Prime Minister's deal. I know that that is not true, but I want to make the case that this deal can provide a way forward for all those who support a deal. I want to explain why those who call for a deal, but not this deal, as a number of Members from all parts of the House have done—people who dream of a negotiated arrangement without the Irish backstop or of single market access without the entry fee and without free movement of people—are simply dreaming, because the deal that is on the table represents the high water mark. A withdrawal agreement is a necessary precondition to any negotiated deal with the EU and to any form of transition or implementation period. Without a withdrawal agreement, the EU will not negotiate any form of future relationship.

On citizens and money, we have reached good outcomes in the withdrawal agreement. On the Irish protocol, clearly none of us is comfortable with the temporary backstop arrangement, which is why all of us—the UK Government, the Irish Government and the EU—will be seeking to avoid its use under any circumstances and have committed to using our best endeavours to ensure that it will never be used and that in the unlikely event that it is, it is replaced by new arrangements as rapidly as possible. It is not a trivial point that the backstop fundamentally challenges the EU's core principles.

We should be in no doubt, either, that the EU means what it says about the withdrawal agreement not being open for renegotiation. If we want a negotiated future

relationship of any kind—I say this to the hon. Member for Manchester Central—it will be based on the withdrawal agreement that is before the House tonight.

**Sir John Hayes:** We have heard once again that the backstop is undesirable and no one wants it. We have heard that it is temporary and an insurance policy. Every insurance policy is time-limited. If neither side wants it and everyone acknowledges that it is temporary, why can we not put a date on it and end it at a particular time? Surely that is not unreasonable.

**Mr Hammond:** I do not know how much engagement my right hon. Friend has with the insurance industry, but it would baulk at the notion that an insurance policy is time-limited. If someone is covered by an insurance policy against the acquisition of some terrible disease, such as asbestosis, it may be 10 or 20 years later that they discover they are a sufferer. They would expect the insurance put in place to cover them. The European Union and the Irish Government are very clear that the withdrawal agreement is negotiated on the basis that the backstop provides an absolute reassurance that in every circumstance, the Irish border will remain open.

The Prime Minister said earlier this evening that her deal is a compromise, and she was clear in her Lancaster House speech at the outset of the process that achieving an agreement would require compromise. The political declaration that has been achieved has exceeded our expectations in the commitments that the EU has made: an agreement to construct the closest economic relationship between the EU and any advanced economy in the world; a free trade area for goods with no tariffs, no fees, no charges and no quantitative restrictions; a commitment to an ambitious relationship on services and investment, including financial services, building on the most ambitious achievements of EU trade deals; and agreement to further co-operation across a wide range of sectors, from transport to energy and data. It provides a strong basis on which to negotiate the legal text of our future partnership agreement, and the Prime Minister has made it clear that we expect Parliament to play a prominent role as we shape the political declaration into a legally binding text.

**Alison Thewliss:** Despite what the Chancellor has just set out, the reality is that nothing he has described tonight will be as good as the situation we have now as an EU member state.

**Mr Hammond:** It is a balance, and I have personally come to the conclusion that the damage that would be done to our political system, the resulting instability and the economic consequences mean that the economic cost of going back would outweigh the economic cost of going forward. I am sorry if the hon. Lady does not agree, but I can assure her that I have thought very long and hard about this.

Those who believe, as his tests suggest the Leader of the Opposition does, that it is possible to have the exact same benefits of being in the EU while being out of it—[*Interruption.*] I know that the shadow International Trade Secretary agrees with me, because he wrote so in *The Guardian* this morning. Those people are simply wrong. I recognise that there are people on the Conservative Benches who have a principled objection to the Prime Minister's deal. I respectfully disagree with them, but I recognise that their motives are honourable.

I wish that I could be as charitable about the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Chancellor. They say they reject the Prime Minister's deal because they want a strong and collaborative future relationship, but the Prime Minister's deal delivers that. They say they want fair management of migration in the interests of the economy and communities, but the Prime Minister's deal delivers that too. They insist on measures to defend rights and protections and to protect national security and on the capacity to tackle cross-border crime and to deliver for all regions and nations of the UK, but the Prime Minister's deal does all those things already. The only one of the Labour leader's tests that the Prime Minister's deal does not meet is the demand that Britain should receive, as a non-member, the exact same benefits of membership—*[Interruption.]* I did not say the same thing. Even the Leader of the Opposition must be able to work out that such a demand could never be delivered, and of course that is why he made it. I say to him that it is time to put the national interest first, to stop chasing unicorns and to start engaging in the real debate.

The deal before the House honours our pledge to implement Brexit, delivering control of our borders, laws and money, while also fulfilling our vision for a future partnership with the EU that will support Britain's prosperity and security in the years ahead. In short, it delivers the Brexit promised in the referendum. That makes it a remarkable achievement—a compromise that everyone in the UK can get behind, however they voted in the referendum. The ability to compromise and find a way through is, after all, one of our great strengths as a nation—it is what gives our society its resilience. It is a characteristic that has been less in evidence in the Brexit debate over the last couple of years, but one that we need to rediscover as a matter of urgency.

No one is going to get exactly the Brexit they want, but in this deal we have a way forward that everyone can live with. Time is not on our side. We as a House now need to move swiftly and decisively to get behind the deal, to make the tough choices needed to simultaneously deliver the Brexit people voted for, protect our economy and our national security and give people the brighter future they were promised. Neither no deal nor no Brexit will allow us to come together as a nation and move on. Both would leave a sizeable proportion of the population feeling cheated and betrayed. The deal is the compromise that can bring the whole nation together, and I commend it to the House.

1.45 am

*Ordered.* That the debate be now adjourned.—*(Jo Churchill.)*

*Debate to be resumed tomorrow (Order, 9 January).*

## Business without Debate

### DELEGATED LEGISLATION

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),*

#### CORPORATION TAX

That the draft Investment Allowance and Cluster Area Allowance (Relevant Income: Tariff Receipts) Regulations 2018, which were laid before this House on 31 October, be approved.—*(Jo Churchill.)*

*Question agreed to.*

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),*

#### EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (AUDITORS)

That the draft Statutory Auditors and Third Country Auditors (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2018, which were laid before this House on 6 November, be approved.—*(Jo Churchill.)*

*Question agreed to.*

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),*

#### EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (MERCHANT SHIPPING)

That the draft Ship and Port Security (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2018, which were laid before this House on 21 November, be approved.—*(Jo Churchill.)*

*Question agreed to.*

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),*

#### EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (CIVIL AVIATION)

That the draft Air Passenger Rights and Air Travel Organisers' Licensing (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2018, which were laid before this House on 28 November, be approved.—*(Jo Churchill.)*

*Question agreed to.*

**Mr Speaker:** With the leave of the House, I propose that we take motions 6 to 8 together.

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),*

#### EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (FINANCIAL SERVICES)

That the draft Alternative Investment Fund Managers (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2018, which were laid before this House on 29 November, be approved.

#### EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (FINANCIAL SERVICES)

That the draft Venture Capital Funds (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2018, which were laid before this House on 13 November 2018, be approved.

#### EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (FINANCIAL SERVICES)

That the draft Social Entrepreneurship Funds (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2018, which were laid before this House on 13 November 2018, be approved.—*(Jo Churchill.)*

*Question agreed to.*

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),*

#### IMMIGRATION

That the draft Immigration (Leave to Enter and Remain) (Amendment) Order 2018, which was laid before this House on 3 December, be approved.—*(Jo Churchill.)*

*Question agreed to.*

### COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS

*Ordered.*

That Douglas Chapman be discharged from the Committee on Standards and Stewart Malcolm McDonald be added.—*(Jo Churchill.)*

### COMMITTEE OF PRIVILEGES

*Ordered.*

That Douglas Chapman be discharged from the Committee of Privileges and Stewart Malcolm McDonald be added.—*(Jo Churchill.)*

### HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE COMMITTEE

*Ordered.*

That Dr Lisa Cameron be discharged from the Health and Social Care Committee and Dr Philippa Whitford be added.—*(Bill Wiggan, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.)*



## PETITION

### Green Deal Scheme

1.47 am

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): I know that people have been waiting all day for this. The green deal is an extremely serious matter, and although the hour is late it is important that the voice of the people of Glasgow North is heard.

The petition states:

The petition of residents of Glasgow North,

Declares that the Government-backed Green Deal Scheme has adversely affected residents of Glasgow North both financially and psychologically; further that many residents have, in good faith, invested their life savings or accrued several thousands of pounds of debt to pay for work that was carried out by companies approved by the Green Deal Scheme; further that in some cases the work, including the installation of insulation and of solar panels, was incomplete; further that some were sub-standard and in many cases residents were given incorrect information which led them to believe that they would save or make money when in fact they had simply lost money; and further that in other cases the installer did not apply for building warrants and as a result they are unable to sell their properties, or have the peace of mind that their homes are safe to live in, or that the insurance policies residents continue to pay are valid without a building warrant.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to compensate financially and protect people who have found themselves suffering in this way after signing up to this Government-backed scheme using Government-approved installers.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002303]

## St Rollox Railway Works: Closure

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—(*Craig Whittaker.*)

1.49 am

**Mr Paul Sweeney** (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): It might be the small hours, but I rise to speak on no small matter. It is a very important matter facing Glaswegians in the future: that of Scottish engineering. The St Rollox locomotive and carriage works in my constituency, which has existed since 1856, is now under imminent threat of closure and I rise in support of the workers there, 200 of whom face the loss of their livelihoods, which is of great concern to the city of Glasgow.

The works were built in 1856, for the Caledonian railway. The new works were built on the site of the first railway in Scotland, the Glasgow and Garnkirk railway. To this day, it is still affectionately known as the Caley. Given that it has existed since the dawn of the railway age, it is very sad that we could be witnessing the end of an industry that is synonymous with the community of Springburn in which it was built.

During the second world war, St Rollox joined in the war effort, producing, among other things, Airspeed Horsa gliders for the Normandy landing airborne assault. Cowlairs, nearby, also produced 200,000 bearing shells for Rolls-Royce Merlin engines. For more than 170 years that community has been at the forefront of Scotland's engineering excellence. Indeed, anyone growing up in the city of Glasgow will have visited, and will be familiar with, the city's transport museum, and will have seen all the wonderful steam locomotives that were built in Springburn, more than 25,000 of which were sent to all corners of the earth. That is a real pedigree of Scottish engineering, which endures to this day. It would be appalling if the last vestiges of such a wonderful tradition were to be lost, and we, along with the trade unions, believe that that is entirely avoidable.

St Rollox has endured through nationalisation and privatisation. In 1948, when it was nationalised as part of British Railways, it became the primary Scottish centre for the repair of rolling stock, and it retains that role to this day. After British Rail Engineering Ltd was privatised in 1988, the site was operated as a rail maintenance facility by British Rail Maintenance Ltd, along with Eastleigh, Doncaster and Wolverton. It was then a nationalised industry, but during that period its size was reduced from 150 acres to about 15 today. In 1995 BRML was privatised and the site was sold to Babcock International and Siemens, along with the Wolverton site. The sites have been paired ever since. In 2002, both sites were sold to Alstom, a French-owned company, and in 2007 Alstom sold the site to a company called Railcare.

Railcare was placed in administration in July 2013. Although I was not a Member of Parliament then, I remember the great anxiety that that caused. However, from anxiety came great hope when, in August 2013, the site was acquired by a German-based engineering group, Knorr-Bremse. In 2018, it was sold to another German company, an industrial turnaround specialist called Mutares. In November 2018, just a few weeks after its acquisition, it was formed into a newco known as Gemini Rail, which was a wholly owned subsidiary

company of Mutares but also associated with Knorr-Bremse—for instance, sharing the same company house number. It is clear this has been an exercise conveniently designed quickly to rationalise operations in the UK.

As at December 2018, St Rollox continues to carry out component and rolling stock repairs and overhauls. Recent work has included overhauls of class 156s, class 158s and class 320s for Abellio ScotRail. It is the largest rolling stock repair site in Scotland. Two smaller sites in Kilmarnock are operated by Brodie and Wabtec respectively, and are still operating at capacity.

In December last year, shortly after acquiring the site, the new owner announced very suddenly that it planned to close the works, stating that it was making losses of between £3 million and £4 million. Unite, which represents more than 90% of the workers on the site and which conducted an inquiry, believes that the actual losses amounted to only about £1 million to £1.5 million. After a meeting with the managing director of the site, it was conceded that the real losses made by the company that year were only £1 million to £1.5 million at St Rollox, but it was forecast that there would be larger losses in the future as the UK rolling-stock industry was transformed, with new stock coming on line, and there was less demand for repairs and maintenance of legacy rolling stock.

**Danielle Rowley** (Midlothian) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making a powerful speech on an issue about which I know he cares deeply. Does he agree that this is another example of far-removed managers making decisions that have an impact on workers who keep our industry alive, and that we need to reverse that and put the power back into the hands of those workers?

**Mr Sweeney** *rose*—

**Hugh Gaffney** (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (Lab): I know how much fighting for good jobs in his constituency means to my hon. Friend, but I also know the history of St Rollox. My grandfather, Walter Freer, worked there in the 1920s, at the time of the Railways Act 1921. St Rollox was purpose-built for both locomotive and carriageway, and with wagon works. When I was a child, my grandad was Casey Jones, so I am proud to be here in his memory. That pride will also be shared by the community of Springburn. St Rollox railway is part of that community and has been since 1856, but now some want to close it down. There are similarities with my own community of Birkenshaw, Tannochside and Viewpark, where once the Caterpillar factory stood, the biggest European indoor factory at the time. It was 32 years today—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. An intervention should be very brief in the form of an observation or question. This is not a speech.

**Hugh Gaffney:** I am getting there.

**Mr Speaker:** No, I am sorry. If the hon. Gentleman has secured the agreement of the sponsoring Member and the Minister and the Chair, he can make a speech, but he has not secured that agreement. This is an intervention, and I think it is reaching its conclusion. [*Interruption.*] It is not a speech; sorry.

**Hugh Gaffney:** Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Some 32 years ago the factory was taken over by the workers. They looked for a way out and I am going to offer the same thing to the workers in St Rollox.

**Mr Sweeney:** I thank both my hon. Friends for making those contributions, and my hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill (Hugh Gaffney) was typically passionate about this issue. I agree with the points both of them are making about workers' control and workers having their livelihoods and value misrepresented by remote management. One of the big problems the St Rollox site has faced over the recent period under private ownership has been the increasing branch-plant relationship developed between the Wolverton site in Milton Keynes and the Springburn plant in Glasgow. All the white-collar operations have been moved to Milton Keynes and the entire operation is controlled at, and its centre of gravity has increasingly moved towards, Milton Keynes. There is not the same vigorous entrepreneurial spirit that once existed, fighting to bring in contracts, to expand the site and to invest in the site. It has increasingly been allowed to wither on the vine, and work has deliberately been turned away from St Rollox and Springburn, allowing it to almost become a self-fulfilling prophecy that it is destined for closure. That is not fair on the workforce. If they are given proper control of the site and an opportunity to flourish, I have every confidence that they could grow in the future.

The St Rollox site has a turnover of £20.4 million this year. The management accept that is enough to allow the company to wash its own face at St Rollox. It is believed that closing the site will leave Scotland's railway at a huge strategic disadvantage in maintaining its own rolling stock, depending on railway maintenance facilities in other parts of the UK.

Unite the union, which is represented in the Gallery, and others are seeking a postponement of the serving of the statutory 45 days' notice to allow more time for a rescue plan to be developed. It is understood that there is a series of contracts that could be bid for which would more than ensure the short to medium-term future of the works, although the company maintains that it would do little to address the fundamental issue of overhead costs to operate the site.

It has come to light that the compulsory consultation notice is likely to be served on the workforce this month. Apparently, this is due to the cost of overheads that Gemini, the new owners, is experiencing in running such a large and underutilised site. However, a solution is in the offing: transfer of the overall site operation and custody to ScotRail and/or Network Rail could see Gemini retain its operations as a tenant or ScotRail operate it entirely in-house as a standalone operation.

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): I thank my constituency neighbour for giving way. Does the hon. Gentleman welcome the fact that the Scottish Transport Minister has also called for a delay to the statutory consultation, which he did after our counterpart in the Scottish Parliament, Bob Doris, raised this at First Minister's questions? Does the hon. Gentleman welcome the efforts of the Scottish Government to bring all the stakeholders around the table to find a way forward for the site?

**Mr Sweeney:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. He raises the actions already taken so far; there has been a very rapid response from elected Members of all parties to address this critical issue facing such a strategic and iconic industrial facility in Glasgow.

I will come to the details of that action soon, but first I want to outline the extent of the work that could have been brought into the site but that curiously the current management has not been entrepreneurial enough to bid for, never mind secure. That includes class 320 work for ScotRail and its fleet owners Eversholt, which is potentially worth £6.5 million; class 156 work for Northern Rail, worth £3 million; class 156 work for ScotRail, worth £2 million; class 156 retrofitting for ScotRail, worth another £1.5 million; and class 153 ScotRail work, worth another £3 million. There is also exam and inspection work unable to be done at other ScotRail depots or in Scotland because they are at capacity and do not have the workforce. In addition, there is high-speed train conversion work also available and class 170 work worth another £3.5 million, as well as the Caledonian Sleeper work. There is a huge array of potential opportunities and investment to be brought into the site that it has not even considered bidding for. It is bizarre that the company would not be doing that if it is not a branch-plant economy and relationship.

**Chris Stephens** (Glasgow South West) (SNP): The hon. Gentleman's speech has been very passionate and I agree with a lot of what he has said. Does he agree that another danger is that the 45-day redundancy notice does not give enough time for a solution to be found for the company and the highly skilled workforce at St Rollox?

**Mr Sweeney:** I very much agree with the hon. Gentleman, who makes a pertinent point about the triggering of the HR1 statutory notice, which starts the clock ticking. In my previous job at BAE Systems, I remember when that clock was set ticking at a mass meeting in 2012. At that time, more than 1,000 jobs were put at risk on the Clyde, and I know how unpleasant that feeling was, especially just before Christmas. The workforce were really sold short by the management. In the morning they were given their Christmas hampers, and in the afternoon they were told that their works were closing down. What appalling corporate social responsibility that was.

This is a testament to the breakdown of trust between Gemini and the workforce, and we have to fight hard to delay the statutory notice as much as possible, because there is a viable solution. The site is fundamentally viable. Indeed, it is believed that one opportunity would be provided through the electrification of the line. We have recently seen investment in the Edinburgh to Glasgow improvements, and this is only a short distance away. It is less than a mile to the site, and the electrification of the line into the works would allow more work to be accessed readily without using shunters. A previous proposal was considered by the coalition Government, and it was anticipated that capital costs of approximately £700,000 would be required at that time. I urge the UK and Scottish Governments to instruct Network Rail to action an immediate feasibility study to look into electrifying the line into St Rollox under control period 6 of Network Rail's funding.

I went to meet the workforce at the site, along with the MSPs from the area and the leader of the Scottish Labour party, Richard Leonard. We consulted the

workforce directly, and a meeting was subsequently held with the Scottish Transport Minister, Michael Matheson MSP. He has confirmed that officials at Transport Scotland and Scottish Enterprise have been working towards pulling together several organisations that are members of the rail supply network, along with potential customers for the services that Springburn provides. He has also asked that Gemini postpone the commencement of the closure consultation to allow all the options to be explored, and we are absolutely confident that there is a viable future for this site. It is fundamentally viable, and it has improved massively. Indeed, I visited it when I was working with Scottish Enterprise, and I was very impressed by its modern nature, its highly efficient operations and the work that had gone into massively improving its efficiency, safety and costs over the period of ownership by Knorr-Bremse. I am hopeful that that can be sustained. There is a model for restructuring that could happen.

I had the opportunity to meet the rail Minister earlier today, and we discussed the opportunities for the site. There is huge disruption in the rail industry in the UK with the onset of new rolling stock, but this site has endured disruptions and changes across the railway industry from the dawn of the railway age. It was built when the first railway was constructed in Scotland, and it can endure again in the future. There is an opportunity to restructure the site and I am hopeful, as I know ScotRail is, that it can be a strategic component of Scotland's rail industry long into the future. I believe that if the rail Minister is amenable to acting proactively and urgently with his counterpart in Scotland, we will be able to work collaboratively at all levels of Government to ensure that the site will endure for the next 150 years.

This is a huge opportunity for Scotland's railway industry, and I would hate to see that value, opportunity and potential destroyed simply to serve the short-term benefit of a private operator that is clearly treating its workforce with contempt. I want that operator to understand that the opportunity to be involved in the site is not just in its own self-interest, and that it is also an opportunity to defend and promote the growth of Scottish railway engineering long into the future. The only reason that the community of Springburn exists is because of the railway industry, and to lose the last vestige of the purpose and unifying identity that underpins our community would be hugely tragic. The worst thing is that the site is not a lame duck; it is entirely viable but it has been sold out by a lack of effort and entrepreneurial spirit on the part of its private management. We must wrest back control of the site and relaunch it for the future, to ensure that Scottish railway engineering can thrive long into this century.

2.3 am

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Andrew Jones):** It seems very late to be starting an Adjournment debate. Indeed, it is so late that we do not even have the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) with us.

I start by congratulating the hon. Member for Glasgow North East (Mr Sweeney) on securing this debate and on the passionate way he has spoken about this important industry in his constituency. We had a very positive meeting with him, the company and the unions earlier today, and I entirely recognise the fact that Gemini Rail Services' announcement on 12 December of a consultation



on proposals to close the depot had serious implications for all the people who work there, their families and the neighbouring communities. I recognise the impact that this announcement will have had on them.

I should also point out, as I did earlier on, that the Government do not have control over the direction of Gemini Rail Services, which is a private business. As it clarified in our meeting, this was a commercial decision taken in response to market conditions and the changes we are seeing as our rail network modernises, with new rolling stock coming into service. The provision of railway services that both begin and end in Scotland is a devolved matter, as is economic development. I know that the Scottish Government have engaged with the company and the unions about the planned closure and are taking action, to which I will return a little later.

This debate provides us with the opportunity to consider both the importance of the rail sector to the UK economy and the rail industry's prospects. Our rail industry is critical as one of this country's most vital and intensively used transport arteries. We rely upon it for the rapid movement of people and goods to the right destinations at the right time reliably and safely, day after day. On those measures, the UK rail industry has been a great success. Despite a huge increase in rail usage, we have one of the safest railways in Europe, with over 80% passenger satisfaction and over a billion more passenger journeys a year.

The Government are investing a record amount of money. The budget for the next control period—CP6, starting in April this year—is £48 billion to boost performance and sustain growth. The budget for the Scottish rail industry will be £4.8 billion. The provision of rail services in Scotland is obviously a matter for the Scottish Government, but I wanted to highlight that significant figure. The CP6 funding settlement provides more funding than would have been allocated under the Barnett formula, so it is a generous settlement that provides ample funding for the Scottish railway.

**Mr Sweeney:** The Minister is making a number of pertinent points, but the fundamental crux of this issue is that while it is a private decision for a private company at this point, it is clear that the company, ScotRail and Network Rail could work collaboratively to restructure the site to put it on a sound commercial footing and allow it to win business competitively. This is not about bailing something out or state aid for a failing industry; this is a kernel of expertise and a centre of excellence that could thrive with a restructuring of ownership. That would require urgent, robust intervention from both ScotRail, Transport Scotland, the Department for Transport and Network Rail. Does he agree that that is the way to proceed?

**Andrew Jones:** I am coming on to that. My point is that as we start this period of high investment, both on a UK basis and within Scotland, we will need the workforce and the supply chain to deliver on those ambitions. Companies such as Gemini Rail Services and the works at Springburn and hundreds of other companies up and down the country, including train firms and those designing signalling, all contribute to the modern rail industry that we need. Partnership between the public and private sectors has delivered real improvements, and I will come on to the hon. Gentleman's specific points.

The rail supply chain is a significant industry, and I do not think that people realise just how big it is. It employs over 225,000 people and adds £5.2 billion to our economy. I recognise that supply chain companies, in addition to being important players in the sector, are important within their communities, which was a key point made powerfully by the hon. Gentleman. That is why we have launched the rail sector deal. We need the industry and Government to create a partnership to deliver the jobs, skills and growth that we require. The deal is important and has several agreed outcomes, such as reducing the cost of digital signalling and ensuring that the supply chain better understands future demand, giving companies more confidence to invest in skills and innovation. Through the sector deal, the industry will deliver long-term education and a people strategy for the rail sector. These are important matters and, as the hon. Gentleman says, this plant can play a vital role, through the sector deal and through the supply chain work, in the rail industry of the future. The deal is about creating the capacity and capability for the rail industry to export more, helping to build more trading relationships with partners across the globe as we leave the EU.

I can understand why the hon. Gentleman has called this debate and why other colleagues have intervened, because this issue matters. No one wants to see industrial closures. That is especially true when there is such significant industrial heritage, which this plant very clearly has. From a basic human perspective, we all feel natural concern for all those who may lose their job, and there is also concern about the loss of skills from both the Scottish economy and the sector as a whole.

The company said earlier today that it is projecting a short way into the future but cannot see the supply chain or orders to keep the operation going, and it said that there might be some way of constructing a deal that would bring different parties together to construct an offer, and perhaps to change the nature of the work at the plant. I am very clear that that would be a fantastic opportunity, should it be possible. As I said in the meeting, I will write to the Scottish Transport Minister to highlight this debate and the concerns that have been expressed.

The hon. Gentleman talked of a consortium coming together for a deal, which would be a positive thing to happen. Speed will clearly be of the essence, and I will make sure that my communication with Mr Matheson, the Scottish Transport Minister, is prompt.

Network Rail could electrify part of its network to open more opportunities for electric rolling stock to be maintained at the plant. Such things need to be considered, but I entirely recognise the point about timeliness. Given the amount of money that rail electrification has been costing, £700,000 is a very small budget, but the point remains. Opportunity exists, and it should be taken.

**Mr Sweeney:** I thank the Minister for giving way once again. He says that urgency is critical in this situation, particularly when we have the sword of Damocles hanging over us with the serving of a statutory notice, which sets the clock ticking on a 45-day consultation, ultimately leading to the loss of those jobs, the dissipation of that skill critical mass and the closure of the site.

[Mr Sweeney]

It is particularly concerning that the company instructed its facilities manager to dump £1.2 million of materials in the form of paint, gangway strouds and brackets, and so on. That is a huge waste that the company is already prepared to write off. It stripped all the signage from the site over the weekend, so it is clear that we need to act urgently to urge the company to delay this, because there is an opportunity to salvage the site. The company has to act fairly in engaging with all stakeholders, state and private, to form a solution that can retain the jobs and integrity of the site. Currently, the omens are not good. Will the Minister write to the owners of the company urging them to hold their fire for now?

**Andrew Jones:** In the meeting this afternoon, the company said it would be very happy to participate in the consortium the hon. Gentleman describes, which seems very positive. I hope all sides will enter this opportunity with their eyes open and with a constructive attitude.

**Chris Stephens:** As well as writing to the Scottish Transport Minister, the Minister could press Network Rail on what it can do to save these jobs in the city of Glasgow.

**Andrew Jones:** The work stream that Network Rail takes north of the border is determined north of the border, so I would be cautious about any discourtesy to

Scottish Government colleagues by treading on their toes, but I understand the hon. Gentleman's point, which I will resolve with the Scottish Minister before taking any action. But if Network Rail can play a part, it should do so. If the company can play a part, it should do so. With the company, the local political leadership, the national political leadership and the trade unions all participating in a positive way, it is possible that this plant may be saved, with the injection of opportunity via some changes to infrastructure. Ultimately, however, it will need to have a supply chain of orders, otherwise it will continue to be loss-making and its future will not be sustainable.

As I was saying, the opportunity is significant, because of the sheer nature of the investment being made across our railway industry. Even though things are devolved in this area, I recognise that the UK Government can highlight issues and we can discuss issues here. I will take the actions that I have described to try to encourage all the parties to come together to form a deal. I hope that I have been able to demonstrate that the Government take seriously the importance of the supply sector into the industry and that the actions we can take, although limited because of the devolution settlement, might help this deal come to fruition. I would be very keen if it did.

*Question put and agreed to.*

2.15 am

*House adjourned.*

# House of Commons

*Tuesday 15 January 2019*

*The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock*

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## Oral Answers to Questions

### HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### NHS Workforce Shortages

1. **Neil Coyle** (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab): What recent steps he has taken to tackle NHS workforce shortages. [908556]

8. **Helen Jones** (Warrington North) (Lab): What steps he is taking to recruit and retain additional staff in the NHS. [908563]

17. **Stella Creasy** (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): What recent steps he has taken to tackle NHS workforce shortages. [908572]

19. **Jim McMahon** (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab/Co-op): What recent estimate he has made of the level of staff shortages throughout the NHS. [908574]

**The Minister for Health (Stephen Hammond):** Good morning, Mr Speaker. The NHS employs more staff now than at any time in its 70-year history, with a significant growth in newly qualified staff since 2012. We have increased the number of available training places for doctors, nurses and midwives, and taken further actions to boost the supply of nurses, including offering new routes into the profession and encouraging those who have left nursing to return. The long-term plan, which was announced last week, sets out the framework to ensure that the NHS has the staff it needs.

**Neil Coyle:** Guy's and St Thomas's, which is based in my constituency, offers globally renowned, first-class healthcare, but the trust has seen a massive drop in applications from other EU member states, including of almost 90% in midwives alone. All vacant posts across the NHS present the risk of longer waiting times and risk patient safety, so why did the Government not publish the workforce strategy in the so-called long-term plan? When will it appear? Will the Government reinstate nursing bursaries to address the shocking staff shortfall across the NHS?

**Stephen Hammond:** As I said a moment ago, the long-term plan sets out a framework to ensure that, over the next 10 years, the NHS will have the staff it needs. To ensure that we have the detailed plan the hon. Gentleman wants, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has commissioned Baroness Harding to lead a rapid and inclusive programme of work to set out a detailed workforce implementation plan, which will be published in the spring.

**Helen Jones:** Fifty per cent. of the staff the NHS will need in 15 years' time are working there now, yet one in 10 nurses is leaving, 80% of junior doctors report excessive stress and six out of 10 consultants want to retire at 60 or before. Does the Minister not accept that this Government have presided over a disastrous decline in morale in the NHS, and will he say what the workforce plan will do to address it?

**Stephen Hammond:** Nurses are at the absolute heart of our NHS. There are 13,400 more nurses since May 2010. We have announced the biggest expansion of nurse training places, with 5,000 more available from 2018. Alongside that, we are opening up new routes. As the hon. Lady will know, the workforce is at the heart of the long-term plan and, as I have just said, a detailed workforce implementation plan will be published in the spring.

**Stella Creasy:** Last week, a 14-year-old boy lost his life in my local community, yet in September, when the Department wrote to my local community asking for ideas about mental health provision, I wrote back to Ministers asking for an urgent meeting to talk about how we could get mental health workers into our schools to work with young people who might be at risk of being involved in gang violence and youth violence. With the shortage of mental health workers at a rate of one in 10, can I finally have that meeting with Ministers so that we can talk urgently about how to support such young people and save not only money, but lives?

**Stephen Hammond:** The answer to that question is yes. The Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Jackie Doyle-Price), will be delighted to meet the hon. Lady.

**Jim McMahon:** The most recent Care Quality Commission inspection of the Royal Oldham Hospital said that it failed to meet safe staffing numbers in maternity and it only had 85% of the required staffing contingent in surgery. There is a human cost to that. We see list after list where people have died, including children, because of unsafe staffing numbers in that hospital. Where is the urgency that is required to address that? Will the Minister meet me about this particular hospital to see what more can be done?

**Stephen Hammond:** The hon. Gentleman is right. I recognise that the overall CQC rating was that the hospital requires improvement. I understand that the funding that has gone into it has been more than adequate and that it is improving. However, I recognise the concerns he raises and I would be delighted to meet him to discuss them.

**David Tredinnick** (Bosworth) (Con): Will my hon. Friend congratulate Conservative-controlled Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council's health and wellbeing



board, and its approach to NHS workforce shortages? It has, for several years, been working on collaboration between GPs and community services, which is in line with the 10-year plan. Will he look at the registers of the Professional Standards Authority, which are not mentioned in the long-term plan, and see if he can make better use of the 80,000 properly regulated practitioners on those registers?

**Stephen Hammond:** My hon. Friend is right to recognise that community provision lies at the heart of the long-term plan, and that a number of health service professionals make up that community provision. If he wishes to write to me about registers, I will be delighted to respond.

**Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con):** The Minister knows about our difficulties in recruiting obstetricians, which has led to what we very much hope is the temporary closure of the full obstetrics service at Horton General Hospital in Banbury. We are doing everything we can locally to rectify that situation. What more can the Minister do to help us nationally?

**Stephen Hammond:** I pay tribute to my hon. Friend's campaign and her tireless work on behalf of her constituents. Figures from the Royal College of Midwives show that there are over 2,000 more midwives on our wards since 2010. The NHS plans to train 3,000 more midwives over the next four years, and as of last September there are over 5,000 more doctors in obstetrics and gynaecology than there were in May 2010. The NHS is hoping to fulfil what my hon. Friend wants to see.

**Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con):** Will the Minister confirm that since the Brexit referendum in June 2016 there has been an increase of 4,000 EU nationals working in our NHS?

**Stephen Hammond:** My hon. Friend and I do not always agree on everything about the EU, but numbers and statistics show that he is correct on that matter.

**Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con):** Clearly, it is important as we move forward with the NHS to train more doctors and nurses. What is the Minister doing to encourage young people to start training to become nurses, doctors, and for other positions in the health service?

**Stephen Hammond:** My hon. Friend is right, and we are ensuring more routes into the nursing profession, such as nursing apprenticeships and nursing associates. We are training more GPs, and we are determined to get 5,000 extra GPs into general practice. A record 3,400 doctors have been recruited into GP training and, as part of the long-term plan, newly qualified doctors and nurses entering general practice will be offered a two-year fellowship to support them to stay there.

**Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab):** The long-term plan admits that staffing shortfalls are "unsustainable", yet incredibly there is no mention anywhere in the document of the damage done by the abolition of the nursing bursary. The plan contains an ambition to double the number of volunteers within three years, and although we should rightly celebrate the fantastic contribution made by volunteers, is it not

damning that, with a record 100,000 vacancies in the NHS, the main plank of the Government's strategy to tackle the workforce crisis is to rely on volunteers?

**Stephen Hammond:** The hon. Gentleman is right to say that volunteers in the NHS provide an invaluable service, but he is completely wrong to suggest that any part of the long-term plan relies on volunteers. There is an expansion in numbers of nursing associates to deal with those vacancies and, as I have said to other hon. Members, we have seen an increase in the number of doctors in GP training. Obviously, he will welcome the £20.5 billion a year that is going into the national health service. That will inevitably mean more doctors and nurses, which is why we are making more training places available.

### Leaving the EU: Contingency Planning

2. **Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab):** What progress his Department has made on contingency planning for the UK leaving the EU without a deal. [908557]

3. **Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab):** What progress his Department has made on contingency planning for the UK leaving the EU without a deal. [908558]

18. **Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP):** What preparations his Department has made for the UK leaving the EU in March 2019. [908573]

**The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Matt Hancock):** We do not want a no-deal scenario in our exit from the European Union, but it is incumbent on us to prepare in case. We asked medical suppliers to stockpile a further six-week supply over and above normal levels, and that work is going well. We will continue to work to ensure the unhindered supply of medicines in all Brexit scenarios.

**Wes Streeting:** The Prime Minister's threatening of this Parliament and the country with no deal is entirely reckless, irresponsible and unnecessary. It is also causing unnecessary fear and anxiety among a range of clinicians and patients who rely on the consistent supply of life-saving drugs. The Secretary of State says that the Government are stockpiling medicines for up to six weeks. Will he do the right thing and commission an independent assessment of those plans so that patients can be reassured? Better still, will he go back to the Cabinet and say that no responsible Health Secretary would allow no deal to take place, no responsible Prime Minister would allow no deal to take place, and this House will not allow no deal to take place?

**Matt Hancock:** It is incumbent on me as Health Secretary and on my team to ensure that we prepare for all potential scenarios. Of course, because of the overwhelming vote of the House in favour of the withdrawal Bill, no deal is the law of the land unless the House does anything else. If the hon. Gentleman is so worried, the best thing that he and all his friends can do is vote for the deal tonight.

**Ian Murray:** Would it not have been a better use of taxpayers' money to have spent hundreds of millions of pounds on frontline patient care rather than on no-deal

planning? The Secretary of State has just said to my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting) that the Government have to prepare for all possible scenarios. A responsible Secretary of State would rule out one of those scenarios, which is no deal.

**Matt Hancock:** As I said, thanks to the votes of Members in all parts of the House, no deal is a matter of the law of the land. They can't get away from it: if they don't like no deal, they need to join me in the Lobby tonight, and vote for the Prime Minister's deal.

**Tommy Sheppard:** In Scotland, 6% of all social care staff are nationals of European countries. In England the figure is 8%. In Scotland, despite the Scottish Government paying the real living wage of £9 an hour, that comes nowhere near the £30,000 threshold proposed for a tier 2 visa. Can the Minister tell us here today what action he will take to avert a staffing crisis in social care?

**Matt Hancock:** We have brought into place already the EU settlement scheme to ensure that those EU workers who are working in social care and in the NHS can and should remain here and continue to contribute, as they do so valuably.

**Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con):** I know the Secretary of State wants to avoid a no-deal scenario, but can he look at the case of prescription foods, which my constituent Cait, who has PKU, relies on for keeping her life, and make sure they are also covered by no-deal planning?

**Matt Hancock:** We are working to ensure that the prioritisation of not just medicines, but medical products and other things needed for the health of the nation, is taken into consideration. There is detailed work under way that is clinically led; the medical director of the NHS is heavily engaged in that work and works very closely with the Department on it. I am very happy to go through the details of my hon. Friend's constituency case to make sure that that is also being dealt with appropriately. I am glad that, because she does not want no deal, she will be voting with the Government tonight.

**Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP):** Legislation was passed two years ago so that the Secretary of State could end profiteering by some drug companies. Now drug shortages after a no-deal Brexit could mean soaring costs across UK health services, so why have the Government not set the regulations from this legislation so that we can use the powers and avoid a black market in medication?

**Matt Hancock:** We have already taken action to ensure that the cost of drugs is reduced. I am very happy to write to the hon. Lady with the extensive details of the agreements that have been made. The legislation is indeed important; so, too, is working with the drugs companies to make sure that we keep those costs down and yet also get the drugs that people need.

**Dr Whitford:** As the precursors of medical radioisotopes have a half-life of less than three days, they cannot be stockpiled. I have frequently asked the Government how they will maintain a steady supply if there is a no-deal Brexit. Can the Secretary of State answer—and please don't say "Seaborne Freight"?

**Matt Hancock:** No, absolutely, we have ensured that there will be aircraft available, and air freight, to make sure that we can get those isotopes that have a short shelf life and cannot be stockpiled, and that there is unhindered supply. I make the following point to the hon. Lady and her colleagues, with an open mind and in a spirit of collaboration: if she is worried about no deal, which she seems to be, she and her party should support the Government tonight.

**Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab/Co-op):** The Secretary of State boasts of being the world's biggest buyer of fridges to stockpile medicines, but if sterling drops because of the Government's mishandling of Brexit, the parallel trade in medicines could mean that stockpiles rapidly deplete as medicines are quickly exported back into the EU. Will he impose restrictions and suspend the necessary export licences that he is responsible for? Otherwise, he risks his fridges standing empty.

**Matt Hancock:** Of course, we have the legislative tools and powers the hon. Gentleman describes at our disposal; we know that. Nevertheless, stockpiling is going according to plan—it is going well—and the pharmaceutical industry has responded very well, with great responsibility. But I say, rather like a broken record—[HON. MEMBERS: "You are."] Yes, and it is important that I say it again and again and again. There is one route open to the House to avoid no deal, which Opposition Members purport to be worried about. They cannot complain about no deal unless they are prepared to do something about no deal, and to do something about no deal, they need to vote with the Government tonight.

**Jonathan Ashworth:** If the Secretary of State has those powers, he should use them now. This is going to be the biggest disruption to patient safety we have ever seen. He is also proposing emergency legislation that means patients might not get access to the medicines their GPs prescribe. Can he tell us whether an insulin patient will be able to get their prescription within a day of presenting at a pharmacy? He is the Secretary of State for Health; why will he not do the responsible thing and rule out no deal, which will do so much damage to the NHS and patients?

**Matt Hancock:** Because of the votes of most of us in the House, including the hon. Gentleman, no deal of course is the law of the land unless the House passes something else. He is a reasonable man. He is a mentor of the old Blairite moderate wing of his party. He is absolutely a centrist. I do not believe that, privately, he believes in the hard-left guff that comes from other Opposition Front Benchers. He is a very sensible man and I like him an awful lot, so after this session and before 7 o'clock tonight, why does he not take a look in the mirror and ask himself, "In the national interest, is it best to vote for the deal and avoid no deal, or is it best to play politics?"

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Let me say very gently to the Secretary of State, who is renowned for his charm in all parts of the House, that his likes and dislikes are a matter of immense fascination to colleagues, including the Chair, but what is of greater interest is his brevity.

### Fibromyalgia: Diagnosis

4. **Toby Perkins** (Chesterfield) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the effectiveness of primary care in diagnosing fibromyalgia; and if he will make a statement. [908559]

**The Minister for Care (Caroline Dinéage):** Diagnosing fibromyalgia can be difficult because there is no specific diagnostic test and symptoms can vary. A range of support exists to help GPs, including an e-learning course developed by the Royal College of General Practitioners and Versus Arthritis, and a medical guide on diagnosis and treatment developed by Fibromyalgia Action UK.

**Toby Perkins:** I am grateful to the Minister for that answer. I just hot-footed it here from Westminster Hall, where an excellent debate on fibromyalgia took place this morning. We heard a huge amount of evidence about people who suffer with fibromyalgia having waited more than a year to be diagnosed and having received treatments irrelevant to their condition. Clearly, diagnosis is not working at the moment. What more can the Minister tell us about investment in research to improve diagnosis and to try to get better outcomes for fibromyalgia sufferers?

**Caroline Dinéage:** I feel that my colleague the Secretary of State has set the bar for compliments to Members this morning. On that basis, I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his Westminster Hall debate, which raised a key issue. The Department's National Institute for Health Research welcomes funding applications for research into any aspect of human health, including fibromyalgia. Its support for that research over the past five years includes £1.8 million funding for research projects and £0.6 million funding for clinical trials through the clinical research network.

**Eddie Hughes** (Walsall North) (Con): Will the Minister endorse the excellent work by Sue Worrall and her team at Walsall Fibro and ME Link, whose monthly meetings seek to tackle the isolation frequently associated with those conditions?

**Caroline Dinéage:** I warmly welcome the organisation that my hon. Friend mentioned. There are some outstanding voluntary community-led organisations up and down the country that provide invaluable support for people who suffer from this condition. We know that symptoms can vary and that it can be incredibly distressing, so that support is enormously valuable.

**Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): The effectiveness of primary care in this and many other areas is undermined for the most vulnerable and poorest communities by this Government's insistence on putting out GP contracts for competitive tender, even when there is no competition to serve poor communities. The Watson review of GP partnerships was published today. Will the Minister commit to reviewing the requirement for competitive tender for GP partnerships?

**Caroline Dinéage:** We do of course support the recommendations that were part of that review. We have announced massive investment in primary and community services and spend on those services will grow as the NHS budget grows.

### Cannabis-based Products: Medicinal Use

5. **Ronnie Cowan** (Inverclyde) (SNP): What guidance his Department has issued to clinicians on the prescription of cannabis-based products for medicinal use. [908560]

13. **Mr Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): What recent clinical advice he has sought on the licensing of cannabis oil for medicinal purposes. [908568]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Steve Brine):** The Government acted swiftly to change the law to allow cannabis-based products to be prescribed for those patients who might benefit, with advice from the chief medical officer and the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs. NHS England and the CMO have written to clinicians in England highlighting the interim clinical guidance available.

**Ronnie Cowan:** When the Government announced that they were prepared to allow medical cannabis under prescription, the decision was welcomed by many people throughout the United Kingdom who suffer from a range of conditions, but the process that has been adopted has failed to deliver. When will the Government take steps to facilitate GPs to prescribe and pharmacists to provide the appropriate effective forms of medical cannabis?

**Steve Brine:** We commissioned the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence to produce further guidance that should be out by October. Doctors are right to be cautious when the evidence base remains limited and further research in this area is vital. The change to the law will facilitate that. The National Institute for Health Research has called for research proposals to enhance our knowledge in the area and I think that that is absolutely right.

**Mr Speaker:** I call Alistair Carmichael. Where is the fellow? I hope that he is not in Orkney and Shetland because that would be a pity. Never mind, I am sure that we will see him ere long.

### NHS Facilities

6. **Mr William Wragg** (Hazel Grove) (Con): What steps he is taking to improve and upgrade NHS facilities. [908561]

15. **Colin Clark** (Gordon) (Con): What steps he is taking to improve and upgrade NHS facilities. [908570]

22. **Rebecca Pow** (Taunton Deane) (Con): What steps he is taking to improve and upgrade NHS facilities. [908578]

**The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Matt Hancock):** In September, we announced £145 million to upgrade NHS facilities for winter and, last month, £1 billion as part of the NHS long-term plan. Future capital spending decisions will be for the spending review.

**Mr Wragg:** I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his answer. He will know the importance of Stepping Hill Hospital to my constituents. Will he work with me and others to ensure that the hospital can secure additional



capital investment to expand accident and emergency, improve outpatient facilities and provide additional car parking?

**Matt Hancock:** I look forward to working with my hon. Friend and his local colleagues on what we can do to support Stepping Hill Hospital further. He is an assiduous representative for Hazel Grove who makes the argument very clearly, both to me and to the NHS Minister, who has already heard from him on several occasions. We did manage to provide £1 million for upgrades to Stepping Hill Hospital ahead of this winter and we understand the case that they make.

**Colin Clark:** Since 1980, Aberdeen University has been at the forefront of MRI development. May I invite the Secretary of State to visit Aberdeen medical facilities to see the fast field-cycling scanner, a development of national importance to stroke diagnosis?

**Matt Hancock:** Yes, I love going to Aberdeen and look forward to another reason for going to the north-east. Of course, Aberdeen University and the UK have been at the cutting edge of this innovation for years and must be for years to come.

**Rebecca Pow:** I first thank the Department for supporting me in my case for upgrading the theatres at Musgrove Park Hospital.

Having skilled staff to work in these places is really important and the University Centre Somerset is one of just two places piloting the nursing associates programme. It is growing really well and it is a vital stepping stone between healthcare assistant and nurse. Will the Secretary of State join me in congratulating the college on how well the programme is going and meet me to discuss the option of a degree course?

**Matt Hancock:** Yes, absolutely. We support nursing associates and I am delighted to see the rapid expansion that is taking place. We want more universities and higher education institutes to come to the fore to provide that sort of education. I cannot wait to meet my hon. Friend.

**Mr Speaker:** Including, of course, as the right hon. Gentleman knows from his recent meeting with me, the University of Buckingham in my constituency.

**Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op):** One of my constituents, who is 17, seriously ill with breathing difficulties and in need of urgent specialist care, is waiting for a room to be available at the Royal Brompton. Is the Secretary of State aware of any delays and whether these have been caused by not having sufficient NHS facilities at the Royal Brompton to meet such urgent demand?

**Matt Hancock:** I have not heard any of the details of that case before now. If the hon. Lady will write to me, I will be very happy to talk to her and engage with her on what we can do for her constituent.

**Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD):** It is 12 long months since the Government closed their consultation on whether to upgrade NHS radiotherapy facilities. Meanwhile, in south Cumbria, cancer patients

have to make daily round trips of up to four hours for weeks on end to receive treatment. When will the Government respond to the consultation and when will they invest in satellite radiotherapy provision in places such as Westmorland General Hospital?

**Matt Hancock:** We will respond to the consultation very soon. We wanted to get the NHS long-term plan published first, because clearly the two are strongly linked. I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman's work chairing the all-party group on radiotherapy and I look forward to working with him.

**Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op):** Plymouth is pioneering health and wellbeing hubs—a new type of NHS facility. I am most excited about the new one in Plymouth city centre, which will include directly employed GPs and mental health, sexual health and dentistry services. We have submitted a funding application to the Minister. When will he be able to fund and support that pioneering project, a new type of NHS facility delivering in some of our poorest communities?

**Matt Hancock:** The hon. Gentleman's neighbour in Plymouth has already brought this to my attention and made the case very strongly for it. I am still waiting for the "Thank you" for the new facilities at Derriford Hospital, but I am a massive supporter of the work that is going on in the local area and the NHS in Plymouth will go from strength to strength under this Government.

**Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con):** The maintenance backlog across the NHS is deeply worrying. It affects equipment as well as buildings. Two of the 10 operating theatres at Torbay Hospital remain out of action. Would the Secretary of State meet me to discuss the impact that that is having on patient care? It is increasing waiting lists and leading to very short-notice cancellations to make way for emergency cases. Torbay Hospital has a £34 million maintenance backlog. It is deeply worrying.

**Matt Hancock:** I am very happy to meet my hon. Friend, who makes a very important point. Of course, future allocations of capital are for the spending review. I look forward to working with her to try to sort out the problems in Torbay and across the board.

**Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab):** A consultation is taking place about the closure of Faith House GP practice on Beverley Road in Hull. It is partly about the premises being less suitable for delivering modern healthcare, but also about how difficult it is to recruit GPs. What will the Secretary of State do about GP services being removed from communities? How will he support the development of GP services in those areas?

**Matt Hancock:** The £4.5 billion extra in the long-term plan that is going to primary and community care is absolutely targeted at solving problems like that. As it happens, I know Beverley Road in Hull quite well; I had family who lived there. It is very important that the services in primary care and in the community are there and are available to people to ensure that that crucial element of our prevention agenda is strengthened to keep the pressure off hospitals, too.

23. [908579] **Suella Braverman** (Fareham) (Con): Fareham Community Hospital is seeing increased usage these days, thanks to local GPs working together to provide a same-day access scheme. However, patients are disappointed about the lack of a mobile breast screening unit on site. Will my right hon. Friend join me in calling on community health partnerships and Portsmouth Hospitals NHS Trust to explore ways of providing that vital service, which could help hundreds of people every day?

**Matt Hancock:** Yes, I would love to do that. I will raise it with Mike Richards, who is running a review of the future of screening services. I am sure that the whole House will want to join me in congratulating my hon. Friend on her forthcoming use of maternity services in the NHS.

### Registered Nurses: Staffing Levels

7. **Karen Lee** (Lincoln) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of trends in the staffing levels of registered nurses in hospitals. [908562]

**The Minister for Health (Stephen Hammond):** Our policies have allowed the NHS to recruit over 13,400 more nurses into all wards since 2010. Additionally, we have increased the number of available nurse training places, offering new routes into the profession and encouraging those who have left nursing to return to practice, alongside retaining more of the staff that we have now.

With your permission, Mr Speaker, I was so enthusiastic about the number of extra staff in the national health service, I might have inadvertently misled my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis): it is 500 obs and gynae doctors since 2010.

**Mr Speaker:** In calling the hon. Member for Lincoln, I congratulate her on her birthday.

**Karen Lee:** You are very kind, Mr Speaker. The latest Care Quality Commission report on Lincoln County Hospital found sufficient nursing staff on only four of the 28 days reviewed and a heavy reliance on agency staff. As people know, I was a cardiac nurse for 12 years, and I can tell the House that agency nurses are expensive and create extra work—often they cannot do IVs and they are not familiar with paperwork, so the regular nurses end up doing half their jobs for them. Will the Secretary of State explain to the House why the NHS long-term plan has no policy on effectively tackling understaffing and no mention of reinstating the nursing bursary, which enabled nurses like me to train?

**Stephen Hammond:** The hon. Lady is right: we want to see more nurses in the NHS. That is why we have provided funding to increase nurse training places by 25% and why the long-term plan will have a detailed workforce implementation plan. She talked about the bursary, but since that was replaced nurses on current training schemes are typically 25% better off. Alongside that, additional funds support learning.

**Rachel Maclean** (Redditch) (Con): I welcome the fact that my local trust has 94 more nurses than in 2010. What is the Minister doing to ensure greater retention of nurses at my local hospitals, so that they have their own nurses instead of relying so much on agency nurses?

**Stephen Hammond:** As I said earlier, nurses are absolutely the heart of our NHS, and my hon. Friend is right about the extra number of nurses at her hospitals. She is also right that retention is one of our big issues. That is why the Agenda for Change pay award was put through last year, why we are working with Health Education England to look at other retention methods and why we are increasing the number of training places to ensure that we not only retain nurses but recruit more into the national health service.

**Julie Cooper** (Burnley) (Lab): I join you, Mr Speaker, in wishing my colleague a happy birthday. I acknowledge that no one knows better than she does about the crisis in nursing staff levels. At the same time, the shortfall in GPs has risen to 6,000, and a third of all practices have been unable to fill vacancies for over three months. Unsurprisingly, waiting times for GP appointments are at an all-time high. As ever under this Government, it is patients who suffer. The situation is set to get worse, with more practices destined to close this year. Why are the Government not taking urgent action to tackle that? When will we finally see the workforce implementation plan that has been promised?

**Stephen Hammond:** The hon. Lady asks about GPs. As she would want to acknowledge, a record number of doctors are being recruited into GP training. We are determined to deliver an extra 5,000 doctors into general practice. NHS England and Health Education England have a number of schemes in place to recruit more GPs and to boost retention—the GP retention scheme and the GP retention fund—and she will know, as I have said it twice this morning, that the workforce implementation plan, which is part of the long-term plan, will be published in the spring.

### Obesity

9. **Andrew Selous** (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): What steps he is taking to reduce obesity. [908564]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Steve Brine):** This Government are taking bold, world-leading action on child obesity that meets the scale of the challenge that we face. We have a soft drinks industry levy, a sugar reduction programme already working, measures on banning energy drinks, calorie labelling consulted on, and a consultation on restricting price and location promotions of sugary and fatty foods which I launched on Saturday.

**Andrew Selous:** The introduction of a 9 pm watershed on the marketing of junk food to children is the No. 1 ask of the Obesity Health Alliance, supported by Cancer Research UK, Diabetes UK and many of the royal colleges. When will we see that consultation launched?

**Steve Brine:** I am glad that my hon. Friend mentions CRUK, which has launched a powerful new marketing campaign that Members will see around Westminster and in the media over the rest of this month. We will launch the consultation on further advertising that was in chapter 2 of the child obesity plan, including the 9 pm watershed, very shortly. We are working hard to ensure that the remaining consultations announced in the second chapter are right. I want to get them right

and, when they are ready and we are satisfied that they are the right tools to do the job that we want to face this enormous challenge, we will publish them.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): With recent Northern Ireland figures showing that at least 25% of young people and 40% of teens are classed as overweight or obese, will the Minister outline what cross-departmental discussions have taken place on the strategies to improve the health of young people through co-ordination and interaction with parents and the provision of healthy eating schemes?

**Steve Brine:** Of course, health is devolved, but we talk to our opposite numbers all the time, as do our officials. Our north star ambition to halve child obesity by 2030 is right and it is shared and matched by our colleagues in Scotland, and we look to our colleagues in Northern Ireland to do the same. Any advice and support that they want from our world-leading plan is more than on offer.

**Dr Caroline Johnson** (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): Does the Minister agree with the campaign being advanced by Jamie Oliver to ensure that doctors in training are given more extensive training in nutrition and its benefits for health?

**Steve Brine:** Yes, I do. I was fortunate enough to visit Southend pier before Christmas to talk to Jamie and Jimmy about this. Nutrition training and the understanding of what is involved in achieving and maintaining a healthy weight varies between medical schools. Some courses have only eight hours over what can be a five or six-year degree. Together with the professional bodies and the universities, we will—as we said in the long-term plan—ensure that nutrition has a greater place in professional education training.

**Mr Speaker:** We are all very impressed by how well connected the Minister is. He is obviously on first-name terms with these illustrious individuals—*[Interruption.]* Indeed, I am sure they are thrilled to befriend the Minister—no reason to doubt it.

**Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): Scotland's childhood obesity plan recognises breastfeeding as the best start to life for babies. Will he look at that in his plans and ensure that the support is available to allow women to breastfeed for as long as they wish to?

**Steve Brine:** Yes, we will. We recognise that it gives a good start in life. Working with my colleague the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, the hon. Member for Thurrock (Jackie Doyle-Price), I will meet one of the groups in that area to talk about it shortly. I know the hon. Lady chairs the infant feeding all-party group, and I am happy to talk to her about that at any time. We see it as an essential start in life.

### Mental Health Support Teams

10. **Bim Afolami** (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): What the aims are of the new mental health support teams to be placed in schools and colleges; and what steps those teams will take to improve mental health for young people. [908565]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Jackie Doyle-Price):** The new mental health support teams will deliver evidence-based interventions in or close to schools and colleges for children and young people with mild to moderate mental health issues. In December, we announced the first 25 trailblazer areas in England, and 12 sites will pilot a four-week waiting time to speed up children and young people's access to NHS mental health services, including in Hertfordshire, serving my hon. Friend's constituents.

**Bim Afolami:** I thank the Minister for that response. She will appreciate that the answer is not just spending more money on mental health—it is how that money is spent. Can the Minister explain in further detail the nature and scope of the research, scientific and otherwise, that has underpinned the Department's response to the increase in poor mental health in our young people?

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** My hon. Friend is right: it is important that we get the best value from any investment we make in improving the nation's mental health by making sure that it is evidence-based. On that basis, the Government engaged extensively with a range of expert organisations and individuals, including children and young people, to inform our proposals to improve mental health support, including through a consultation. We also commissioned academics to undertake a systematic review of the evidence which directly informed our proposals and we will, of course, learn from the trailblazers as we commission additional services later this year.

**Luciana Berger** (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister will know that the Health and Social Care Committee interrogated the Government's plans on mental health for our young people. We found a massive gap: many schools that are passionate about their students' mental health have had to cut the provision that they previously provided, including the educational psychologists, the councillors, the pastoral care workers and the peer mentors. Can she tell us—as the Education Minister could not tell us—what her plans will replace? We know that an army of those professionals are no longer working in our schools.

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** I know that the hon. Lady is very passionate about all this, and I can say to her that, in rolling out this additional support, we do not want to crowd out anything that is there already. It should genuinely be working in partnership with the provision that has already been undertaken, but we recognise that we need to be rolling out further investment. We are introducing a new workforce that will have 300,000 people when it is fully rolled out, but we must ensure that we invest in the training in such a way that it will be effective.<sup>1</sup>

### Mental Health Services

11. **James Cartlidge** (South Suffolk) (Con): What steps he is taking to ensure the adequacy of mental health service provision in the long term. [908566]

16. **Nigel Mills** (Amber Valley) (Con): What steps he is taking to ensure the adequacy of mental health service provision in the long term. [908571]

1. *[Official Report, 16 January 2019, Vol. 652, c. 8MC.]*



**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Jackie Doyle-Price):** Under the NHS long-term plan, there will be a comprehensive expansion of mental health services with an additional £2.3 billion in real terms by 2023-24. This will give 380,000 more adults access to psychological therapies and 345,000 more children and young people greater support in the next five years. The NHS will also roll out new waiting times to ensure rapid access to mental health services in the community and through the expansion of crisis care.

**James Cartledge:** I thank my hon. Friend for her answer. She will be aware of the long-running and substantial problems that we have had in our main mental health trust, the Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust. Will she update the House on the latest position there, and in particular, will she tell us what steps the Government are taking to finally turn around this failing trust?

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** My hon. Friend is quite right: I have stood at this Dispatch Box a number of times to address concerns from all the local MPs in Norfolk and Suffolk. I can advise him and the House that the trust is receiving increased oversight and enhanced support from NHS Improvement. It is in special measures for quality reasons. It is also receiving peer support from the East London NHS Foundation Trust, which is an excellent and outstanding trust. We will continue to take a close interest in developments, but I can assure him that the trust is receiving every possible attention to improve its performance.

**Nigel Mills:** Will the Minister also set out what steps will be taken to ensure that care for someone experiencing a mental health crisis is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week?

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his question, because this was top of my list of asks as we were developing the forward plan. The NHS has reiterated its commitment to ensure that a 24-hours-a-day, seven-days-a-week community-based mental health crisis response for all adults is in place across England by 2020-21. All adults experiencing a mental health crisis will be able to be directed to support via NHS 111. This is based on best practice as shown by the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough NHS Foundation Trust. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his interest in this, and I can assure him that NHS England, all the commissioners and I are very much on it.

**Dr Paul Williams (Stockton South) (Lab):** Half of all women who experience depression or anxiety in the perinatal period say that their problem was not asked about by health services. There are some genuinely positive things to say about the NHS long-term plan's proposals for specialist services, but what is the point in having services if half the people with a problem do not have it diagnosed? What are we going to do about that?

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** The hon. Gentleman has quizzed me about this a number of times, and I know that he cares very deeply about it. One of the specific issues he has raised with me is the awareness of GPs and their involvement in diagnosing these problems. Obviously we are taking that forward as part of the GP contract. I

can also advise him that there is a significant expansion in perinatal services. We are confident of achieving the national trajectory of 2,000 more women accessing specialist care this year, and more than 7,000 additional women accessed such care as of March 2018.

**Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab):** Recent analysis of NHS digital mental health workforce statistics reveals that NHS England is not on course to meet its targets of 21,000 additional mental health staff by 2021. This means that it is unlikely to meet the goals set in the five year forward view and the recent long-term plan. Mental health services are in real danger of further decline, so may we have an absolute guarantee from the Secretary of State that these targets will be met, and if they are not, will he resign?

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** I have to advise the hon. Lady that we are on course to meet the targets in the five year forward view, but she is right to raise concerns about the workforce. Frankly, that keeps me awake at night. We are investing in a significant expansion of mental health services and that requires appropriate staff to deliver them. I can assure her, however, that we are in productive discussions with clinical leads in NHS England. We need to be much more imaginative about how we deliver services, and we are seeing substantial gains and improvements in performance through the increased use of peer support workers, who provide the therapeutic care from which many can benefit. However, the hon. Lady is right to hold me to account.

#### Rare Diseases and Cancer

12. **John Howell (Henley) (Con):** What steps he is taking to improve the diagnosis and treatment for patients with rare diseases and cancer. [908567]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Steve Brine):** Our much-mentioned new plan sets out the clear ambition to diagnose three quarters of all cancers at an early stage—up from half today.

**John Howell:** The blood cancer charity Bloodwise launched its “Hear our voice” report in Parliament last week. Will the Minister ensure that NHS England works with the charity to ensure that blood cancer is included in the 75% target?

**Steve Brine:** Yes, I will. I spoke at the launch of Bloodwise's excellent report at its parliamentary reception last week. I have been clear since the new ambition was announced that the 75% target applies to all cancers, and we will not achieve it unless we focus on harder-to-diagnose cancers, such as blood cancer.

**Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab):** Given that the number of people suffering from rare diseases in any one country is always likely to be small, and given our changing relationship with the European Medicines Agency and the European medicines market, what is the Minister doing to ensure that the future development of orphan drugs in this country is safeguarded?

**Steve Brine:** The hon. Gentleman will know that the draft withdrawal agreement hopefully sets us on a relationship with the EMA, but the UK's strategy for

rare diseases, which was published in 2013, sets out our commitment to improve the diagnosis and treatment of patients with rare diseases and to end the diagnostic odyssey that has been referred to throughout the past few years.

#### People with Autism and Learning Disabilities

14. **Mike Wood** (Dudley South) (Con): What steps he is taking to increase support for people with autism and learning disabilities. [908569]

24. **Alex Burghart** (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): What steps he is taking to increase support for people with autism and learning disabilities. [908580]

**The Minister for Care (Caroline Dinéage):** Autism and learning disabilities are clinical priorities in the NHS long-term plan. We are committed to improving the quality of care provided to people with a learning disability or autism and to addressing the persistent health inequalities they face.

**Mike Wood:** I thank the Minister for her response. The commitment to reducing diagnosis waiting times for children and young people is welcome, but what are the Government doing in this 10th anniversary year of the Autism Act 2009 to tackle diagnosis waiting times for all people?

**Caroline Dinéage:** I congratulate my hon. Friend on his active involvement in the all-party parliamentary groups on learning disability and on autism. Over the next three years, we will be testing and implementing the most effective ways to reduce waiting times for specialist services. We are developing guidance to support commissioners to develop the necessary services to support all autistic people, and we have launched a review of our autism strategy.

**Alex Burghart:** As a former governor of a school for children with autism, I thank the Minister for her response. It is well known that people with ASD suffer premature morbidity due to worse rates of heart disease, cancer and death through epilepsy. What is the Minister doing to ensure that fewer people with autism die early?

**Caroline Dinéage:** These are key elements of the NHS long-term plan, and we will shortly start consulting on mandatory learning disability and autism training for health and social care staff. We will work to improve uptake of the existing annual health checks for people with learning disabilities and will pilot the introduction of specific health checks for autistic people.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister knows of my interest in access to healthcare as chair of the Westminster Commission on Autism. She will also know that a real barrier is having enough people with the skills not only to identify autism, but to support families dealing with it.

**Caroline Dinéage:** The hon. Gentleman is right, and I pay tribute to his hard work in this area. Training is so important, and we want to ensure that all staff, whether clinical, medical or perhaps just on reception, have the necessary training to be able to help to support people with learning disabilities or autism.

**Chris Bryant** (Rhondda) (Lab): What are the Government going to do about people who have suffered acquired brain injury? One in four major trauma centres have no neurorehabilitation consultant, meaning that such people all too often fall between the cracks and do not get proper support. Will the Government change that?

**Caroline Dinéage:** The hon. Gentleman chairs the all-party group on acquired brain injury, and we are working on the recommendations of his report. This is such an important issue, and we want to make sure that nobody falls through the gaps.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. We are running late, but I do not think Health questions would be complete without the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb).

#### Local Authority Public Health Budgets: Prevention Vision

20. **Norman Lamb** (North Norfolk) (LD): What assessment he has made of the effect of changes to local authority public health budgets in 2019-20 on his Department's ability to achieve its "Prevention is better than cure" vision. [908575]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Steve Brine):** Local authorities will receive £3 billion in 2019-20, ring-fenced exclusively for use on public health, but our ambitions for prevention go far beyond any one pot of money. "Prevention is better than cure" was widely welcomed, and we will build on it with a comprehensive Green Paper later this year.

**Norman Lamb:** The number of people attending sexual health clinics is up 13% over four years, and the number with gonorrhoea and syphilis is up 20% over the last year, yet the Health Foundation says that funding for sexual health is down 25%. Will the Secretary of State and the Minister be making a powerful case, as part of the spending review, for proper investment in public health, and particularly in sexual health, given their commitment to prevention?

**Steve Brine:** Yes, of course. Matters for the spending review are just that, but one thing that the right hon. Gentleman, as a former Health Minister, will have noticed—and probably welcomed—in the long-term plan is that we are going to look at the commissioning of, and therefore the funding flow for, sexual health services as part of the long-term plan.

#### Topical Questions

T1. [908581] **Mr Clive Betts** (Sheffield South East) (Lab): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

**The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Matt Hancock):** Last week we launched the NHS long-term plan, which delivers on the vision for how the extra £20.5 billion that we are putting into the health service will be spent to get the best return for the taxpayer. The long-term plan is built on the principle

that prevention is better than cure, and there will be a new focus on personal responsibility that reflects and complements the responsibility that the NHS has to us all.

**Mr Betts:** Looking to the last financial year, I am sure that the Secretary of State has seen a National Audit Office report that says that auditors gave a qualified opinion on 38% of local NHS bodies, expressing concerns about overspending and value for money. The Comptroller and Auditor General said:

“A qualification is a judgment that something is seriously wrong”.

Does the Secretary of State accept that many of these problems are down to local bodies struggling with the effects of austerity and real-terms cuts to their funding? Does he also accept that he is ultimately responsible for spending in the NHS, and does he accept responsibility for the totally unsatisfactory state of affairs that the NAO has identified?

**Matt Hancock:** That is a very big question, and the very big answer comes in the form of the £20.5 billion that is going in, but it is not just about the money. We also need to ensure that, at all levels, we strengthen the leadership capacity in the NHS, because the best hospitals that deliver the best services, that hit their targets and that are the best clinically are also the ones that have the best financial results. Strengthening leadership, making sure that the money is available, as appropriate, and ensuring that we deliver for patients are at the core of the long-term plan.

T4. [908584] **Mr Robert Goodwill** (Scarborough and Whitby) (Con): Before Christmas we had the brilliant news that £40 million of capital funding has been allocated for a new state-of-the-art A&E facility at Scarborough Hospital, which will transform emergency care for my constituents. Can the Minister update me on similar ambitious plans for Whitby Hospital?

**The Minister for Health (Stephen Hammond):** My right hon. Friend is right to welcome the announcement for Scarborough Hospital, and I understand that the full business case for the redevelopment of Whitby Hospital is going through the Hambleton, Richmondshire and Whitby governing body for approval on 24 January. I am assured that the clinical commissioning group remains supportive of the redevelopment of Whitby Hospital and, if it is helpful, I would obviously be delighted to meet him after 24 January.

**Barbara Keeley** (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): This Government's cuts to council budgets have meant that 100,000 fewer people received publicly funded social care over the past three years, and 90 people a day died while waiting for social care last year. What does the Secretary of State think it says to their families that the social care Green Paper and the meaningful funding settlement have been delayed again?

**The Minister for Care (Caroline Dinenage):** The hon. Lady knows that we have given councils access to nearly £10 billion over a three-year period to address this very issue, but she is right to highlight the issues at the heart of social care. We will be publishing the Green Paper very shortly.

T8. [908588] **Andrew Lewer** (Northampton South) (Con): Perhaps the worst private finance initiative contract in the country was awarded in 2001 to Shaw Healthcare for the rehabilitation of elderly people coming out of hospital. Northamptonshire County Council has been paying Shaw for a service in which more than 50% of beds have been lying empty. What steps can the Department take to manage the problems that have arisen from this and other PFI contracts?

**Stephen Hammond:** Departmental officials have worked alongside the council to engage with Shaw Healthcare to identify the causes and explore the solutions to minimise the number of empty beds under the PFI. Through improved contract management and regular meetings with Shaw, significant improvements are being made, and contract changes are under discussion to further improve performance. This aligns with the Department's best practice centre for PFI contracts, as the Chancellor announced in the Budget—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I appreciate the natural courtesy of the Minister in looking in the direction of the person questioning him, but the House wants the benefit of his mellifluous tones, so he should face the House. We are grateful to him.

T2. [908582] **Helen Goodman** (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): The closure of ward 6 at Bishop Auckland Hospital will mean the loss of 24 beds, which is why 14,000 people have signed a petition to keep it. Will the Minister now step in to ensure that we keep ward 6?

**Stephen Hammond:** The hon. Lady will know that in the long-term plan we have committed to ensuring that more people are treated and that more money is spent in hospitals. The decision on closure is for local organisations, as she will know, but, as I have said to other hon. Members, my door remains open and I would be delighted to meet her.

T9. [908589] **Gordon Henderson** (Sittingbourne and Sheppey) (Con): As we heard earlier, obesity is a major health problem in Britain. Nationally, 1,100 people per 100,000 are admitted to hospital because of obesity-related problems. This is a particular problem in Sittingbourne and Sheppey, where 1,700 people per 100,000 are affected. That is the highest rate in the whole of Kent and Medway. Does the Minister recognise the huge strain that such a statistic puts on the budget of the Swale clinical commissioning group, and, if so, what steps will he take to provide the funds needed to solve the problem?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Steve Brine):** Yes, of course we recognise the economic strain that obesity puts on the NHS, which is why we are taking the action we are, including with our renewed focus on prevention. The measures in the plan include doubling the capacity of the diabetes prevention programme and the further 1,000 children a year we hope to treat for severe complications relating to their obesity. That should help my hon. Friend's CCG, as well as mine and those of all Members.

T3. [908583] **Mohammad Yasin** (Bedford) (Lab): A senior Bedford GP was told by the East of England Ambulance Service that a patient who required urgent admission



would have to wait 10 hours for an ambulance. I am deeply concerned about this response time. Will the Minister urgently investigate why patients are being deliberately downgraded when an ambulance is called from a GP surgery?

**Stephen Hammond:** A number of MPs, including the hon. Gentleman, have raised issues about the trust's performance, and a range of actions have been put in place. He will be pleased to know that I met the performance director in December. I have been discussing several support mechanisms involving both the NHS and the Department, and I continue to receive reports. He will also be pleased to hear that the trust's performance improved over December.

**Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con):** Children's hospices provide vital support for children with life-limiting conditions and their families at the most difficult of times. I welcome the £25 million of extra investment in these services, but what more can be done to support children's hospices across the UK?

**Caroline Dinenage:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right to highlight the incredible work of children's hospices across the country. Up until now, there has been a disparity between their funding and that of their adult counterparts, which is why I was delighted when, as part of the NHS long-term plan, we announced plans to increase funding for children's hospices by as much as £25 million a year over the next five years. We can always do more, however, and we are always open to suggestions.

T5. [908585] **Yvonne Fovargue (Makerfield) (Lab):** I have recently been contacted by constituents who have faced long waits in A&E at Wigan Infirmary. Figures show that one in four patients have waited longer than four hours. Can the Minister explain how removing waiting time targets will improve the situation?

**Matt Hancock:** The hon. Lady is absolutely right that these waiting time targets need to be improved upon, which is one reason why we are putting so much extra taxpayers' money into the NHS. Of course, waiting times also need to follow clinical need, and we are taking advice on that.

**Alan Mak (Havant) (Con):** Genome sequencing and other fourth industrial revolution techniques play a key role in the detection and treatment of cancer and other diseases. How is the NHS adopting those new techniques?

**Matt Hancock:** The use of new technologies is drilled through the new NHS long-term plan. Genome sequencing holds great opportunities to improve the health of the nation, and my hon. Friend is a great advocate for it.

T6. [908586] **Vernon Coaker (Gedling) (Lab):** As I have seen recently in my own constituency, access to mental health services is sometimes deplorable. Notwithstanding what the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, the hon. Member for Thurrock (Jackie Doyle-Price), said earlier about all the plans, how long will people have to wait before those services actually get better?

**Matt Hancock:** The biggest proportional increase in spending in the NHS—it has taken place faster than the average rate, over a five-year period—is in mental health services, alongside the increase in primary care and community care. That money will come on stream with a £6 billion cash injection for the NHS overall in April, in just over two months' time. So we are getting on with it, but there is a lot of work to be done.

**Julia Lopez (Hornchurch and Upminster) (Con):** NHS Property realised £43 million when it sold St George's Hospital in my constituency, yet a £17 million bid for a new health centre there has not been successful. Will my right hon. Friend commit himself to looking at that again in order to convince communities that they benefit when local NHS assets are sold?

**Matt Hancock:** Absolutely. I look forward to working on that with my hon. Friend and local commissioners, and also to working with my hon. Friend before the spending review, when the next round of the capital allocations will be set.

T7. [908587] **Ms Marie Rimmer (St Helens South and Whiston) (Lab):** In line with the long-term plan, leaders in St Helens have integrated health and social care teams and budgets, and there is a joint role for an accountable officer and director of social services. Can the Secretary of State assure me that that successful place working will not be put at risk by restructuring in NHS England and NHS Improvement, and indications in the long-term plan that integrated care systems need to be formed on sustainability and transformation plan footprints?

**Matt Hancock:** Yes, 100%. That is exactly what is in the plan, and I am delighted to have such support. This is precisely the direction in which we need to go in integrating care to ensure that patients are served better, whoever is the ultimate funder of the service.

**Tracey Crouch (Chatham and Aylesford) (Con):** In the event of an out-of-hospital cardiac arrest, access to a defibrillator can make the difference between life and death. Although there are tens of thousands of defibs across the United Kingdom, the majority are not known to the ambulance service, so will the Minister join me in welcoming the British Heart Foundation's efforts to map the location of all defibs so that ambulance services can direct people to their nearest heart restarter in an emergency and, hopefully, we can save more lives?

**Steve Brine:** Yes, I will. We work closely with partners such as the BHF to harness new technology. Ultimately, this is about using data—big data—to ensure that patients benefit, and that is at the heart of the health service.

T10. [908590] **Chris Ruane (Vale of Clwyd) (Lab):** We have an excellent advocate for those with motor neurone disease in north Wales, one Vincent Ryan. He has drawn my attention to the fact that the social care Green Paper was expected before the new year, but the Health Secretary has now said that it will be published before April, more than two years after it was first announced. Can the Secretary of State confirm that, whenever the Green Paper does arrive, it will address social care provision for adults of working age living with a disability as well as older people?

**Matt Hancock:** Yes. The hon. Gentleman is right: that is absolutely critical.

**Mrs Pauline Latham** (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): What advice can the Minister give to elderly and vulnerable people who missed out on the first wave of flu jabs? Are they still available?

**Steve Brine:** Yes, they are still very much available. People should make an appointment through their GP or their wonderful pharmacist.

**Dr Rosena Allin-Khan** (Tooting) (Lab): While working a night shift in A&E this weekend, I was struck by the fact that I was working alongside so many members of staff from our EU—Italian, Irish and Spanish. I am proud that St George's Hospital is paying for the visas of those vital staff post Brexit, but can the Secretary of State tell me why the financial burden of retaining them and improving their morale is falling on NHS trusts and not the Government?

**Matt Hancock:** I welcome what St George's is doing, and I welcome all the people from the EU who are working in our NHS—in greater numbers than on the day of the referendum. They are welcome here, and I look forward to their working here long into the future.

**Andrea Jenkyns** (Morley and Outwood) (Con): Each month I hold my memory cafés for those suffering with memory loss, dementia and Alzheimer's, and their carers, families and friends. What support are the Government providing for those suffering with such memory loss conditions?

**Caroline Dinanage:** We remain absolutely committed to delivering the challenge under dementia 2020 and to making England the best country in the world for dementia care by 2020. As part of that, we are more than happy to do everything we can to support steps such as the memory cafés of which my hon. Friend speaks, which are such a valuable local community resource.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I was going to call Mr Skinner, who I thought was perched a moment ago.

**Mr Dennis Skinner** (Bolsover) (Lab) *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** He is perched again; in fact he is more than perched.

**Mr Skinner:** The Secretary of State has been very fond today of talking about the long-term plan. I am 86 years of age, and the reason I am able to ask this question is because under Labour—is he listening?—the money that went in was trebled from £33 billion to £100 billion, an increase of £67 billion. That is why I am still here: I had my operation for cancer, and it was successful; I had an operation for a bypass, and it was successful; and I had a hip replacement, and I can still walk backwards. That is the Labour story—just remember it!

**Matt Hancock** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Before the Secretary of State responds, let me say that the ferocity and eloquence of the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr Skinner) are legendary, but all he is really telling us is what the Chair already knew, namely that the hon. Gentleman is indestructible.

**Matt Hancock:** The hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr Skinner) and I both come from Nottinghamshire mining stock, and we both support the NHS, which was first proposed from this Dispatch Box by a Conservative Minister under a Conservative Prime Minister, and has been presided over by a Conservative Secretary of State for most of its life. I am delighted that those operations, including under a Conservative-led Administration, kept the hon. Gentleman ticking, because what an adornment he is—I look forward to voting with him this evening.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. As I am often moved to observe at Health questions, demand tends to exceed supply, as in the health service under whichever Government, but we must now move on.

## Points of Order

12.42 pm

**Angus Brendan MacNeil** (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Just before Christmas I wrote a letter to the Prime Minister asking if she would be respectful of the mandate in the Scottish Parliament for a second independence referendum by agreeing to a section 30 order. The response came about a month later, and I have to say that it was not respectful of UK member Parliaments at all—in contrast, of course, to the European Union. Indeed, the response was not from the Prime Minister, but from the Secretary of State for Scotland. This is an example of the Government arbitrarily changing the rules—something they complained about last week. Should the Prime Minister herself not be responding to these things or, in an innovation, has she passed to the Secretary of State for Scotland the power to grant a section 30 order for a second independence referendum?

**Mr Speaker:** I thank the hon. Gentleman both for his point of order and for his characteristic courtesy in giving me advance notice of it. However, what I have to say to the hon. Gentleman might disappoint him. The hon. Gentleman is perfectly at liberty to put his inquiry to the Government Department of his choice, and indeed the most senior Minister of all, but it is the entitlement, constitutionally and procedurally, of the Government to decide by what route a reply is provided. Although there is some consternation etched upon the contours of the hon. Gentleman's face that he got a reply from the source he did not want and not the source he did want, I am afraid that he will have to live with that and bear it with such stoicism and fortitude as he can muster.

**James Heapey** (Wells) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Yesterday you said you would adhere to the advice of the late Lord Whitelaw and cross bridges only when we come to them. I think we would all agree with you on that, but in the interests of knowing what bridges might be crossed, you were asked yesterday to confirm that only a Minister of the Crown could move a motion to extend article 50, and I wonder if you have any update on what you described at the time as being a holding response.

**Mr Speaker:** No, I do not, for the simple reason that although I am extremely delighted that the hon. Gentleman has been willing to learn from me and, more particularly,

from Lord Whitelaw, that point has not been reached. I appreciate the assiduity of the hon. Gentleman and his nimbleness in being ready to spring to his feet to raise a matter of immediate concern and preoccupation to him, but that crucial point at which some ruling might be required, though of great interest to him, has not yet arrived. So there we are. [*Interruption.*] The hon. Gentleman chunters cheekily from a sedentary position, “When might it be?” The hon. Gentleman has to learn the art of patience. If he is patient and deploys Zen, he will find that it is ultimately to everybody's advantage.

**Dr Caroline Johnson** (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. You said yesterday that you were very “happy to reflect”. Can you give the House a sense of when you might have had the chance to reflect, and reassure me that it will be before such a motion is proposed?

**Mr Speaker:** What I would say to the hon. Lady is that at the point I am ready to say something on important matters of procedure that require a statement, I hope she will trust that, on the strength of nine and a half years in the Chair, I do know when that point is. Much as I appreciate the diligence and commitment in the Chamber of the hon. Lady, and recognise that there is a desire on the part of many Members, often at short notice, and sometimes on a co-ordinated basis and sometimes not, to raise points of order with great enthusiasm, there is no need for it now. At the point at which a ruling is required, it will be proffered to the House by, if I may say so, an experienced Chair. I think it would be regarded as a courtesy by the House if we could proceed to the presentation of a Bill, for which the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Nick Boles) has been patiently waiting.

## BILL PRESENTED

EUROPEAN UNION (WITHDRAWAL) (No. 2) BILL

*Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Nick Boles, supported by Liz Kendall, Norman Lamb, Yvette Cooper, Nicky Morgan, Hilary Benn and Sir Oliver Letwin, presented a Bill to make provision in connection with the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 314).*



## Public Sector Supply Chains (Project Bank Accounts)

*Motion for leave to bring in a Bill (Standing Order No. 23)*

12.47 pm

**Debbie Abrahams** (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require public authorities to pay certain suppliers using project bank accounts; and for connected purposes.

It is exactly a year ago today since the construction giant Carillion announced it was going into liquidation. At the time, there was widespread concern about what that would mean for the completion of major public sector projects already under way, including hospitals and HS2, which Carillion was also working on as part of a consortium. There were also real worries for the 30,000 or so small businesses that, as part of Carillion's supply chain, were also working on these projects. After Carillion's collapse, thousands of those subcontractors lost major contracts and were left reeling with substantial debts. A survey of building, engineering and electrical firms showed that small businesses were, on average, owed £141,000 by Carillion, out of a total of £2 billion owed to suppliers. The vast majority of those suppliers never received any recompense. Following on from those losses, it has been estimated that 780 small building firms went into insolvency in the first quarter of 2018 as a direct consequence of Carillion's collapse—that is a 20% increase in insolvencies on the previous year.

Neil Skinner, whose construction firm Johnson Bros. is based in my constituency, and who is here today, was one of Carillion's suppliers and lost £176,000. Neil told me:

“Carillion often went over sixty days”

before it paid him,

“with a lot of chasing, and once the job for a particular customer was finished our sanction, to stop working, was gone and their payments just stopped”,

even though Carillion still owed money for the job that Johnson Bros. had done for it.

“They resorted to using all the familiar late payment tactics, from finding fault with an invoice, referring us to their India accounts office, statement queries, disputed invoices paid, and so on.

Then, lastly, they imposed a 15% non-negotiable discount on our work or they would send all unpaid invoices back to their quantity surveyor's (QS) department. We reluctantly signed this contract and then they went ‘bump’ the Monday after signing and 10 days before the first part payment was due.

As a result of Carillion's late payment tactics small enterprises like mine have been suffering greatly, if not terminally.”

Neil added:

“Large companies know late payment can destroy small businesses like us, but they rely on these tactics to ‘cook the books’ and be seen to be profitable themselves. Carillion went under owing us well over 15% of our annual turnover and, following a difficult year last year, this money is much needed to help us survive.”

By ensuring that all public sector projects over £500,000 use project bank accounts, my Bill would not only protect small businesses from losing money owed to them should the tier 1 supplier become insolvent, as Carillion did, but stop small businesses being paid late by large companies. PBAs are ring-fenced bank accounts

into which monies due to firms providing construction or other works are paid. The accounts are ring-fenced in a trust arrangement so that if a tier 1 contractor becomes insolvent, the monies for the subcontractors are protected. They do not disrupt contractual arrangements, but instead of public bodies paying tier 1 contractors directly, the public body pays money directly into the PBA. The tier 1 contractor and suppliers are then all paid simultaneously, usually within 15 to 18 days.

The Government are already using PBAs successfully in many areas. For example, Highways England uses them for all its works, and by 2020, £20 billion of highways work will have been paid through PBAs. They have also been used in building projects in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Even some local authorities are using them. Internationally, many Australian states mandate for PBAs to be used in construction projects, and last year the European Commission agreed to use PBAs for European projects.

In addition to payments to small business suppliers being protected and being received more quickly, there is also a reduction in disputes and disruption, as suppliers are less likely to suspend their work when paid promptly. The costs of public sector projects are reduced as well, as the greater security of payment provided by PBAs is factored into suppliers' pricing. PBAs are a practical, tried and tested measure to protect small businesses and make sure that they are paid promptly.

I have been campaigning against late payments since 2011, when a haulier in my Oldham East and Saddleworth constituency came to me and told me that he was struggling to survive because a mainstream supermarket chain was delaying payments. He was scared that he was going to go under. When I investigated the problem, I was staggered to see how endemic it is right across the country. Four out of five companies across all sectors experience late payments and are owed money, with 68% having to write off bad debt. One in three small businesses admit that late payments are forcing them to rely on bank overdrafts to keep up with their overheads, and more than a quarter say that late payments are forcing them to pay their own suppliers late.

It is shocking that, collectively, small businesses were owed £14 billion in late payments last year. Although late payments have come down from their height in 2013, just under half of small and medium-sized enterprises spend around £4.4 billion in admin costs alone on chasing late payments, and more than one in 10 businesses struggling with overdue invoices have to employ someone to chase for payment. Although the private sector tends to be worse for paying late than the public sector, some Government Departments are also failing to meet their commitment to pay 80% of undisputed invoices within five working days. In addition, Bacs research on existing measures to tackle late payments said:

“When it comes to government initiatives...about a quarter...say they are aware of measures to oblige large and listed companies to publish payment practices. However, three quarters...don't feel these measures improve the speed their companies are paid.”

In 2013, I held an all-party inquiry to look into the issues associated with late payments and what could be done about them. The evidence we took from small businesses was incredibly powerful. Our key finding was that late payment reflects the culture in the company, and as we know the culture of a company, or a society, ultimately reflects its leadership. It was clear that late

payment was used as a form of corporate bullying, with large companies exerting their power over their smaller suppliers just because they could. There was also evidence that many large companies are trying to rebuild their balance sheets on the backs of small businesses, and even have business models that rely on delaying payments to their suppliers. For some tier 1 suppliers, they are little more than a funding repository. Late payment like this is unethical and needs to be seen to be as unacceptable as tax evasion.

Before Christmas, I followed up on my inquiry with a roundtable with representatives from small businesses, including the Specialist Engineering Contractors' Group and the Federation of Small Businesses. Although some of my inquiry recommendations had been implemented, it was clear that there was still much to do, and PBAs were seen as a practical next step.

Our small business sector is the powerhouse of our economy, contributing £2 trillion of annual turnover—more than half of all private sector turnover—and providing 60% of all private sector jobs. Small businesses are critical to boosting aggregate levels of productivity in the UK, which, as we know from last week's figures, is at its lowest point in a decade. For a sustainable recovery and healthy growth, we need to support and nurture our entrepreneurs and small businesses. There is so much that needs to be done to tackle late payments and protect small businesses; my Bill is just one step in that process.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Ordered,*

That Debbie Abrahams, Alex Cunningham, Toby Perkins, Anna McMorrin, Diana Johnson, Rachel Reeves, Peter Aldous, Andrea Jenkyns, Marion Fellows, Caroline Lucas, Stephen Lloyd and Jim Shannon present the Bill.

Debbie Abrahams accordingly presented the Bill.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 1 March, and to be printed (Bill 315).*

## European Union (Withdrawal) Act

[9TH ALLOTTED DAY]

*Debate resumed (Orders, 4 December and 9 January).*

*Question again proposed,*

That this House approves for the purposes of section 13(1)(b) of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, the negotiated withdrawal agreement laid before the House on Monday 26 November 2018 with the title 'Agreement on the withdrawal of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland from the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community' and the framework for the future relationship laid before the House on Monday 26 November 2018 with the title 'Political Declaration setting out the framework for the future relationship between the European Union and the United Kingdom'.

**Mr Speaker:** Under the order of 4 December, as varied on 9 January, I am now permitted to select amendments. I have provisionally selected the following four amendments: (a), in the name of the Leader of the Opposition, Jeremy Corbyn; (k), in the name of the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford); (b), in the name of the right hon. Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh); and (f), in the name of the hon. Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron). If amendment (b) is agreed to, amendment (f) falls. Reference may be made in debate to any of the amendments on the Order Paper, including those which I have not selected.

For the benefit of Members and those observing our proceedings, let me set out concisely what will happen at the end of today's debate. This will be of interest to Members of the House and, I think, to those beyond the Chamber, whether within the Palace of Westminster or further afield, attending to our proceedings. At 7 o'clock, I shall first invite the Leader of the Opposition to move his amendment. If it is agreed to, I will then put to the House the original question, as amended. If it is disagreed to, I shall invite the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber to move his amendment. If that is agreed to, I will then put to the House the original question, as amended. If it is disagreed to, I shall invite the right hon. Member for Gainsborough to move his amendment. If that is agreed to, I will then put to the House the original question, as amended. If it is disagreed to, I shall then invite the hon. Member for Basildon and Billericay to move his amendment. If that is agreed to, I will then put to the House the original question, as amended. If it is disagreed to, I will then put to the House the original question in the name of the Prime Minister.

That having been explained, I invite the Attorney General, Sir Geoffrey Cox, to open today's debate.

12.59 pm

**The Attorney General (Mr Geoffrey Cox):** I am extremely obliged to you for promoting me, Mr Speaker. Perhaps I can take that as a hint to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister.

**Mr Speaker:** That was of course always part of the intention.

**The Attorney General:** I will suggest the next office you could perhaps promote me to, Mr Speaker.

I am more than conscious that last time I had a prolonged outing in this House the verdict did not go well. [*Laughter.*] On this occasion, I intend, if I may, to

[The Attorney General]

adopt an approach that I hope will be more to the House's taste. I want to listen to the House's views, and I shall be as accommodating as possible to the interventions of Members of this House, knowing as I do that many of them have very strong views upon this subject.

I have listened with care to the speeches of Members of this House during the course of last week's proceedings, and I have been struck by the heartfelt and eloquent expressions of principled opinion that hon. Members have made. I was particularly struck, though I do not think he is in his place this morning, by the speech late last night—I commend you, Mr Speaker, and those who remained here until after 1 o'clock in the morning to complete yesterday's proceedings—by the hon. Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker). He waited, I think, until midnight or shortly thereafter to begin his speech, and made the most passionate appeal to Members of this House to understand the value of compromise. He told the House that the membership of this place confers on us not only the great privilege of participation in the Government but the responsibilities that go with it.

In the past, when this country has faced these kinds of grave obstacles and impediments to finding a way forward, Members of this place have found the resource within themselves to achieve a compromise and to subordinate their ideal preference—the solution that they would like to see—to that which commands a degree of consensus. It is precisely for that reason that I support the withdrawal agreement—not because I like every element of it but for wholly pragmatic reasons: it is the necessary means to secure our orderly departure and unlock our future outside the European Union.

Since 23 June 2016, we have been on a road that has led us ineluctably to this point. One after another, this House has taken the steps, often by overwhelming majorities, necessary to bring us to the brink of departure, and there are now but two steps to take. The first is this withdrawal agreement. It is the first of the two keys that will unlock our future outside the European Union. It is sometimes said in various circles, I understand, Mr Speaker, that if you are moving from one pressurised atmosphere or environment to another, it is necessary to have an airlock. This withdrawal agreement is the first key that will unlock the airlock and take us into the next stage, where the second key will be the permanent relationship treaty.

**Ian Paisley** (North Antrim) (DUP): I appreciate the point that the Attorney General has made with regard to the value of compromise. Anyone involved in any significant negotiation knows that compromise, and the timing of it, is absolutely essential. Is he aware of the most recent comments by the retired former Irish ambassador to the EU, a man who worked on behalf of the Republic of Ireland on the Belfast agreement, who said in *The Sunday Business Post*: “We”—the Irish Government—“were wrong to insist on the backstop—and softening our stance is the only way to prevent ‘no deal’”? Is the Attorney General pushing for that outcome?

**The Attorney General**: Well, of course I would have been infinitely happier if the European Union had not laid down as one of its cardinal negotiating points and principles that there should be a backstop, but it has

done that. On the basis of its own guidance to its own negotiating principles, it would have been a demand that it always sought, and we are faced with the position as it now is.

If we take this step of entering this withdrawal agreement, we will then enter a stage where we are to negotiate the second key to unlock our future outside the European Union. What I am commending to the House is that we take this key and we unlock the door to that first chamber—that airlock where we can then settle the permanent relationship that is set out in the political declaration.

**Hilary Benn** (Leeds Central) (Lab): The Attorney General's use of the airlock analogy is very striking, but does he realise that the reason many of us will vote against the deal tonight is that on the other side of the second airlock is a complete vacuum about our future relationship with our biggest, nearest and most important trading partner?

**The Attorney General**: I intend to address the very point that the right hon. Gentleman raises, because it is important to distinguish between the withdrawal agreement and the political declaration and the permanent treaties in which the long-term relationship between this country and the European Union will be settled. The political declaration sets the boundaries within which those permanent arrangements will be negotiated. The aims of the withdrawal agreement are to settle the outstanding issues that our departure creates. These are two separate and, importantly, distinguishable functions.

The withdrawal agreement commands across the House, I would submit, with the exception of two areas—the backstop and the political declaration—widespread consensus as to its necessity and its wisdom.

**Frank Field** (Birkenhead) (Ind): Might I draw the Attorney General's attention to amendment (n) in my name, which calls on him to be a servant of the House and give his legal judgment on whether undertakings about the backstop and our ability to limit it are binding in law, and therefore actionable in law, internationally? Might he draw our attention to the letter he wrote in consequence—maybe in consequence—to the Prime Minister saying that we actually had that legal basis from the Council's conclusions on 13 December?

**The Attorney General**: The right hon. Gentleman is of course right to say that I published that letter in the spirit of the conversation I had with him—in the spirit of the Government's desire to make clear as much information as this House needs to make its judgments.

**Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): On the backstop, can the Attorney General confirm that fish from Northern Ireland will have tariff-free access into the EU and tariff-free access back to the UK, but fish from Scotland will be subject to tariffs going into the EU, and that therefore Northern Ireland is going to be treated differently from Scotland in the backstop? The Scottish Secretary talked about responsibilities. He said that he would resign if Northern Ireland were given different conditions from Scotland. Is that not the case, and should not the Scottish Secretary consider his position?



**The Attorney General:** As I understand what the hon. Gentleman said, he has misunderstood. The backstop does not deal with the question of fish at all. It has no policy arrangements—

**Alan Brown:** Will the Attorney General give way?

**The Attorney General:** I am willing to discuss it with the hon. Gentleman later.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown) is rather excitable today. The Attorney General yields to none in his courtesy in the House, but it is not reasonable to expect of him, even with his formidable intellect, the capacity to try to respond to an intervention that he has not heard when he is dealing with one that he has.

**The Attorney General:** I am happy to discuss the matter with the hon. Gentleman afterwards if he wishes.

**Sir Hugo Swire (East Devon) (Con):** Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the non-selection of the amendment in my name and the amendment in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison), the Chairman of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, makes harder the Government's challenge this afternoon to convince those of us who are still concerned about the implications of the backstop? What does he think can replace those two amendments?

**The Attorney General:** I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his question. I have never underestimated the challenge that I face today or the one that the Government face. As I shall come on to say in due course, I have reflected deeply, as he knows, upon the question of the backstop. I have reached the conclusion that it is a risk that it is acceptable to take, even having regard to the perils that it involves if it were to become permanent and the questions that it unquestionably raises in connection with the Union with Northern Ireland.

**Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con):** Will the Attorney General confirm that, while the political declaration is aspirational in style, it is not legally binding in international law, but the withdrawal agreement, as a draft international treaty, would be fully binding in international law? Will he also confirm that he is offering the House an embarrassment of riches? After months of debating the backstop, we now have the airlock as well. Are the Government so desperate that they are now offering the House of Commons a buy-one-get-one-free?

**The Attorney General:** My right hon. Friend knows what I mean. The airlock metaphor is indicated to demonstrate the distinction that exists. The withdrawal agreement has been negotiated over thousands of hours and is, as he rightly says, the legally binding text and the only legally binding text. It was only ever empowered under article 50 to deal with historic issues and outstanding matters that otherwise would have catapulted citizens, businesses and Governments into legal uncertainty.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**The Attorney General:** I want to make a bit of progress, because it is important to look at what the withdrawal agreement does.

We should not underestimate the legal complexity of our disentanglement from 45 years of legal integration. It has taken two years and thousands of hours of detailed and arduous negotiation, some of it highly technical, to produce 585 pages of the most minute consideration of the possibilities that no deal would create in legal terms for the millions of people who depend upon the certainty of the legal system and rules to which we have hitherto been subject. It provides for the orderly, predictable and legally certain winding down of our obligations and involvement in the legal systems of the EU. If we do not legislate for that legal certainty, as a matter of law alone, thousands of contracts, transactions, administrative proceedings and judicial proceedings in the European Union and this country will be plunged into legal uncertainty.

It would be the height of irresponsibility for any legislator to contemplate with equanimity such a situation. A litigant in court who was dependent upon having concluded a contract on the basis of EU law and then found themselves suddenly having the rug pulled from under them, not knowing what their legal obligations were, would say to this House, “What are you playing at? What are you doing? You are not children in the playground. You are legislators, and this is your job.”

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**The Attorney General:** I will give way in a moment. I intend to take many interventions in the course of this speech.

We are playing with people's lives. We are debating the effects of legal continuity. Forty-five years of legal integration have brought our two legal systems into a situation where they are organically linked. To appeal to those who have a medical background, it is the same as if we were to separate from a living organism, with all its arteries and veins, a living organ—a central part from this body politic. We cannot underestimate the complexity of what we are embarked upon doing.

**Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab):** Will the Attorney General give way?

**The Attorney General:** I cannot resist giving way to the hon. Gentleman.

**Mr Speaker:** The Attorney General, as per usual, is addressing the House with a remarkable combination of the intellect of Einstein and the eloquence of Demosthenes. We are all enjoying it enormously—*[Interruption.]* Well, I am certainly enjoying it, but I hope he will not cavil if I gently remind him that 71 Members wish to contribute. I know he will tailor his contribution to take account of that important fact.

**Chris Bryant:** The Attorney General is making a good point, which a lot of us agree with—legal uncertainty is the worst possible outcome. That is why some of us are so angry that the vote was taken away from us in December. There is not a single chance of the Government getting the necessary legislation through by 29 March, even if the Attorney General were to get his way today.

[Chris Bryant]

Can he confirm that if the vote is not won tonight, the Government will have to defer leaving the European Union on 29 March?

**The Attorney General:** The hon. Gentleman knows the affection that I hold for him. It is not “my way”. I understand the heartfelt, passionate and sincere views held on both sides. I listened all last night to the speeches from Members on the Opposition and Government Benches. We must come together now, as mature legislators, to ask ourselves: what are the fundamental objections, if there are any, to this withdrawal agreement? Whether or not it can be done by 29 March does not affect the decision we have to take today, which is: do we opt for order, or do we choose chaos?

**Angus Brendan MacNeil** (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): The Attorney General admitted that there are two problems with the deal. It is a bit like a yachtsman who, when seeing his yacht on the rocks, says, “That anchor chain was great. Only two links were bad.” That is what he is giving the House. It is a disaster, and well he knows it. My second point is that he misunderstood the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown). He was not talking about fish being caught, but fish as a commodity once caught. If it is landed in Northern Ireland, it is in a more advantaged position for export to Europe than fish caught and then landed in Scotland for export to Europe. He should recognise that and be straight with my hon. Friend, which I am sure he was trying to be, but he misunderstood the point.

**Joanna Cherry** (Edinburgh South West) (SNP) *rose*—

**The Attorney General:** I wonder whether I might take the intervention of the hon. and learned Lady.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. In terms of good form, it is the norm for the Minister occupying the Bench or the Member making the speech to offer some response before taking a further intervention. It may be a perfunctory response, but that is the norm.

**The Attorney General:** I apologise, Mr Speaker. I wanted to take the interventions together. If the hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Angus Brendan MacNeil) is referring, in relation to Northern Ireland, to the quota that is to be agreed by the Joint Committee for landing—

**Angus Brendan MacNeil:** When it is caught and then sold.

**The Attorney General:** I would need to examine the issue. I am not certain the hon. Gentleman is right but, again, I have offered to discuss it.

**Joanna Cherry:** The right hon. and learned Gentleman says he is much exercised about legal certainty, so may I ask him about paragraph 2 of his letter yesterday on the exchange of letters? He said that the letters from the Council

“would have legal force in international law and...be relevant and cognisable in the interpretation of the...Agreement...albeit they do not alter the fundamental meanings”

of the withdrawal agreement’s provisions. He, as a senior lawyer, like me will know that in a competition between the letter of assurance and the withdrawal agreement, the withdrawal agreement, as the international treaty, will triumph. That is the case, is it not?

**The Attorney General:** Let me say straightaway, as my letter says, that these assurances, in my view, make a difference to the political question that each of us has to take, but, as I said in the letter, they do not affect the legal equation.

**Nigel Dodds** (Belfast North) (DUP): On this point about the legal effect and what the Prime Minister said—five weeks ago today, in fact—about legally binding assurances—does not what Attorney General has just said confirm the fact that legally binding assurances have not been achieved? That is the tragedy of where we find ourselves now, after five weeks. In fact, from our point of view, the thing that would have been essential to get this matter through the House with our support was not even asked for, which are the changes that would eliminate the trap of the backstop.

**The Attorney General:** First, let me say to my right hon. Friend, the legal equation remains the same. The assurances are binding in the sense that, in international law, they would be a legally binding interpretative tool. What they do not do is alter the fundamental meaning of the provisions of the withdrawal agreement. In that respect, he is right.

I need to come to the first point that I want to make to the House. Let us examine the rest of the agreement. Do we have—

**John Woodcock** (Barrow and Furness) (Ind): Will the Attorney General give way?

**Mr Shailesh Vara** (North West Cambridgeshire) (Con): Will the Attorney General give way?

**The Attorney General:** I will in a minute.

Do we have before us—the withdrawal agreement—a sensible settling of these critical historical obligations for continuing transactions to resolve, for millions of people, the legal uncertainty of taking ourselves away from the highly integrated legal system in which we were organically linked and, indeed, part of? The 585 pages—

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**The Attorney General:** I must make some progress. I will take many more interventions.

On the 585 pages, what does the agreement do? First, it secures the rights of 1 million British citizens living in the European Union and of 3 million European Union citizens living in the United Kingdom. What are we to say to them if this House today does not take the advantage of resolving and giving them the certainty of knowing that their position is enshrined in fundamental law?

**Rachel Reeves** (Leeds West) (Lab): Will the Attorney General give way?

**The Attorney General:** I will in a moment.

The agreement settles the bills. It legally allows for the orderly completion of these thousands of continuing transactions—judicial proceedings, accounting procedures—that would otherwise be thrown into a legal void. It provides for a period of adjustment for people and for businesses of the next 21 months, extendable up to two years, to allow our businesses and our individual citizens to adjust to the new realities.

That is what I mean by the airlock. It is quite simple: an airlock enables the human body to adjust to the new pressure it will face when it exits the airlock. This period allows the transition and adjustment of this country to enter into the bright new world that we will enter when we leave the European Union. So I say to the House with all due diffidence and respect: we all of us would regard, would we not, these parts of the withdrawal agreement as essential to create the bridge for our departure from the European Union.

**Mr Vara:** My right hon. and learned Friend speaks of the legal complexities of the withdrawal agreement, and he also speaks of a coming together. May I refer him to the advice that he gave to the Prime Minister on 13 November in his capacity as Attorney General? On page 2, paragraph 8, he said:

“for regulatory purposes *GB is essentially treated as a third country by NI* for goods passing from GB into NI.”

How can he talk about coming together, while his own advice to the Prime Minister talks of anything but?

**The Attorney General:** I understand the force of what my hon. Friend says, but precisely the same prevails in numerous EU countries. For the purposes of regulation, the Canary Islands are treated as a third country to Spain. It is not for the purposes of regulation alone—single market regulations alone. There are examples all around the world of where there are regulatory differences between individual parts of the jurisdiction of sovereign states.

**Lady Hermon (North Down) (Ind):** On a previous occasion, in early December, in what I thought was a magnificent performance, Attorney General, you used a very striking description of the backstop. You described the backstop as an “instrument of pain”—

**Mr Speaker:** I did not.

**Lady Hermon:** You are quite right, Mr Speaker. The Attorney General described the backstop as an instrument of pain. He said it was

“as much an instrument of pain to the European Union as...to the United Kingdom.”—[*Official Report*, 3 December 2018; Vol. 650, c. 555.]

That is very strong language indeed—an “instrument of pain” for the European Union. Will the Attorney General take some time to explain that in detail? I think that would be very helpful.

**The Attorney General:** I am immensely obliged to the hon. Lady because that is precisely what I want to move on to.

If we accept, and I urge this House to accept, that effectively 90% of this withdrawal agreement—some 450 of the 585 pages—in fact settles these crucial outstanding matters, which no sensible person could doubt require to be settled in order to effect our departure, that leaves

the two grounds of objection that have been advanced—I listen with great care to speeches from Members on the Opposition side of the House—to this agreement and declaration, so may I come to those two grounds? Before I do, I simply say that there are some typical misconceptions about the withdrawal agreement. For example, it is said that the Court of Justice of the European Union retains jurisdiction over our courts once the time-limited obligations have wound down that the withdrawal agreement settles. It does not. It does not. It does not. It does not. How many times do I have to say it to my hon. Friends? [HON. MEMBERS: “More.”] It does not! The fact of the matter is that once—once—these obligations have wound down, the CJEU will have no jurisdiction over the resolution of disputes between individuals, citizens, businesses in our country. This is what our people voted for and we, by adopting this withdrawal agreement, can give it to them.

Secondly, it is said that we will be permanently bound by EU rules. But we will not. The fact of the matter is that the withdrawal agreement’s obligations are inherently time-limited. Once they have wound out, the EU rules will no longer have effect in this country.

**Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con):** My right hon. and learned Friend is making his case with his usual eloquence, but on that specific point and his point about airlocks, airlocks need exit mechanisms. In the absence of legal certainty that we could unilaterally leave the backstop—my amendment (f) addresses this and I will be pressing it—what certainty is there that the EU does not drag negotiations on, so that we could still, with an extension to the transition period, be discussing these issues in four or five years’ time?

**The Attorney General:** Herein lies the critical question that we all have to confront in connection to the backstop. Before I answer it, however, I will take my hon. Friend’s intervention.

**Charlie Elphicke (Dover) (Con):** I thank the Attorney General for giving way. While he pauses for breath, may I too take him to the airlock? In travelling through an airlock, it helps to have a supply of air. In this particular case, I would urge conditionality—that we do not agree to write out a cheque for £39 billion of hard-earned taxpayers’ money unless or until a future relationship agreement is agreed that is legally binding. That would give us greater leverage in the negotiation and enable us to deliver serious value for the British taxpayer.

**The Attorney General:** You cannot say to somebody to whom you owe money, “I am not going to pay you my debt unless you give me something else.” It is not attractive, it is not consistent with the honour of this country and it is not consistent with the rule of law. The fact of the matter is that the withdrawal agreement settles those historic obligations.

May I come to the critical question and the challenge that was—

**Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con):** Will the Attorney General give way?

**The Attorney General:** I will do in a moment. Let me get on because time is short and I need to move on.



[*The Attorney General*]

On the backstop, there is, I would suggest to the House, an inconsistency. There are those who say in this House that the EU will do what is in its interests and that it will, cynically, entrap us in the backstop. They have said—can anybody doubt that this is true?—that the only real thing that is in the best interests of any nation or any organisation of nations is to have cordial relations of good will and co-operation with one's neighbours. History has taught us that over the centuries. To entrap us in the backstop against the overwhelming political will of this nation would have precisely the opposite effect of cultivating those cordial relations of good will between ourselves and the European Union. Any future relationship will depend on good faith and good will. These assurances, which I accept do not have effect on the legal equation, in my view represent solemn statements of the President, the Council and the Commission, which to breach would be incompatible with the European Union's continued standing in international relations and forums. But even if—

**Mr Bone:** Will the Attorney General give way on that point?

**The Attorney General:** I must make some progress.

But even if I am wrong about that, let us examine what the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) asked me to look at. What is the position in the backstop? First, the European Union. No Belgian lawyer—there's a Freudian slip, Mr Speaker. No Belgian fisherman, no French fisherman, no Danish fisherman, no Dutch fisherman will be allowed to point the prow of their trawlers one metre into British waters under the backstop. They will have no access to the rich hunting grounds that for decades they have exploited perfectly lawfully, because the backstop provides them with no legal basis to do so.

I ask the House to reflect. Why does the House think that the rumblings and hollow thunderings of concern are emanating from the counsels of the Quai d'Orsay? They have 10,000 gilets jaunes on the streets of Paris and elsewhere, but if their fishermen are told that they cannot catch a single cod or plaice in the waters of the United Kingdom they will place intense pressure upon the European Union. So I say to the hon. Lady that that fact alone affords a real issue for the member states. But on agriculture, we do not have any further participation in the common agricultural policy under the backstop, and we pay, though we get tariff-free access to the single market, not one penny for that system.

**Anne-Marie Trevelyan** (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con) *rose—*

**Sir Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough) (Con) *rose—*

**The Attorney General:** I must make progress.

I say to my hon. Friends, as I say to Opposition Members, the EU will have to set up entirely different legal and administrative systems in order to set up the customs union that is enshrined within the backstop, yet Britain will pay not one penny of contribution to those complex administrative and technical systems which the EU will, on their side alone, have to finance. How long does the House really think that the EU would wish to go on paying for a bespoke arrangement

in which they are paying tens of millions of euros to sustain a customs union that is simply on their own admission a temporary arrangement?

But even if that was wrong, there are the regulatory provisions under the backstop. They are standard non-regression clauses. They exist in free trade agreements all around the world. They provide us with the ability, if we wish to take it, of being flexible about the means by which we achieve the outcomes because all they do is require us to maintain parity of standards with the position we had when we left the European Union. Therefore, it does give us regulatory flexibility if we wish to avail ourselves of it and the European Union is faced with not a penny being paid, with tariff-free access to the customs union, with not having to obey the regulatory law—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I have been tolerant thus far and I enjoy enormously the performances of the right hon. and learned Gentleman, but this perambulation is very uncommon and irregular. The right hon. and learned Gentleman must face the House. We want to see him and to get directly the benefit of his mellifluous tones.

**The Attorney General:** You upbraid me entirely justly, Mr Speaker, and I apologise.

**Sir Edward Leigh:** Everything the Attorney General says about the backstop may be true, but he knows that many of our hon. Friends are deeply concerned about this and we want an end date. I am not asking him for an answer now, but I see the Prime Minister and the Chief Whip on the Treasury Bench. There is an amendment on the Order Paper that has been selected by Mr Speaker, which could unite the party, or most of it. It is a compromise. If we can have an end date to the backstop, then we can move forward. I do not ask for an answer now, but I beg the Government to consider, over the next six hours, whether they should not accept these amendments because they would try to unlock this process and get it through Parliament.

**The Attorney General:** The amendment that my right hon. Friend has tabled would, in my judgment, not be compatible with our international law obligations. He may know and accept that, but it is certainly my view that it would not be compatible and therefore would be likely not to be seen by the European Union as ratification. It would certainly raise serious question marks over the amendment.

We need to examine the matter without the indulgence of believing that there is any other easy solution. It is sometimes said that the problem with the backstop is that it will not enable us to walk away. That is true, except in this regard: the question is what we would be walking away from. Would the other side regard it as something they would not wish to walk away from, or would it be an embrace that they would like to escape as well? If my hon. and right hon. Friends and Members of the House on both sides come to the conclusion, as I would urge them to do and as I have done after many hours of reflection, that it would be, as the hon. Member for North Down said, an instrument as painful to the European Union as it would be to us, it is a risk, weighed against the other risks, that we should take, if the consequence of not doing so is something worse.

**Mr Bone:** May I take the Attorney General back to some time ago, when he was saying that there was a legal obligation to give £39 billion to the EU, despite the fact that we have been a net contributor of more than £210 billion since the EU started? Will he explain to me on what legal advice he says that, because the House of Lords said there was absolutely no legal obligation?

**The Attorney General:** My hon. Friend is wrong. The House of Lords did not say that. The House of Lords Committee said that there was no obligation in EU law, but that there may well be public international law obligations. The basis of the argument that there are no public international law obligations is in my judgment—I have tested it, as I always do on matters of law, with some very distinguished lawyers with expertise in the field—flimsy at best. The House of Lords Committee did not say there are no public international law obligations.

**Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Con):** Will the Attorney General give way?

**The Attorney General:** I must move on, because the next thing I must deal with is the alternatives.

**Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op):** What about giving way to a woman?

**The Attorney General:** I will give way to my right hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry), but first I need to make some progress.

Orderly exit from the European Union would always require a withdrawal agreement along these lines. No alternative option now being canvassed in the House would not require the withdrawal agreement and now the backstop. Let us be clear: whatever solution may be fashioned if this motion and deal are defeated, this withdrawal agreement will have to return in much the same form and with much the same content. Therefore, there is no serious or credible objection that has been advanced by any party to the withdrawal agreement.

It was said last week by the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) that we should have negotiated a full customs union with a say within the political declaration and then there would have been no need for a backstop, because the agreement could then have been concluded within the transition period. However, he knows, and it is clear, that the European Union is unwilling to and regards itself as bound by its own law not to enter into detailed negotiations on the permanent relationship treaties. The EU was never going to do it, and its own negotiating guidelines said it would not, so there was always going to be this withdrawal agreement, a political declaration setting out a framework and months, if not years, thereafter of detailed negotiation on any final resting place that any political declaration might have.

**Chuka Umunna (Streatham) (Lab):** Will the Attorney General give way?

**The Attorney General:** I will come to the hon. Gentleman in time. Let us examine the point. The question is what is the basis for the objection to the withdrawal agreement?

**Anna Soubry:** The Attorney General and I are both members of the criminal Bar, although I was never in his league. We both understand the art of negotiation.

Someone cannot be a criminal barrister or, indeed, any kind of lawyer unless they understand negotiation. He advances the case for the withdrawal agreement on the basis that it has reached some pragmatic consensus, but I suggest to him that a good negotiation is something that settles things and that a majority can positively support. The problem with this agreement is that it does not settle anything and it does not satisfy the vast majority. In fact, it probably satisfies no one in this House.

**The Attorney General:** I respectfully suggest to my right hon. Friend that that is because the expectations of the withdrawal agreement have been far too unrealistic. *[Interruption.]* This is a serious issue, and I ask for the indulgence of the House in making what I hope is a serious point, although I have to give way to the hon. Member for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves). If the House does not accept the point, that is fine, but let me at least make it.

The withdrawal agreement and a backstop are the first and necessary precondition of any solution. Members on the Opposition Benches have real concerns about the content of the political declaration and the safeguarding of rights. I listened to Members speak last night about the enshrinement of environmental rights and environmental laws and so on, but the political declaration would never have been able to secure detailed, legally binding text on those matters, which will be discussed and negotiated in the next stage of negotiation. It makes no sense to reject the opportunity of order and certainty now because Members are unhappy that they do not have guarantees about what will be in a future treaty.

What will be in that treaty, governed by the parameters set out by the political declaration that I need to come to in a moment, will be negotiated over the next 21 months. This Government have made a pledge to the House that we will take fully the opinion of the House in all the departmental areas over which the negotiations will take place.

**Stephen Doughty:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

**Mr Speaker:** I hope it is a point of order and not a point of frustration. I await it with bated breath.

**Stephen Doughty:** It is a point of inquiry, Mr Speaker. You will be aware that the Attorney General has now spoken for 49 minutes. I understand that a substantial number of colleagues wish to speak today. Can you tell us how many colleagues are waiting to speak and the approximate time people will get?

**Mr Speaker:** The hon. Gentleman is, as always, trying to be helpful, although it was really a point of frustration. The fact is, as I have previously advised the House, that no fewer than 71 hon. and right hon. Members are seeking to catch my eye. There are notable constraints to which I do not wish to add, but of which I feel sure the Attorney General will take account.

**The Attorney General:** I set myself a clear time limit, but I am anxious—*[Interruption.]* You really cannot win. I am trying to take as many interventions as I can, and I will take that of the hon. Member for Streatham (Chuka Umunna).

**Chuka Umunna:** The Attorney General talks about the danger of setting unrealistic expectations, but it was the Prime Minister sitting next to him who promised in her Lancaster House speech that we would have agreed the future relationship before exit day. Secondly, he makes great play of this implementation period, but it is of no use in some respects if we do not know to what we are transitioning. He knows that we will have a different European Parliament, a different European Council and a different European President, and two other presidents, who will all have changed by the time that the future relationship is due to be settled.

**The Attorney General:** We must start from where we are now. It is easy to say, “We shouldn’t have started from here.” The political declaration sets out clear parameters about the future treaty. First, written into the DNA of the political declaration are two cardinal principles—

**Chuka Umunna:** But it is not a legal document.

**The Attorney General:** It is not a legal document, but no political declaration would ever be a legal document, by definition. Under EU law, we cannot have a finally negotiated text with all the legal detail.

Let me come to the two clear conditions in the political declaration—*[Interruption.]* I will complete in a few minutes. First, no free movement—

**Rachel Reeves:** Will the Attorney General give way?

**The Attorney General:** Will the hon. Lady forgive me, but I really cannot? Her own colleagues say that I am taking too long, and I must wind up.

The position is that the political declaration includes two clear conditions. First, there will be no free movement. One cannot belong to the single market without participating in the four freedoms, therefore we will have a deal that admits of a spectrum of landing places where we will not belong to the single market.

**Rachel Reeves:** Will the Attorney General give way?

**The Attorney General:** No, I must now make progress.

Secondly, there will be an independent trade policy. One cannot have a customs union—certainly one that is not bespoke—while having an independent trade policy. The Labour Front-Bench team say that they want a customs union with a say. That would be the first time—if it were ever negotiable—that the European Union had allowed a third country to have any say over commercial policy. Therefore, it is a fantasy, a complete fiction.

The Labour Front-Bench team also say that they want a strong single market deal, forming the exact same benefits—

**Rachel Reeves:** Will the Attorney General give way?

**The Attorney General:** No. The same benefits but with no free movement—that is exactly what the Government want. They want a clear, strong, deep relationship with the European Union with no free movement, so I say to Labour hon. Gentlemen and Ladies and—

**Rachel Reeves:** But the Attorney General will not hear this hon. Lady.

**The Attorney General:** All right.

**Rachel Reeves:** I thank the right hon. and learned Gentleman for giving way. He has been speaking for almost an hour, and for almost that entire time he has been addressing the concerns of a wing of his party, rather than the concerns of this House. In the past week, two amendments have been passed, neither with the support of the Government—to the Finance Bill and to the business motion—and both those amendments made it clear that the view of this House is to avoid a no-deal Brexit. That is the priority of this House—not the issue of the backstop, which he seems to have been addressing for the past hour. Instead of trying to unite his party, as the right hon. Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) has urged him to do, will the Attorney General try to unite the country, and to do the right thing by it, by ruling out leaving the European Union on 29 March without a deal?

**The Attorney General:** The hon. Lady can eliminate a no deal today; all she has to do is to vote for this one. In reality, it is the height of irresponsibility for the Labour party, which claims to be a party of Government, to plunge millions of our citizens into legal uncertainty of that type because of a factitious, trumped-up basis of opposition, whereas the real strategy is to drive this Government and this House on to the rocks, and to create the maximum chaos and the conditions for a general election—*[Interruption.]* We know the game, I say—*[Interruption.]* It is as clear as day—*[Interruption.]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Zen—the House must calm itself. It is an early stage of our proceedings.

**The Attorney General:** I say to the House with the greatest respect, we must seize this opportunity now. This is the key—the first of two—by which we unlock our future outside the European Union. I believe that it is an exciting future. I believe that the opportunity for this House to hold the pen on 40% of our laws, from the environment through to agriculture and fishing, should excite us as an opportunity to do good in this country.

Let us not forget, however, that many outside this House as well as in it wish to frustrate the great end to which the people of this country committed us on 23 June 2016—17.4 million of them in hundreds of constituencies, regardless of party, voted to part company with a political structure that no longer commanded their assent. We should be deeply grateful, because in other ages and other places, such a moment could only have been achieved by means that all of us present would deplore—but we should not underestimate the significance of the moment because it was expressed peacefully by the ballot.

If we approve this agreement, we know that we shall leave the EU on 29 March in an orderly way, and can commence negotiation of the permanent treaties. This agreement and the accompanying political declaration are the two keys that unlock the demand of the electorate that we should repatriate control over vast areas of our laws that hitherto have been in the exclusive legislative competence of the EU. If we do not take that first step, history will judge us harshly, because we will be plunged into uncertainty.



If this vote fails today, those who wish to prevent our departure will seek to promote the conclusion that it is all too difficult and that the Government should ask the electorate to think again. That is why former Prime Ministers and their spin doctors, and all their great panjandrums of the past, are joining the chorus to condemn this deal, for they know that this deal is the key. There is no other. Destroy it—in some form or other, the only practicable deal—and the path to Brexit becomes shrouded in obscurity. If we should be so deceived as to permit that, when historians come to write of this moment, future ages would marvel that the huge repatriation of powers that this agreement entails—over immigration, fisheries, agriculture, the supremacy of our laws and courts—was rejected because somehow it did not seem enough and because of the Northern Ireland backstop.

1.58 pm

**Nick Thomas-Symonds** (Torfaen) (Lab): I am happy to open today's debate for the Opposition and to follow the Attorney General—I am, of course, grateful for his remarks over the past hour. I was also pleased to see his letter to the Prime Minister yesterday, which gave advice on the backstop protocol and the latest exchange of letters, and to receive it without the need for a contempt motion on this occasion.

On 3 December, I was sitting at this Dispatch Box when the Attorney General made his statement on the legal position. He said of Members:

“It is time that they grew up and got real.”

He had even said to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman):

“There is nothing to see here.”—[*Official Report*, 3 December 2018; Vol. 650, c. 557-563.]

After the Government were found to be in contempt of Parliament, however, and he had published his advice the next day, it turned out that there was everything to see here, and that it was the Government who needed to get real.

Let us be clear about what the Attorney General advised. What did he say about the backstop protocol? He said:

“Therefore, despite statements in the Protocol that it is not intended to be permanent, and the clear intention of the parties that it should be replaced by alternative, permanent arrangements, in international law the Protocol would endure indefinitely until a superseding agreement took its place, in whole or in part, as set out therein.”

Which parts of the backstop are more likely than others to remain, even in the event of a trade deal being agreed, he has never actually told us. He added:

“There are numerous references in the Protocol to its temporary nature but there is no indication of how long such temporary arrangements could last.”

On Northern Ireland, incidentally, the Attorney General said:

“GB is essentially treated as a third country by NI for goods passing from GB into NI”—

those are his own words. The Attorney General even said:

“The Protocol appears to assume that the negotiations will result in an agreement.”

Are we in the House to assume, given the conduct of the negotiations, that this Government will be able to negotiate a full future trade deal in time for the protocol not to come into effect?

**The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Michael Gove):** Yes.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds:** Nick Macpherson, the former permanent secretary to the Treasury, disagrees with the Secretary of State. I know that the right hon. Gentleman is not a fan of experts, but perhaps he will listen to this one for a moment. Mr Macpherson said:

“There is no way the UK will negotiate a trade deal with the EU by December 2020. Even 2022 is optimistic. Mid-2020s more likely.”

As a matter of law, as a shadow Law Officer, I ask myself whether there is anything to prevent the backstop from becoming permanent:

“As a matter of international law, no there is not—it would endure indefinitely, pending a future agreement being arranged”.—[*Official Report*, 3 December 2018; Vol. 650, c. 553.]

They are not my words, but those of the Attorney General in this House.

I have to state, clearly, for the House that, as the Opposition, the Labour party is committed to the Good Friday agreement—an agreement that my constituency predecessor, Lord Murphy of Torfaen, helped to negotiate when he chaired the peace talks. That was one of the greatest achievements of any Government since 1945. Labour Members are committed to the long-lasting peace that has been achieved since 1998 and care deeply about the livelihoods and communities of the people who live on the Northern Ireland-Ireland border.

Our position is that a permanent customs union, with a say in external trade deals, a strong single market relationship and guarantees on rights and protections, would have rendered a backstop unnecessary.

**Michael Gove:** Name me a single other country that is in a customs union with the EU that has a say over trade deals. Is not this an unprecedented legal and political novelty of the kind that is rightly called a unicorn?

**Nick Thomas-Symonds:** Let me be clear that I would want our own arrangements. The Secretary of State asks me to give an example of that particular theoretical possibility. It is not one that I wish to emulate, but Turkey is one of them, if he actually looks at it. Secondly—[*Interruption.*] No, let me respond to the Secretary of State on this. He will vote this evening for a backstop that itself contains a bespoke customs arrangement—[*Interruption.*] It has a say, and that is the difference, as the Secretary of State should admit.

**Michael Gove:** You're wrong.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds:** No, I am not.

Let me be clear: this backstop provides only a bare bones customs union, and that is why we cannot support it.

**Lady Hermon:** May I inform the hon. Gentleman—I am sure he already knows—that the vast majority of farmers, businesses, fishermen and community leaders in Northern Ireland strongly support this deal negotiated by the Government? I heard his warm words about his support for the Good Friday agreement, but actions speak louder than words. Voting down the Brexit deal tonight will be a clear signal that the Labour party does not care about the consequences for the Good Friday agreement.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds:** I have great respect for the hon. Lady, but I fundamentally disagree with her final remark. There is a commitment to the Good Friday agreement among Labour Members. My constituency has great pride in the agreement because the peace talks were chaired by my predecessor—we have great respect for it and want to protect it.

Let me be clear why we cannot support the bespoke customs union within the backstop: it would have no proper governance; firms based in Britain, rather than Northern Ireland, would be outside the single market facing barriers to trade; and the protections for workers and the environment would be unenforceable non-regression clauses that would see the UK fall behind over time. The arrangement falls far short of what Labour has argued for.

What other routes are there to an exit from the backstop? I asked the Attorney General about international treaties that the UK has no unilateral right to terminate. His response was to direct me to the Vienna convention on the law of treaties. Even if it applied—and it only applies between states—the Attorney General knows this is clutching at straws. First, it is said, we could argue that the EU was not using “best endeavours” to complete our future trade agreement and that that constituted a “material breach” under article 60 of the convention. The Attorney General has said, in relation to article 2.1 of the backstop protocol, that

“it is the duty of the parties to negotiate a superseding agreement. That must be done using best endeavours, pursuant to Article 184 of the Withdrawal agreement. This is subject also to the duty of good faith, which is both implied by international law, and expressly created by Article 5 of the Withdrawal Agreement”.

But he has also said:

“The duty of good faith and to use best endeavours is a legally enforceable duty. There is no doubt that it is difficult to prove.”

Again, those are the words of the Attorney General. He knows that that is the case.

Secondly, we could try to argue that there had been a “fundamental change of circumstances” under article 62 of the Vienna convention, but we could not credibly argue that entering the backstop was such a change in circumstances when the situation is clearly set out in the withdrawal agreement in such a way. To say that a scenario we are all aware of and debating now represents a fundamental departure would not wash with anyone, as the Attorney General knows. It is not so much an airlock as a padlock, and it is a padlock with two key holders, of which we are only one.

What changed over Christmas? What has been achieved by delaying the vote? The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs told us on the morning of the vote that it was

“definitely, 100%, going to happen”.

We all know what happened after that—it is one of many incidents during this process that has led many of us to disbelieve so much that the Government say. The Prime Minister said in her statement later that day:

“I have heard those concerns and I will now do everything I possibly can to secure further assurances”.

The Leader of the House said:

“The Prime Minister has been clear that the vote will take place when she believes she has the legal assurances that Parliament needs that the backstop will not be permanent.”—[*Official Report*, 10 December 2018; Vol. 651, c. 25-84.]

The International Trade Secretary, went even further, saying that it would be

“very difficult to support the deal without changes to the backstop”.

He was not sure that the Cabinet would agree for it to be put to the House of Commons.

What actually happened? The Prime Minister went to the European Council but could not persuade leaders to give her the conclusions she wanted. The Christmas break came and went. We got a document on commitments to Northern Ireland that did nothing to change the legal text and then, yesterday, letters appeared between the Prime Minister on the one hand, and the President of the European Council and the President of the Commission on the other.

**Anna Soubry:** The hon. Gentleman is making a case about trust, and that is what the country is being asked to do—make this great leap of faith. We do not know what our future trading and security relationships will be. The sorry story is that all the way through the past two and a half years we have had a series of promises that have not been delivered. He will remember, for example, the then Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis), saying at the Dispatch Box that we would have a deal before we left that would convey the “exact same benefits” of our current membership of the single market and the customs union. That is what is troubling people. This is a blindfold Brexit and that is why people will not vote for it.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds:** The right hon. Lady is right and I am sure that she has noted the inconsistency. The Attorney General said only a few moments ago that we could not expect to have anything detailed negotiated at this stage, but that is precisely what the Government had previously promised. How are we supposed to believe those conflicting statements?

**Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab):** That point is exactly at the heart of this question of trust. The Attorney General just committed the EU to not agreeing to future trade deals, in response to our request for a customs union, but he refused to say—the Government still refuse to do so—whether the Government will commit to a customs union in that future trade agreement. If they were to do so, there would be no need for this discussion about the backstop or about the matter of trust that the right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry) talked about.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds:** My hon. Friend highlights the really vague nature of the political declaration, which I will come back to in a moment.

**Several hon. Members rose—**

**Nick Thomas-Symonds:** They are queueing up! I will give way to the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr Evans), but then I need to make some progress.

**Mr Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley) (Con):** We have talked about trust and promises, which are vital. We promised to deliver on the outcome of the referendum. It was this House that gave the people the referendum in the first place. We passed our sovereignty to the people and promised that we would deliver on their verdict. That verdict

was to leave the European Union. Does not the hon. Gentleman believe that if we failed to deliver on that verdict, it would be seen as one of the greatest betrayals of trust in this country?

**Nick Thomas-Symonds:** My constituents, like those of the hon. Gentleman, voted to leave the EU, and I voted to trigger article 50 in good faith and in line with their wishes. I sincerely hoped that there would by now be something significantly better before this House that we could all have supported and got around.

**Daniel Kawczynski** (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con) *rose—*

**Nick Thomas-Symonds:** I am going to make some progress, but I will give way again in a moment.

I want to move on to the letter that has been sent by President Juncker and President Tusk, page 2 of which states:

“The European Council also said that, if the backstop were nevertheless to be triggered, it would only apply temporarily, unless and until it is superseded by a subsequent agreement”.

They again spoke about “best endeavours” and about the backstop being in place only for as long as “strictly necessary”, but we all know that that represents no difference at all to the position on which the Attorney General advised in December. Have there been any changes to the withdrawal agreement text? None. Changes to the possible interpretations of it? None. Changes to the reassurances available? None. What did the Attorney General himself say in his latest letter to the Prime Minister about the Council’s conclusions and their impact on the Northern Ireland protocol? He said that

“they do not alter the fundamental meaning of its provisions as I advised them to be on 13 November 2018.”

To coin a phrase, nothing has changed.

**Daniel Kawczynski** *rose—*

**Simon Hoare** (North Dorset) (Con) *rose—*

**Nick Thomas-Symonds:** I want to make some progress.

I made it clear in response to an intervention that my constituency of Torfaen voted to leave. I respect everyone who voted. In good faith, and in line with their wishes, I voted to trigger article 50 to start the process of our withdrawal. I wish there were a withdrawal agreement worthy of wide support across this House. I wish there were a political declaration that actually did point a way to a future that secured our economy, our jobs and our futures, and that it was not the meaningless text—the leap in the dark—that it actually is. Now, more than ever, we need to unite the country away from fractious debate and towards a shared vision of our future.

The Prime Minister says she wants to unite, but all she has done is divide. She failed to unilaterally guarantee the rights of EU citizens at the outset, which would have been the right thing to do, creating good will on both sides. Her red lines created more problems than they solved, and she has negotiated issues in an order and a way that made a backstop inevitable. The Prime Minister has had two years to reach out across the House for consensus, but she has failed to do so. Instead of speaking to others, she has stayed in her bunker. Now she only speaks at the concrete walls, unable to deliver the changes needed.

This country deserves so much better than this totally inadequate agreement. We hoped for more in the 916 days since the Prime Minister first stood on the steps of No. 10 with what have proved to be completely empty promises. I stand here today, nearly four years after I was first elected, knowing that we can and must do better at this key moment in our history. For that reason, the Prime Minister’s deal should be voted down by this House.

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The first of the approximately 70 Members wishing to speak from the Back Benches is the Father of the House, Mr Kenneth Clarke.

2.14 pm

**Mr Kenneth Clarke** (Rushcliffe) (Con): I shall try to compete with the Opposition spokesman on brevity by being briefer than he was.

This is a chaotic debate in every conceivable way. Future generations will look back and be unable to imagine how we reduced ourselves to this disorderly exchange on a whole range of views, cutting across the parties, at a time when we were taking such a historic decision. That was summed up to me yesterday when I drove through the gates into New Palace Yard and was flanked on either side by lobbyists waving things at me. To my right, I had people waving yellow placards with the words “Leave means leave.” To my left, I had people waving European Union flags and demanding my support. In so far as anyone was shouting any clear message to me, it seemed that both sides were shouting the same thing. Both sides were demanding that I vote against the withdrawal agreement. That summed up the confusion, because both were pursuing objectives, neither of which I agreed with and which took us a million miles away from the national interest, which the House of Commons should surely turn itself to in the end.

We all know where we are coming from, and I am not going to labour my well-known views, because I have been here so long. Yesterday I slightly offended one of my very good friends in the House when I referred to hard-line remainers as well as hard-line Brexiteers. I confess that I am undoubtedly a hard-line remainder. I do not think that there is anyone more hard-line on the subject in the House. When I was a Cabinet Minister, I refused to vote for the referendum being held. The Prime Minister and the Chief Whip chose not to notice my attempts ostentatiously to abstain on the vote. I am the only person on the Government side of the House who voted against invoking article 50. I am a lifelong believer in the European project, and no opinion poll is ever going to change my mind at this stage.

**Sir William Cash** (Stone) (Con) *rose—*

**Mr Clarke:** I apologise to my hon. Friend, but I have no time.

I believe that Britain’s role in the world now is as one of the three leading members of the European Union, and one that has particular links with the United States—when it has a normal President—that the others do not. That enables us to defend our interests and put forward our values in a very dangerous world. We have influential membership—we lead on liberal economic policy—



[*Mr Kenneth Clarke*]

of the biggest and most developed free trade area in the world, which is always going to be where our major trading partners are, because in the end geography determines that they matter to us more than anyone else.

I will not go on, but just in case there is any doubt about where I am coming from, let me say that I am being pragmatic, as we all have to be. The Attorney General was quite correct to raise the need for the House to achieve some kind of consensus and to accept some kind of compromise to minimise the damage, which I regard as my duty. The vote on invoking article 50 revealed to me that there was not the slightest chance of persuading the present House of Commons to give up leaving the EU, because it is terrified of denying the result of the EU referendum. To be fair to my friends who are hard-line Brexiteers and always have been, none of them ever had the slightest intention of taking any notice of the referendum, but there is now a kind of religiously binding commitment among the majority in the House that we must leave. So we are leaving.

Why, therefore, am I supporting the withdrawal agreement? It is a natural preliminary to the proper negotiations, which we have not yet started. Frankly, it should have taken about two months to negotiate, because the conclusions we have come to on the rights of citizens, on our legal historical debts and on the Irish border being permanently open were perfectly clear. They are essential preconditions, to which the Attorney General rightly drew our attention, to the legal chaos that would be caused if we just left without the other detailed provisions in that 500-page document.

The withdrawal agreement itself is harmless, and the Irish backstop is not the real reason why a large number of Members are going to vote against it. One would have to be suffering from some sort of paranoia to think that the Irish backstop is some carefully contrived plot to keep the British locked into a European relationship from which they are dying to escape. The Attorney General addressed that matter with great eloquence, which I admired. It is obviously as unattractive to the other EU member states as it is to the United Kingdom to settle down into some semi-permanent relationship on the basis of the Irish backstop.

In my opinion, we do not need to invoke the Irish backstop at all. We can almost certainly avoid it. It seems quite obvious that the transition period should go on for as long as is necessary until a full withdrawal agreement, in all its details on our political relationships, regulatory relationships, trade relationships, security and policing, has been settled. I do not think that will be completed in a couple of years, however. I actually think it will be four or five years, if we make very good progress, before we have completed all that, and I think that is the view of people with more expertise than me who will be saddled with the responsibility of negotiating it if we ever get that far. I have actually been involved in trade agreements, unlike most of the people in this House.

If we extend the transition period as is necessary, we will never need to go into the backstop. Putting an end date on the transition period is pretty futile, because we cannot actually begin to change our relationship until we have agreed in some detail what we are actually

changing to. If this House persists in taking us out of the European Union, that is eventually where we have to get to.

**Anna Soubry:** Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

**Mr Clarke:** If I give way to my right hon. Friend, who is a good friend, I shall suddenly find that everyone is leaping up, and I will not keep my word if I start giving way.

The outcome that I wish to see is, as it happens, the same as the Government's declared outcome. Keeping to the narrower matters of trade and investment, we should keep open borders between the United Kingdom and the rest of the European Union and have trade relationships that are as free and frictionless as we have at the moment. I shall listen to people arguing that that is not in the best interests of the United Kingdom and future generations, but that is an impossible case to make. It is self-evident that we should stay in our present free trade agreement. We cannot have free trade with the rest of the world while becoming protectionist towards continental Europe by erecting new barriers. Nobody said to the electorate at the time of the referendum that the purpose of the whole thing was to raise new barriers to two-way trade and investment.

It seems quite obvious, and factually correct in my opinion, that if we wish to keep open borders—the land border, which happens to be in Ireland, and the sea border around the rest of the British Isles—we will have to be in a customs union and in regulatory alignment with the EU, which would greatly resemble what we call the single market. All this stuff about new technology may come one day when every closed border in the world will vanish, but under WTO rules we have to man the border if there are different tariffs and regulatory requirements on either side. That is where we have got to go, and we will have to tighten things up sooner or later.

The Government keep repeating their red lines, some of which were set out at an early stage long before the people drafting the speeches had the first idea about the process they were about to enter into. Most of the red lines now need to be dropped. The standard line is that we cannot be in a customs union because that would prevent us from having trade agreements with the rest of the world, which is true. We cannot have a common customs barrier enforced around the outside of a zone if one member is punching holes through it and letting things in under different arrangements from other countries. For some, that is meant to be the global future—the bright and shining prospect of our being outside the European Union, which nobody proposed in the referendum. As far as I can see, such things stemmed from a brilliant speech made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), who was praised for putting an optimistic tone on it all. He held out this vision of great countries throughout the world throwing open their markets to us in relief when we left the European Union and offering us better terms than we have spent the last few years obtaining when taking a leading role in negotiating together with the European Union.

Of course, the key agreement that is always cited is the trade agreement that we are going to have with Donald Trump's America, which is a symbol of the

prospects that await us, and China apparently comes next. I have tried in both places. I have been involved in trade discussions with those two countries on and off for the best part of 20 years. They are very protectionist countries, and America was protectionist before President Trump. I led for the Government on negotiating the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership. The reason why the EU-US deal had the funny title of TTIP was that we could not call it a free trade agreement, because the Americans said that Congress was so hostile to the idea of free trade that we could not talk about such an agreement, so we had to give it another title.

We got nowhere, even under the Obama Administration, because we wanted to open up public procurement and access to services, including financial services, in the United States, and I can tell you that it was completely hopeless trying to open up their markets. We are told that things are different with President Trump, that the hopes for President Trump are a sign of the new golden future that is before us. However, President Trump has no time for WTO rules. He has been breaking them with some considerable vigour, and he will walk out of the WTO sooner or later. His view of trade deals is that he confronts allied partner countries and says that the United States should be allowed to export more to them and that they should stop exporting so much to the United States. He has enforced that on Canada and Mexico, and he is having a good go at enforcing it on China.

President Trump's only expressed interest in a trade deal with Britain is that we should throw open our markets to American food, which is produced on an almost industrial scale very competitively and in great quantities. That trade deal would require one thing: the abandonment of European food and animal welfare standards that the British actually played a leading part in getting to their present position in the rest of the EU, and the adoption of standards laid down by Congress—the House of Representatives and the Senate—in response to the food lobby. There is no sovereignty in that. Nobody is going to take any notice of the UK lobbying the American Congress on food standards. It is an illusion.

If we had enforced freedom of movement properly before all this, we would not be in this trouble. All the anti-immigrant element of the leave vote was not really about EU workers working here. We were already permitted to make it a condition that people could only come here for a prearranged job, and we were permitted to say that someone would have to leave if they did not find a new job within three months of losing one. Everybody in this House and outside falls over themselves with praise for the EU workers in the national health service and elsewhere, but it is another illusion.

Given the present bizarre position, my view is that we must get on with the real negotiations, because we have not even started them yet. It is not possible to start to map out the closest possible relationship with the EU if we are going to be forced to leave. We are in no position to move on from this bad debate and then sort everything out by 29 March. It is factually impossible not only to get the legislation through but to sort out an alternative to the withdrawal agreement if it is rejected today.

We should extend article 50, but that involves applying to the EU and it implies getting the EU's consent, which would be quite difficult for any length of time. I advocate

revoking article 50, because it is a means of delay. We should revoke it—no one can stop us revoking it—and then invoke it again when we have some consensus and a majority for something. I will vote against it again, but there is a massive majority in this House in favour of invoking article 50.

**The Attorney General:** Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

**Mr Clarke:** I will annoy everyone else by giving way this once.

**The Attorney General:** I am admiring my right hon. and learned Friend's speech minute by minute, but there is one point on which he is wrong. We cannot revoke article 50 unless we provide satisfactory evidence to the European Union that we are cancelling our departure—not suspending it, not pausing it, but cancelling it.

**Mr Clarke:** I have not been in legal practice for 40 years so, if that is the case, I will examine it and look at what authority my right hon. and learned Friend gives me. Would we be prevented permanently thereafter from ever invoking article 50 again? I would like to examine that proposition. If that is the case, we have to extend article 50, but we cannot carry on having this chaotic debate and, in the next 70 days, coming to conclusions that commit this country to a destiny that will have a huge effect on the next generation or two, because we are heading towards leaving with no deal at all, which would be just as catastrophic as he described.

The vast majority of Members of Parliament are flatly against leaving without a deal. For that reason, pragmatism and common sense require us to vote for this withdrawal agreement to try to get back to some sort of orderly progress.

2.32 pm

**Ian Blackford** (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): It is always a considerable pleasure to follow the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke). We live in a strange world because, as on so many occasions, I find myself pretty well agreeing with much of what he says. Of course, on many occasions, I find him in the Division Lobby with us, and I say to him with respect and friendliness that his analysis is spot on. He has demonstrated the futility of those who believe that a UK outwith the European Union could somehow quickly put together trade deals around the world. It is a fantasy; it is for the birds.

It is an absolute travesty that a binary choice between the Government's deal and no deal is being put to the House today. That is not the case. Other options are open to the House, and the right hon. and learned Gentleman has talked about either revoking or staving off the article 50 process, which would give the House time to come to its senses, based on what we now know of the risks of Brexit.

Let us be absolutely clear that there is no such thing as a good Brexit. The Scottish Government's analysis demonstrates that, in any Brexit scenario, the countries of Scotland, England, Northern Ireland and Wales will all be poorer than they would be under the status quo. It is the responsibility of any Government to provide security for their citizens. A Government who wish to

[*Ian Blackford*]

make a proposition that imperils the employment opportunities and living standards of their citizens are abrogating their responsibility.

It is on that basis that I plead with the right hon. and learned Gentleman to vote against, or at least abstain on, the Government's motion today, because this House, to use the often-used phrase, must take back control. We must talk to the people of the United Kingdom, however they voted, based on our knowledge of the facts. Last week Jaguar Land Rover announced that it will be making an additional 4,500 workers redundant, following the 1,500 redundancies already announced. We know the reasons for that are complex, and they include diesel cars and China, but Brexit is a significant contributory factor.

This Government stand accused of putting workers on the dole, and doing so as a function of ideology, because that is what it is. Look at the circumstances of where we are today. The Prime Minister called a general election because she thought she would come back with a thumping majority, but she came back as a minority Prime Minister. She should have seized the moment and recognised that this is a Parliament of minorities, a Parliament in which she has to reach across the House to try to achieve consensus, but she has failed to do so.

All that has happened since the 2017 general election is that we have had an internal battle in the Tory party. The Brexiteers want to drive us off a cliff, and there is no way that the Scottish National party and the people of Scotland will be sitting on that bus as the Prime Minister drives it off a cliff. There is no way that the people of Scotland will be dragged out of the European Union against their will.

**Dr Lisa Cameron** (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): My right hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. The Government's own analysis shows that, no matter the outcome, with Brexit we will all be poorer, but does he agree that it is the most vulnerable in society who will pay the price? I am the chair of the all-party parliamentary group on disability, and people with disabilities have been writing to me in their hundreds because they are terrified that Brexit will happen and they will be thrown into further despair.

**Ian Blackford**: My hon. Friend is correct that it is the most vulnerable in our society—those who are disabled and those who rely on our public services—who will pay the biggest price for Brexit, because there is no question but that our public services will be poorer. We know that economic growth in the United Kingdom will be reduced by Brexit. Why are we punishing people to that extent? The Government have a responsibility to be honest with people and to reflect on what happened in 2016.

An economist, Dr Samuelson, said, "When events change, I change my mind." Why has the Prime Minister not reflected on the situation we are in? I am grateful for my hon. Friend's intervention, and I am delighted to announce to the House that all 35 SNP Members have spoken out in this debate about the risks we see to our constituents and to our industries across Scotland. Of course, we are particularly alarmed by the issue of freedom of movement. We have benefited enormously from those who have come to work and live in our

country, to add to the diversity of our communities and to make a contribution to our economic growth. EU citizens who have chosen to make their lives here are now being told that they will have to register to sustain the rights they have.

**Mhairi Black** (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (SNP): Disgusting.

**Ian Blackford**: It is, as my hon. Friend says, disgusting. This is about people who are a part of us: our friends, our neighbours and our relatives. We are now saying to them that they are going to have a different status as a consequence of what we have done. But it is not just about EU citizens who have chosen to come to live and work in this country; it is about our rights as EU citizens as well. If the Government get their way and Brexit takes place on 29 March, whereas today each and every one of us has the right to work in 28 member states, we will be automatically restricted to the right to live and work only in the UK. I was lucky enough to work in the Netherlands. My son worked in the Netherlands. Why should my grandchildren not have the same rights that my generation had? It is abhorrent that we are treating the people of these islands like that.

**Drew Hendry** (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): My right hon. Friend is making a powerful point about people who have come to live and work and be our friends and neighbours in our communities. Does he agree that it is an absolute disgrace that these people, who are so vital to us, are being told they must make an application to pay to stay in their own homes, even though many of them have been here for decades? It is an absolute outrage.

**Ian Blackford**: I absolutely agree, but of course it fits with the hostile environment that many on the Government Benches have prosecuted over the last few years. We have an expression in Scotland: "We're all Jock Tamson's Bairns". If we look back at Scottish history over the last 100 years, we see that our population has barely grown—we have gone from 4.8 million to 5.5 million people. We face a ticking time bomb: an ageing population. The last thing we need is to be cut off from the supply of labour and people who want to come and contribute to sustainable economic growth in Scotland. How will we afford to invest in our public services if we cannot generate economic growth? That is what leaving Europe will do to us. It will restrain our ability to deliver growth and look after the vulnerable in our society.

This is the defining moment in the Brexit process and in the future of relationships. Members of Parliament must recognise their responsibilities, and for many I know that demands they make difficult decisions. I would say to each and every Member of Parliament that their primary responsibility is not to party but to their constituents. They ought to think about the risks consequent on this deal. It is the height of irresponsibility for the Government to suggest that this is a binary choice. The SNP's amendment gives the House the opportunity to support extending article 50 and to give the people of the United Kingdom the choice to make that determination themselves on the basis of the facts and in the knowledge of what Brexit will do. It is only right and proper, according to the democratic principle, that we allow the people of the United Kingdom to make that choice.



I appeal to Members across the House. We in the SNP have many friends across this place, including on the Labour Benches. I appeal to the Labour party for goodness' sake to get off the fence. The young people who voted for Labour in England in 2017 will never forgive the Leader of the Opposition and his colleagues unless they recognise that this is the opportunity to unite the House, vote down the Government's deal, support a people's vote and allow the people to have their say. Will you do it? *[Interruption.]* I can see the shadow International Trade Secretary chuntering. If he wishes to intervene and accept his responsibilities—*[Interruption.]* Well, he can blow a kiss, but what he is doing is blowing a raspberry at the people of the United Kingdom. That is the reality. If hon. Members are serious about politics and responsibility, it is about time some of them grew up. Grow up and accept responsibility; do not dodge this.

The people of Scotland have a choice. The SNP has been in government in Scotland since 2007. *[Interruption.]* I can hear Government Members say, "Too long", but the fact is we have won three elections on the trot to the Scottish Parliament and the last two elections to Westminster. The party sitting in third place in Scotland is the Labour party, and that is because it is out of touch and out of step with the people of Scotland.

**Stephen Gethins** (North East Fife) (SNP): It comes as no surprise that, when challenged to do so by the leader of the SNP, nobody got up to defend the position of the Labour party. Does that not tell us that there is no such thing as a jobs-first Brexit? It is a myth.

**Ian Blackford**: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and that is why I am appealing to every Member in the House to think about the people—about the people who have already lost their jobs, about the thousand people in the European Medicines Agency, about the thousand people in the European Banking Authority, about the workers at Jaguar Land Rover, who know that the Labour party today is not going to lift a finger to protect their economic interests. That is the reality: a party that was once of the people but is now sitting back and failing to accept its responsibilities. Thank goodness in Scotland we have an alternative.

The people of Scotland have watched everything that has gone on over the last two and half years. "Taking back control", the Conservatives say. My goodness, they have taken back control from the Parliament of Scotland. When this House pushed through the withdrawal Act, it took back responsibility for fisheries, agriculture and the environment, which were laid down in the Scotland Act 1998 when the Parliament was established as devolved matters, and which were supposed to be protected by the Sewel convention. Nevertheless, the Government said, "These are not normal times", and they grabbed back powers not so much from the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament, but from the people of Scotland, who had voted for it in the referendum 1997. That is the reality of the Conservatives, who have always been hostile to devolution.

Of course, we are told, "The people voted in 2016 and we should accept it", but the people of Scotland were told in our referendum in 2014 that if we stayed in the UK our rights within the EU would be respected. The fact that 62% of the people of Scotland voted to

stay in the EU is ignored by this Government. The fact that the Scottish Parliament has said we wish to stay, as a very minimum, in the single market and the customs union has been ignored by this Government. They have shown contempt for the institutions in Scotland and for the cross-party unity that existed on these matters in Scotland.

The time is coming when the people of Scotland will have to reflect on how we are being treated and ignored. The Scottish Parliament has a mandate for an independence referendum, and if and when the First Minister and the Scottish Government choose to enforce that mandate, this House will have to respect the wishes of the Scottish people. I hope tonight that this House votes down the Government's deal and has the confidence to extend article 50 and to give the responsibility back to the people, but if the House is determined to push ahead with Brexit, the day will come when the people of Scotland will have to determine their own future—do we wish to be tied to a United Kingdom that is going to damage our economic interests, or will we accept our responsibilities as a historic, independent European nation? That day is coming and it is coming soon.

2.49 pm

**Sir William Cash** (Stone) (Con): For me, this has been a very long journey towards leaving the European Union. The European question has always been about who governs this country and how. The national interest is served by our democratic system of parliamentary government, which has evolved over centuries of our history. We make our laws in this Parliament, in line with the consent of the voters in general elections, on the basis of the party manifestos. The Government are chosen by virtue of those who win the most seats. It is also fundamental that our proceedings are both accountable and transparent. We have *Hansard*, and all votes are recorded. Any voter can see the transcripts and can see how their laws are made and voted on in this Parliament.

We must fully repeal the European Communities Act 1972 on 29 March, as the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 legislatively requires. I agreed with the Prime Minister when she said in her Lancaster House speech:

"we will not have truly left the European Union if we are not in control of our own laws."

However, the withdrawal agreement does not achieve that, despite breathtaking assertions to the contrary. This situation may even be indefinite through the backstop, and through the undemocratic procedures of the Council of Ministers. We could be indefinitely shackled, as article 132 of the agreement affirms, even up to 31 December "20XX". The decisions in the Council on which laws we obey, and changes to the rules creating great uncertainty for business, will be made through qualified majority voting or consensus by the other 27, behind closed doors. We will not be there. There will be no transcript, and no explanations will be given of how or why the laws imposed on us will be arrived at.

That alone is a reason why I shall vote against the withdrawal agreement. It is a denial of our democracy, and therefore of the national interest. It defies the referendum vote and the withdrawal Act itself, which repeals the European Communities Act and all the treaties and laws, including the single market and the customs union, which have been heaped on us since we joined the European Community in 1972-73.

[*Sir William Cash*]

It is outrageous to suggest that what we are doing in rejecting the withdrawal agreement is undemocratic. This is pure Alice in Wonderland. It turns the very notion of democracy and the national interest on its head, but that is not all. The agreement is not compromise, as the Attorney General suggested; it is capitulation. Nor is it pragmatism. We are not purists. We are defending our democracy against servitude.

Apart from control over our laws, there is the question of money. We will be paying not merely £39 billion but far more for nothing. We will lose the rebate. Then there is the role of the European Court of Justice. There is the issue of our not being able to trade independently outside the clutches of the European Commission. We have prodigious opportunities to create prosperity and to provide the revenue for the payment of our public services by trading on our own terms with other countries in the world throughout the Anglosphere and the Commonwealth. There is also the question of the constitutional status of Northern Ireland.

The state aid proposals in the agreement would give a power of veto to the European Union over our incentives in relation to ports and industrial development, which would be one of our primary means of attracting foreign direct investment. It should also be borne in mind that, in the European Union, we run a deficit in the single market in goods of about £95 billion a year, whereas Germany hides behind the euro with a surplus of £140 billion with the EU27. Sir Paul Lever, our former British ambassador to Germany, said recently in his book “Berlin Rules”:

“the EU is geared principally to the defence of German national interest.”

He explains, as I did in my own book “Against a Federal Europe” in the early 1990s, that there will be a German Europe. He shows that no decisions, including those related to the negotiations for the withdrawal agreement, were made by the Commission or by other member states without the prior agreement of Germany itself.

Why on earth would anyone want to remain? The EU does not work for the UK or, indeed, for the EU itself. Youth unemployment in countries such as Italy, Greece and France is running at between 20% and 50%. Those countries are utterly disillusioned with the austerity imposed by the German-led fiscal compact. Hungary, Poland and other countries in central Europe are in revolt, and even Sweden and Denmark have moved to the right. So what is it that makes the reversers in the House believe that we should remain in this imploding, undemocratic European Union, whose economic foundations are in tatters as the euro stagnates? Why on earth do they believe that a new “people’s vote” is needed, when one was enacted in the House of Commons and voted for by most of those who are now trying to unravel the withdrawal Act, and despite the fact that every Conservative endorsed the referendum vote in our manifesto?

As I argued some months ago, our system is one of parliamentary government, not government by Parliament. Government by Parliament would be anarchic. So we are faced with not only a constitutional crisis but a massive breach of public trust, as a party and as a Parliament. Until the time of the Chequers proposals,

I was fully prepared to support the Government, but on 6 July my trust in the Government and the Prime Minister was completely lost.

On 9 July I asked the Prime Minister how she could reconcile Chequers with the repeal of the European Communities Act, and received no reply. During the debate that took place the following week, I stressed that the 80-page White Paper which set out those proposals, and which is now intrinsic to the withdrawal agreement, had been pre-planned for probably up to a year. I explained that it would unravel the European Communities Act, and that this was a gross misleading of Parliament. Indeed, the Chequers meeting itself had bounced the Cabinet, in breach of collective responsibility and in breach of the ministerial code. All those factors amount to a monstrous breach of constitutional and public trust.

That brings me to what happens next, when I believe the withdrawal agreement will be consigned to the grave of history. Far from Members of Parliament—as the Prime Minister has asserted—voting for the agreement, it is our duty to vote against it. We will not have effectively left the European Union if we do not. We will also be undermining our Westminster system of government, and depriving ourselves of the monumental opportunities of global trading on our own terms and with our friends in the United States who are so disillusioned with this agreement—and the same applies to other members of the Commonwealth.

As Churchill once said, and as I was reminded at the time of Maastricht by my constituents, we should put our country first, our constituency second, and our party third. Tragically, our Prime Minister became leader of our party by coronation and not by the will of the party members—all the recent evidence suggests that they are profoundly against the withdrawal agreement—and we then had the deeply unsatisfactory outcome of the last general election.

I simply say, therefore, that now is the time to walk away from this European Union. The expression “no deal” is a misnomer. It is not a default position; it is what the Act of Parliament endorsing the Lisbon treaty specifies. There must be no extension of time indicated by the so-called European Union (No. 2) Bill presented by my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Nick Boles). I am glad that the Prime Minister reaffirmed that to me yesterday. It will achieve nothing.

I strongly urge the Government to conclude, after the vote is cast tonight, that enough is enough, and that we have reached journey’s end. Now is the time to walk away from the intransigence of the European Union and our failed policy of seeking to supplicate its guidelines, its terms and its paymasters. We witnessed similar events in May 1940 when the then Prime Minister actually won the vote after the Norway debate, but, on reflection, concluded that he had to resign because he had lost the confidence of Parliament as a whole. I believe that there are lessons in that for the Prime Minister. She should consider her position, and should do so with dignity and without rancour.

2.58 pm

**Hilary Benn** (Leeds Central) (Lab): I want to address what happens next, if, as seems likely, the Prime Minister’s deal is defeated this evening. The first question is “What will the Prime Minister do in that event?” Until yesterday,

I thought that she might say “I am going back to Brussels to secure some more assurances”, but that route now appears to be blocked in the light of the letter that she brought to the House’s attention yesterday. I would like to think that she would take a bold step—that she would reach out across the House to look for a consensus, would say that she was prepared to consider a completely different approach, or would even announce that because she still believed in her deal, she would take it to the British people and ask them what they thought. That really would be political leadership. But if she does not do any of those things, the House of Commons will have to move swiftly to enable us to decide what we can agree on because, as the Prime Minister rightly said, the House of Commons can say what it is against, but in the end it will have to be for something. So we need to decide what a different policy might look like and how we get there.

One option is undoubtedly to leave without a deal. Some Members favour that, as we have just heard, but many of us think it would be a disaster—by the way, so do the Government. So let’s give the House of Commons a chance once and for all to make it clear what it thinks of that.

Then there are the alternative deals. There is Canada with a variety of pluses attached. There is the EEA and a customs union—which is what I have been arguing for—or a variation on that. And then there is the question of process: how do we enable any of the different approaches, if we can agree on them, to be negotiated with the European Union, and how can we do that when we are running out of time?

I think it is now inevitable that article 50 will need to be extended, whichever option the House of Commons chooses, assuming we can reach agreement on something. I support a series of indicative votes and I support the Bill that the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Nick Boles) and others have tabled, which, if approved, would give the House the legal means to give effect to what we decide, including on whether to extend article 50. If this House cannot agree, apart from deciding that we do not want to leave with no deal—in other words, if this House remains deadlocked, which is a possibility—someone else will have to decide. In all fairness, I have to say that I can see no other way of doing that in those circumstances than by resolving to go back to the British people and asking them what they think.

**Mr Gregory Campbell** (East Londonderry) (DUP): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Hilary Benn:** I would give way, but time is very short and many other Members want to speak.

The reason the Prime Minister has got into such difficulty is that, as we will discover tonight, the House of Commons will not agree a deal because of fear, uncertainty and doubt: fear that we will be locked permanently into a backstop; uncertainty about entering into a process where we will be in an even weaker position than we have been in over the past two and a half years; and doubt about where this will all end up, in an age, as the Father of the House, the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), so eloquently put it, when it is the quality of the alliances you have that determines the ability to influence what happens in the world in the interests of the people we represent.

Faced with this set of circumstances, what would be the rational thing to do? It would be to seek to remove that fear, that uncertainty and that doubt, and to say to the European Union “Look, the only way we are going to get a deal is not by another exchange of letters or asking for another assurance, but by moving on to negotiate the future relationship now, so that everyone can see at the end of the process what it would involve before we formally leave.” I understand the legal position that in law the European Union cannot sign such an agreement, as the Attorney General pointed out, until the United Kingdom has ceased to be a member state, but it has a choice about its negotiating mandate and we all understand why the EU chose to structure the negotiations in the way that it did: because far from holding all the cards, we have, as the last two and a half years have demonstrated, held hardly any cards at all. But if we were able to negotiate more detail on the future relationship, which I recognise would be very challenging for the EU—and also for the Government, because they would finally have to confront the choices they have been steadfastly avoiding for the last two and a half years—at the end of that process we would know where we stood on the backstop and on the nature of the future relationship.

To do that we would have to extend article 50. If we want to reassure people—we may confront this choice at some point—that extending, or maybe revoking, article 50 is not a device for the House of Commons to overturn the referendum result in 2016, the House of Commons could say to the people, “Don’t worry, whatever the result is of this process we will put it back to you, so you take the final decision.” If we could undertake those negotiations while still a member, from the EU’s point of view, it would not really make any difference at all: we would still be paying the money—we are going to do that under the transition; we would still be accepting the rules of the ECJ—we are going to do that under the transition; we would still be a member of the single market and the customs union—we are going to be under the transition; and we would still be accepting free movement, which we are going to do under the transition.

I acknowledge that that would be difficult, but it would be the sensible thing to do and who knows where the EU will be in two or three years’ time, which we all know is how long these negotiations will take to complete. Indeed, if the EU were to say to other countries, not just to the UK, “You’re not going to get what you want if you leave, but if you remain then there is the possibility of reform,” that would be the kind of leadership that the EU could potentially offer. I do not know whether there is the strategic vision in the EU to do that, but it should provide it because the forces present in Britain are present in all of its member states and reform, including on free movement, would be in their interests as well as in ours.

If this is not possible, and if the Government will not reach out, then we as Parliament must take responsibility. That would not be us subverting democracy in any way; it would be us doing our job—it would be taking back control. The draft Bill I referred to earlier, and which I support, will give us the means to do so. It proposes to ask the Liaison Committee to take a role. It could be amended to give that responsibility elsewhere—

**Frank Field:** Will my right hon. Friend give way on that issue?



**Hilary Benn:** No, as I am going to conclude my remarks.

And the House of Commons will in the end have a chance to vote on that.

The referendum result came as a shock to many in this House, but it did not come as a shock to those who voted to leave. It was a cry of anguish as the EU became the lightning conductor for the feelings of 17.4 million people about the change they have seen in their communities, the disappearance of well-paid jobs, the shrinking of opportunities and—let’s be honest—above all about our collective failure to share with all of our citizens the prosperity of this, the sixth richest economy in the world. But that will not be solved by a damaging Brexit. It will not be remedied by the convulsion, the argument, the lack of direction and purpose, and the refusal to be honest about choices we face that have consumed almost all our energy, effort, attention and time.

We cannot let this carry on for the next five years. We owe it to our constituents to tell the truth. We owe it to ourselves to do the right thing and, in rejecting the deal today, as we should, we must show, as parliamentarians of all parties and all views, that we are, after the vote tonight, capable of coming together—to listen, to compromise, in the interests of the people we come here to serve.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** On account of the level of demand I am afraid there has to be now a five-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches with immediate effect.

3.7 pm

**Dominic Raab** (Esher and Walton) (Con): For my part in this debate, I have always understood the case for compromise, but compromise cannot come at any price, and the deal before us involves the most severe and enduring risks to our economy and our democracy while stifling the opportunities of Brexit that fired up over 17 million people with the optimism and the hope to vote in June 2016.

My reasons for my decision are straightforward. First, the Northern Ireland backstop and the scale of separate “regulation without representation” is undemocratic and a threat to our precious Union. Secondly, the UK-wide customs backstop has morphed into a hybrid customs union and single market arrangement, where the combination of alignment and non-regression requirements prevent this House from determining the right laws in the best interests of this country.

**Mrs Anne Main** (St Albans) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the backstop is, as the Attorney General said, taking a risk with the Good Friday agreement and the Union of this country, and that is a risk that many of us are not prepared to take?

**Dominic Raab:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and on top of that powerful point the effect of this deal is to give up control, and it would precipitate a democratic cliff edge. That is compounded by the lack of an exit mechanism we can control. It gives the EU a veto over any UK exit from the backstop, even if negotiations on the future relationship languish for years or break

down entirely. It is clear that none of the subsequent assurances alter the legal position as set out in the withdrawal agreement.

**Damien Moore** (Southport) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that if more assurances were there, many more Members of this House would potentially support that agreement?

**Dominic Raab:** My hon. Friend is right on that, and I will come back to what I think the Prime Minister and the Government should do in the event that the deal is voted down.

My third reason for opposing this deal is that paragraph 23 of the political declaration means that the upcoming negotiations on our future relationship would take the backstop as the starting point, to be built on. The future relationship would not be a free trade agreement, nor would it even be the Chequers model, which was set out back in the summer. It would be a hybrid arrangement somewhere even further along the spectrum of legislative alignment with the EU, between the customs union and the single market, without our having any say over the rules to be imposed.

Given the EU veto over our exiting the backstop, we will spend the second phase of negotiations, from March, under massive pressure from the EU to accept additional single market rules, free movement—potentially—and access to UK fisheries as the price for exiting the backstop. The EU will inevitably press us right up until the next election, if not well beyond, and it would wield all the negotiating leverage. So I say to all hon. Members weary of Brexit that I share your desire to move on from Brexit, but be under no illusions: the deal before us cannot end this grinding process—it can only prolong it. This deal is so demeaning to our country that it would inevitably invite—no, demand—reversal by the British people from the moment the ink was dry. It would torment us and, as a result, our EU neighbours, for the foreseeable future.

So what next? If this deal is voted down, we should make our best final offer to the EU on the current deal, including, as hon. Members on all sides have said, an ability to exit the backstop and a transition to a best-in-class free trade agreement. At the same time, we must accelerate our preparations for leaving on World Trade Organisation terms, in case all our reasonable offers are rebuffed in Brussels, so that we can manage and mitigate the undoubted risks of leaving on WTO terms while leaving the arm of friendship extended to continue negotiations with the EU, whether it is right up until the end of March or even beyond.

That is what my head tells me about this deal, but this decision touches the hearts of so many of us in this House, on all sides, and indeed the very soul of who we are as a country. Like many of us, I think about what this deal means for our children. My two sons are four and six. I want them to grow up in a country that is even better than it is today, one that is more prosperous, more ambitious, more confident, and, yes, more conscientious in the world, too. I want them to know that we fearlessly chose the right path for their future, that we did not duck the challenge, weary of Brexit, and that we did not avoid the undeniable but manageable short-term risks at the long-term expense of the economic health and democratic foundations of the country that I know we all love.

But what I fear most in the terms of this deal is the drain on our economy, the loss of our competitive advantage and the enfeeblement of our democracy that it would inevitably inflict over time. I say that because it is the embodiment of a distinct view of the United Kingdom, one that acquiesces in defeatism and makes its peace with managed decline. I will not sign up for that, not for my country, not for our people, not for my children and not for theirs, because I believe in this United Kingdom of ours. I believe in our entrepreneurs and our innovators. I am proud of our culture, just as I love those across Europe—and well beyond. I believe that we in this place, the mother of parliamentary democracy, accountable to the people, must determine the vital, sensitive and controversial issues of the day, and not meekly abdicate such precious decisions to Brussels. So, I will vote against the motion and the deal, because it is racked with self-doubt, defeatism and fear. Equally, many of us who vote against this deal vote for and aspire to something better and something brighter. With my heart and soul, I vote for the promise of Brexit, which must be fulfilled. I vote for the temerity to regain mastery of our own destiny. I vote for the ability to reach our full, global potential. Above all, I vote for hope not fear, and for the renaissance of the democracy in this country and the people I love.

3.15 pm

**Kate Hoey** (Vauxhall) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Esher and Walton (Dominic Raab), and I fully agreed with most of what he said. It is with sadness that I am going to have to vote against this withdrawal agreement, because I had hoped that I would be able to support it, because I am one of the few Labour MPs who genuinely wants to leave the EU and one of a somewhat larger group of Labour MPs who genuinely wants to honour the referendum result—I include the leader of my party in that.

I am very conscious that this Parliament is full of remain MPs—it is a remain Parliament. Most of them were very upset when the referendum result came through, as they could not believe that people had not listened to their dire warnings. It is absolutely true, and the public know this, that some in this Chamber have spent their whole time from day one after that referendum trying to think of ways to stop this. They have been trying to think of ways of preventing us from leaving. Tonight, we have the culmination and we will have another opportunity for people who will be trying to stop this after tonight.

For me, today is about something very simple. I do not understand why we need to vote on any of these amendments, because if they go through they will have no bearing whatsoever on the legal agreement—they are not going to be “legal”. We have seen, and we realise now, that the assurances given are not going to mean anything, because they are not put in a legal, prescribed way. I remind people who think these assurances might be able to be fulfilled that we are going to have a new European Parliament in May and new EU Commissioners. The Prime Minister may have built a relationship with some of the current ones, but they will not be there then. We can reject the idea that somehow they would even think—some of them—of honouring those assurances.

What happened to the mantra of, “Nothing agreed until everything is agreed”? Why are we giving the £39 billion, even if we owe it—I do not think we do owe

as much as that? Why are we giving that up front, before we have had anything in return? The withdrawal agreement will mean more uncertainty for the next few years, with the EU holding the trump cards, especially on the backstop. I can never support a situation in which Northern Ireland will end up being treated separately from the rest of the United Kingdom and in which the only people who will speak for it will be representatives of the Irish Government. That is just not tenable.

I have heard some people say, “It was only 52% to 48%, after all; why don’t we just give a little bit of compromise to those who voted to remain?” Had the result been 52% to remain and 48% to leave, does the House think that we, and all the lawyers, QCs and solicitors here, would have been beavering around trying to find a way to get a little bit of Canada or Norway into the remain decision? Let us be honest: there are people here who would do anything to stop us leaving the EU. We voted to take back control to, I believe, the people. The people made their decision. Parliament gave the decision to the people to decide whether they wanted to leave. We gave it up—we said, “People, you decide”—and they voted to leave. The idea that Parliament will spend the next week or so trying to find other ways to stop us leaving on 29 March is shocking.

The Attorney General said that we must vote for the withdrawal agreement “for wholly pragmatic reasons”. With respect to him, the vote did not ask the people of the United Kingdom whether they wanted a pragmatic leave or a pragmatic remain. It was very simple, and they wanted to leave. Whatever happens after tonight, one thing cannot be evaded, overruled or wrecked: the United Kingdom must leave the EU at the end of March to implement and honour the will of the British people.

**Graham Stringer** (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab): My hon. Friend has listed a series of arguments and reasons that might undermine the 2016 decision. Does she agree that a second referendum would have no credibility if the result of the first referendum was not implemented thoroughly and properly?

**Kate Hoey**: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The people, many of whom voted remain, will just not understand why we should even think of a second referendum when we have not implemented the result of the first.

As I was saying, whatever happens after tonight, the UK must leave the EU at the end of March to implement and honour the will of the British people. I trust our Prime Minister on this. I have heard her say over and over again that we will not revoke article 50. I have heard her say over and over again that we will be leaving on 29 March. Yes, that may mean some difficulties, but those difficulties are nothing compared with what this country has had to go through in the past. We are a strong, proud and determined country, with a people who believe and have confidence in our country, so let us go forward to 29 March, leave the European Union and have that bright future that we know is ahead of us.

3.21 pm

**Nicky Morgan** (Loughborough) (Con): How is it possible for the right hon. and hon. Members who speak today to capture the past two and a half years in

[*Nicky Morgan*]

five minutes? How is it possible to capture the 45 years of our membership in five minutes? The good news for those who like to debate Europe is that we do not have to do that, because there will be many, many more debates to come—

**Chris Bryant:** What joy!

**Nicky Morgan:** I can hear the joy on the Opposition Benches.

As the Attorney General said, this is only the end of phase 1. I think that the point he was trying to make in his speech was that today's debate should be about the 625 pages of the withdrawal agreement and the political declaration. I will support the agreement tonight—as with my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), people perhaps might not have expected that, given some of the statements I have made. I do not want to go into the detail, because it is easy to get stuck in the weeds of the EU debate and to talk about this appendix or that clause of the withdrawal agreement that we do not like. This House is in danger of getting so bogged down in the detail that we forget that the country is looking at us—not just at the detailed debate, but at the tone of the debate and the way that we conduct ourselves and disagree—and that we can do it well and in a way that, as the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) said, will hopefully, eventually, lead us to a place where there can be broader consensus and a majority can be found. Unfortunately, that ability to find a consensus has been somewhat lacking.

A previous Prime Minister talked about “general wellbeing”; there has not been nearly enough talk about flourishing. I have heard some contributors begin to say what people want—what is a positive way forward—and that is where we need to be, as a House, if the House does not approve the agreement tonight. The country is deeply divided, our constituencies are divided and this House is divided, but it is up to us as Members of Parliament to change the tone and start to heal the divisions if we are ever to get to talking about other issues. That is one of the lessons I have learned in the past two and half years. That is not to say that I have always practised it, but it is certainly something for which we should all aim.

Whatever is said today—whatever right hon. and hon. Members on all sides say—a substantial number of those watching and of our constituents will disagree with us. As we know, some will disagree more vehemently and violently than others, but there is a vast silent majority out in the country who are watching today and hoping against hope that the House does approve the agreement. On the basis of what I am hearing, I do not think they will be satisfied, but I have never before had so many members of the public coming up to me as a Member of Parliament and wishing us well for this vote. The country is watching what we do today and beyond.

I wrote an open letter to my constituents. I do not hear enough Members of Parliament talking about their constituencies in this debate today. We are their representatives. It is not about us; it is not about how we feel; it is not about our heads and our hearts: it is about who we are representing and what is best for them.

I have come to a conclusion after wrestling with this greatly over the last two and a half years. Of course I would have been happy to see the referendum result go differently. I would be happy to see an even closer relationship with the EU going forward. But that is not what people voted for—the majority who voted in 2016. They did vote for change and it is up to us to deliver that change.

I have always been very clear that Brexit should not undermine our constitution, and we have put our representative democracy under massive strain through having one referendum. It should not be about undermining our economy, although that is not all about numbers. In order for people to flourish in this country, it is not just about the size of our economy—it is about other issues, too, that have not been tackled by Brexit, nor by the Government over the last two years as our UK politics have stalled. It should be about our values and not undermining our values as a country. One of those, undoubtedly, is that the British people are very independently minded, and I can understand why it is that people took the decision they did in June 2016.

Let me, in the time available, briefly take one issue from what the Attorney General said. If the deal goes down tonight, there are other deals—other models—on the table where I believe this House can find consensus and compromise. Carrying on with this deal cannot be an option, and I would be disappointed if the Prime Minister did that.

3.26 pm

**Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson** (Lagan Valley) (DUP): I am delighted to take part in this debate. My constituency voted by a majority to leave the European Union, but I recognise that there are many voices in opposition to that in Northern Ireland. I have no doubt that the Prime Minister has worked very hard to try to address the concerns that have been raised on both sides of this debate, and I commend her for that, but when I hear Members speaking about the danger that Brexit poses to the peace process in Northern Ireland, I have to refute that notion. I believe strongly in the peace process. I am delighted that in the past 20 years we have seen a reduction in violence—our streets in Northern Ireland have become more peaceful. That is something I want to maintain, and we do not want the clock turned back, but the British people voted to leave the European Union and we must respect their decision.

When we talk about the threat that a hard border could pose to the peace process, I look at what the Irish Government say. I hear the Irish Prime Minister saying very clearly that even in the event of a no-deal outcome, there will not be a hard border between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic. That is the stated position of the Irish Government, and it is the stated position of the Government of the United Kingdom, so where is this hard border coming from?

**Sir Bernard Jenkin** (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): We need to be clear that when people say that the Union customs code must be applied and WTO rules must be applied, yes, they are right, but that is in order to provide confidence that checks are being made. They do not have to be made at the frontier—they can be made away from it—so there is no need for a hard border in Northern Ireland.



**Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson:** And it is worth noting that even at the moment, with both the UK and the Irish Republic being members of the European Union, we have checks between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic. If someone travels by bus from Belfast to Dublin, they can be stopped on the main road and their identity will be checked. With the movement of animals, there are checks across the border. The idea that there is no border and there are no checks at the moment just is not true. It does not reflect the reality. These things can be approached sensibly, as they have been in the past. There is no reason why they cannot be dealt with sensibly in the future.

My party does not advocate a no-deal outcome. We want a deal between the United Kingdom and the European Union. We want the Prime Minister to deliver a deal for this country, but we do not believe that what is on the table at the moment is the best deal, and nor is it in the best interests of the United Kingdom.

We have heard a lot of talk today about the backstop. My concern about the backstop is not only its implications for Northern Ireland. I echo the point that if we enter the backstop, it hands a massive negotiating advantage to the European Union, which weakens our negotiating position in the next critical phase of obtaining a free trade agreement with the European Union. That is why I do not believe it is in the interests of the United Kingdom.

**Mr Nigel Evans:** We hear it said a lot that neither the EU nor the UK wants to implement the backstop and that it would be temporary. If that is the case, why does the right hon. Gentleman believe that the European Union will not budge on at least making the backstop time-limited?

**Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson:** I believe the reason is that it gives a negotiating advantage to the European Union, and the EU does not want to give up that advantage in favour of the United Kingdom.

What offends me about the backstop and its potential is, as the Attorney General described in his advice to the Government, that Northern Ireland would have to treat Great Britain as a third country for trading purposes. The Attorney General told us today that that already happens, and he gave the example of the Canary Islands, but the Canary Islands are not leaving the European Union—they will still have representation and will still be able to influence the way in which regulations are drawn up by the EU. That is not so for Northern Ireland. Under the backstop arrangement, we will have to accept regulations with no say in how they are drawn up—not at Stormont, if we have an Assembly back; not here at Westminster; and most certainly not because the Irish Government will advocate on our behalf. Indeed, the Irish Government have shown in the past that they will look after their own interests first, and rightly so—it is a sovereign state, in so far as it is possible to be a sovereign state in the European Union.

The backstop is not in the best interests of Northern Ireland or the United Kingdom, and that is why we need real change—change that the Prime Minister describes as legally binding. What is on offer from the European Union at the moment does not have legal effect. That is our concern, and it is why we cannot support the amendments that have been tabled. We need a clear

commitment from the European Union that the backstop arrangement will be altered so that the UK has the unilateral right to leave the backstop at the time of its choosing and in circumstances that would be beneficial to the relationship.

We are not trying to create difficulties, but we do not want to hand to the EU a significant negotiating advantage, and nor do we want regulatory barriers between Northern Ireland and Great Britain, which would damage our economy in Northern Ireland. I respect the views expressed by business leaders and others in Northern Ireland who support the current withdrawal agreement, but I do not agree with their opinion that the proposed arrangements will be good for the Northern Ireland economy. They are not the so-called best of both worlds. They create a regulatory barrier between Northern Ireland and our biggest market—Great Britain—so that we can avoid regulatory differences between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic, even though we do far less trade with the Irish Republic and the EU than with Great Britain. Although I am no expert in business, I believe that it cannot be in the best interests of Northern Ireland to have regulatory barriers with our biggest market in order to continue having free trade arrangements with the EU, which is a smaller market for us in trading terms.

We therefore urge the Prime Minister to look again at this withdrawal agreement. She said that she would seek to secure legally binding changes. That is what we need, and what we have on the table does not achieve that. For those reasons, the Democratic Unionist party will be voting against the withdrawal agreement this evening, and we will also be voting against the amendments, because they do not change the fundamental reality that until we get the assurances we need on the backstop, we cannot support what is on the table.

3.34 pm

**Mr Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield) (Con):** Entertaining as it was to watch the theatricality of my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney General, I have to say to the House that it filled me with a slight sense of gloom that the Government have got to such a pass that they had to rely on the skills of a criminal defence advocate to get them out of their difficulties.

We have had everything. We had the appeal to patriotism and the bright fields beyond. We had the analogy of the airlock, in which we were assured that if we placed ourselves for a period of time in an uncomfortable position, we would find that the door opened to the fields of ambrosia beyond. I am afraid that my own view is that we will either choke to death in the airlock as a nation or, when the door finally opens, find the landscape little to our liking.

At appropriate moments, we also had those delicious moments of confession and avoidance from the Attorney General. He gently pointed out that he thought the suggestion that we could have a negotiated deal without a transition had been overblown. Who overblew it? The truth is that for two and a half years, and during the period of the referendum, we have been living in a fool's paradise in relation to expectations. When during the referendum was there mention of the backstop and its constitutional implications that worry so much Members representing Northern Ireland constituencies? Where was

[Mr Dominic Grieve]

the 20-month transition, now potentially extended for two years, and where was the complete lack of concrete terms for a future relationship?

That is the reason why we now have the problem that only about 20% of the public appear to think that this is a good deal, and it should come as no surprise that so few Members of Parliament are also willing to support it. The difficulty—this is where I do agree with what the Attorney General said—is that we are where we are: we cannot turn the clock back. I know that some hon. Members talk of alternatives, and we can consider them, but I have to say that my view about where we are is that alternatives will be very hard to come by. In any case, I raise an anxiety about whether they can be justified.

One of the things I have found most curious in this debate is that I keep on being told that I must sign up to this deal because it would be a betrayal of the United Kingdom electorate not to do so. Yet there are hon. Members who are prepared to consider, for example, going for a Norway-style option. I have to say that that seems to me to be an example of the elites picking up the carpet and brushing the broken glass under it to try to avoid the difficulties that have been created.

That is why I am respectful of what the Prime Minister has tried to achieve. I accept that it is probably the only deal on offer, realistically, and might be willing to support it, if it had the support of the public. Yet we have spent months trying every possible device in this House to prevent Members from expressing any view saying that the public ought to be consulted. On that, I am afraid I will not budge.

It pains me to see how the discourse has developed. It pains me, Mr Speaker, to see you and me accused of being in a sinister conspiracy, all of which is utter and complete fantasy. It pained me to discover the No. 10 press office briefing against me last Friday for involvement in an initiative of my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin) in which I had not the slightest degree of involvement. Such is the level of madness that pervades us at present, and that makes me all the more determined—as the death threats come in and the rhetoric heats up—that we must stay sensible, be willing to have a dialogue across the House and try to resolve this. The question now is whether the Government are prepared to listen. For the present, I very much regret that I cannot support the Government this evening.

3.39 pm

**Stephen Doughty** (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): It is an absolute pleasure to follow the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve). I agreed wholeheartedly with the vast majority of his remarks.

I am in the House first and foremost as a representative of my constituents, the people of Cardiff South and Penarth. Their views are absolutely clear: they voted to remain in 2016 and that view has increased in intensity. I have received nearly 2,000 messages—in emails, phone calls and conversations—and 86% of them now tell me that my constituents want to stay in the EU. The vast majority of them want to see the question put back to

them so that they can make the choice. Of those who still want to leave, there is a split between those who want to support the Prime Minister's deal and those who want to leave with no deal. There is no consensus on what leaving even means.

Let me be clear to everybody in the House: the people who voted leave did so in good faith. They are my friends, my family, my constituents and my neighbours. Indeed, I have very strong and good relationships with many people across the House who fundamentally disagree with me on Brexit. We must listen to their concerns and we must hear them. Those concerns were made loud and clear, and we have to respond to them. We have to offer hope and a positive vision for the future, but I will not vote for a deal that will, by all measures and on all analysis, leave my constituents poorer and less safe, and actually lead to more uncertainty, not less, with this process going on and on and on. It is simply not acceptable when we are told by leading manufacturing organisations, trade unions and businesses about the jobs that are being lost or put at risk, and the livelihoods that are put at risk as a result.

I wholeheartedly support the Labour Front-Bench policy of opposing the deal. It is absolutely clear that it does not meet the six tests that the Labour party set out. I, of course, want a general election. I would like this Government to be removed, for many reasons, but it is clear that we are unlikely to reach that objective, so we must try hard. We would like a no-confidence motion to be tabled if the Prime Minister loses tonight, but if we are not able to resolve this matter in the House, we must put it back to the people.

I do not think that there is a majority in this House for other variations of the deal. I do not think, as a previous proponent of it in this House, that there is a majority for the Norway option. I also do not think that there is now time to engage in fantasy negotiations with the EU. It was very, very clear from the beginning what the possibilities were and the constraints that were put on those possibilities by the Prime Minister's red lines. A problem exposed by many people—the failure to reach out across the House to find consensus at the start of the process—has led us to the situation we are in today.

I want to address two particular concerns that the Prime Minister and others have raised against those of us who advocate putting the issue back to the people. The first is that it is somehow anti-democratic. No, it is not. It is a continuation of democracy. I understand very much why the Prime Minister feels that she is duty bound to deliver on a result that happened in 2016, but what about the will of the people today? As the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield said, if there was clear consent among the people of this country—among my constituents and all the constituents represented in this House—we would not face the situation we are in today with the Prime Minister facing defeat from every angle and our needing to find a new way forward.

Secondly, I hear the concern that this will stir up far right or right-wing rhetoric, violence on the streets and civil disturbances. We simply must not indulge that terrible, terrible attitude. Those people do not represent leave voters. We must not give into them. Our colleague who was murdered would not have given into them; she would have stood up against them. That is what we all must be doing in this House. I see this as part of a much

wider challenge that worries me deeply. We have talked much about the economic and business implications of the deal, but when the people rubbing their hands in glee at this chaos are Vladimir Putin, Donald Trump and the enemies of this country, we all ought to be asking ourselves some very serious questions.

Winston Churchill was quoted earlier by the hon. Member for Stone (Sir William Cash). I would like to draw the House's attention to another quote by Winston Churchill, from the early 1930s. He warned about ignoring the warnings of our followers in the country and ignoring the signs of the times, saying:

"This was one of those awful periods which recur in our history, when the noble British nation seems to fall from its high estate, loses all trace of sense and purpose, and appears to cower...frothing pious platitudes".

I think, Mr Speaker, of "global Britain" and "Brexit means Brexit".

We are all patriots in this House. Let us find a way forward. Let us put this issue back to the people and let them decide.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. There will now be a four-minute limit on each Back-Bench speech.

3.44 pm

**Mr Shailesh Vara** (North West Cambridgeshire) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty).

I have been a loyal Conservative Member of Parliament for nearly 14 years, but I do not believe that the withdrawal agreement before us is in the interests of my constituents or our country. That is why in November last year I resigned from my post as a Minister in the Northern Ireland Office, allowing me to speak up against the agreement and to vote against it later today.

The Government have repeatedly said that the United Kingdom's constitutional and economic integrity would not be compromised, but the legal advice given by the Attorney General to the Prime Minister on 13 November states in paragraph 8, on page 2, that

"for regulatory purposes GB is essentially treated as a third country by NI for goods passing from GB into NI."

I raised the issue earlier with the Attorney General. While his answer was eloquent and articulate, he somewhat fudged the issue. We entered the then European Economic Community as a United Kingdom, and it is important that we leave it as such at the end of March.

The withdrawal agreement sets out the terms on which we will negotiate a future free trade agreement, but it is extraordinary that we are required to pay £39 billion up front before we have negotiated the deal itself. It is also extraordinary that we are agreeing to enter an unending backstop that we will not be able to leave unilaterally. Effectively, we are agreeing to be handcuffed by the EU, and it will determine when the handcuffs come off.

The assurances and warm words are just that, and they are meaningless. We are told that the backstop will be temporary, but "temporary" has to be judged in context. Given that the agreement with Canada took seven years and the agreement with Singapore took eight years, we can rest assured that "temporary" means many years. France and Spain have already made it

clear that they will have conditions. In the case of France, that is access to our coastal waters for fishing, and for Spain, it is rights regarding Gibraltar. They have said that they will not agree to our departure from the backstop unless they have satisfaction on those matters. Not only will we be held hostage in the customs union in that way, but we will be heavily restricted in our ability to do favourable trade deals with the rest of the world.

I recognise the need for compromise in international agreements, but this deal is not a compromise, it is a cave-in by our country. It is an agreement that has been negotiated on the basis of fear of being outside the EU, rather than on confidence. It is important to remember—the facts make this clear—that in the decades ahead, economic progress in the countries outside the EU will far exceed progress within the EU. This debate is not only about today, tomorrow, next month or even next year; it is about the decades to come and the future of our children and our children's children. We need to get it right, and this agreement does not do that. That is why I will be voting against it this evening.

3.48 pm

**Alison McGovern** (Wirral South) (Lab): I am sorry that the hon. Member for Stone (Sir William Cash), the right hon. Member for Esher and Walton (Dominic Raab), my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey) and the Attorney General are not in their places, because I would like to say to them and all Members of this House that I need no lectures on how to love my country. None of us do. We all care deeply for Britain, but the fact is that, as the members of the Treasury Committee found in our report published for this debate before it was aborted in December, there is no dividend for our country in Brexit. Economically, there is only loss.

There is no Brexit bonus. There is only the madness of doing something we know to be a bad idea because we allowed another bad idea—a referendum for which we were ill prepared—to take hold. I will not repeat the cliché that people did not vote to become poorer in the referendum, because it does not matter now. What matters is the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty) made. The choice is ours: should we vote to make our constituents poorer?

I ask those who think that their constituents will be angry if they do not back the deal what they will say when they become accountable for a permanent downgrade of our economy. Can they do that without consequences either? I do not think so. Often in this House we talk about the real issue of how wages have fallen over the past 10 years. To properly understand the money in people's pockets, however, we have to understand that it matters what they are able to pay for, and what has happened to our currency since the Brexit vote has made us all poorer. There is only more to come, and there is no escaping it.

The reason that happened was the deep dishonesty at the heart of the leave campaign. It said we could have global Britain, a Britain open to the world and more globalisation, but also less immigration, more command and control over our economy, and less globalisation. That contradiction at the heart of what people were offered is at the root of the impasse we find ourselves in.



[*Alison McGovern*]

The truth is, because of that contradiction, we now do not really know what the public want. We have had a general election with an inconclusive result, because people were offered something that was never really on the table and they voted for it. Another referendum would be far from perfect, but I have come to the reluctant conclusion that offering people a choice—Brexit as we now know it to be versus the deal that they have now—is probably the only way forward.

Finally, I will mention the thing that has kept me going through this turgid Brexit discussion: the reason why we are in this place. We are here for our ageing population; to produce Treasury Committee reports about wages and nursing homes, not about Brexit; for our young people; and to talk about how to fund libraries and teaching assistants, not about Brexit. I ask myself a simple question: judged by those objectives, does Brexit help, or is it a hindrance? Will it help our country to have the money it needs, or will it hold us back? The answer is glaringly obvious: Brexit is bad for our country, and it is time that in this House we took the steps that we need to take to rectify it.

3.52 pm

**Dame Caroline Spelman** (Meriden) (Con): I will support the Prime Minister's deal today because, as the west midlands businesses that employ thousands of my constituents tell me, "It's good enough"—good enough for us to leave and thrive outside the EU. Not perfect, maybe, but those who flirt with plan Bs must examine their conscience when they hear the plight of industry. This is not the time to take a stand against the pragmatic reality of what is on the table. I credit my right hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) for recognising that.

Right now, what business needs is some certainty. With only 73 days to go before we leave the EU, firms are already having to take costly decisions to stockpile goods and parts and, in some cases, to mothball production capacity. The cost of that hits their bottom line and ultimately results in them having to let people go. The car industry, for which the EU is the principal market, is particularly hurt. Let us remember that its factories are drawing on workers from some of the most deprived parts of the UK. Colleagues might not yet have lost jobs in their constituencies, but in the west midlands we certainly have.

I call on the Government to find a way to help the UK car industry, which is such an important employer, exporter and life transformer, through the challenges that it faces. Those challenges grieve me deeply, as the renaissance of manufacturing had transformed the lives of my constituents. Take, for example, single mums on my council estate who have taken up well paid jobs through apprenticeships with companies such as Jaguar Land Rover. Next week, when Dawn—not her real name—shows up in my surgery to complain about losing her job, the thing she understands as "Project Fear" is not being able to keep up the mortgage payments on the home she has provided for her kids.

What can we do to stop that inescapable human cost? At the very least, as a Parliament, we must stop the UK crashing out of the EU without a deal. There is a majority for no to no deal in Parliament, and the letter I co-authored with the hon. Member for Birmingham,

Erdington (Jack Dromey) attracted 225 signatures. I and other hon. Members have tried to withdraw amendments tonight that could have wrecked the meaningful vote, but we remain determined to rule out no deal.

Businesses tell me they have roughly 14 days to decide whether to shut factories to weather the storm of disruption after we leave the EU or stockpile at huge expense. The least we can do is to provide a stable platform or foundation by ruling out no deal. The hit on business is taking place now: 90% of the CBI's members are stockpiling, along with the SMEs in their supply chains, spending billions on contingency that they would otherwise use to invest. Some 10,000 lorries pass through Dover every day. Just-in-time delivery will become not-in-time delivery with the slightest hold-up at the border. The path the country has chosen is fraught with risk, even if, in time, opportunity beckons, so let us at least manage the risk of a no-deal Brexit so that constituents like Dawn do not face losing their jobs, their homes and their livelihoods.

As Second Church Estates Commissioner, I might be expected to make reference to the profound comments by the Archbishop of Canterbury about Brexit in the debate in the other place, that leaving without a deal would be a political, practical and moral failure. I echo the words of the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) that we must come together, try to unite and bring unity to our country.

3.56 pm

**Mr Ben Bradshaw** (Exeter) (Lab): Given the time constraints, I will focus on what should happen later tonight when the motion is defeated, but I will start by saying that if the UK leaves the European Union under the terms that the Government propose, it will constitute one of the greatest acts of self-harm in our country's history. We would be poorer, we would have less sovereignty not more, and we would guarantee that the uncertainty and political wrangling that have so disfigured Britain for the last two and a half years will continue for years and years to come.

It is increasingly clear to everyone, except perhaps the Prime Minister, that she and the country will face a choice after tonight's vote, between reaching out, finally, across the House, to seek a majority for a less damaging, Norway-style Brexit, and putting her deal to the public in a people's vote. I am extremely doubtful that there is a majority in the House for Norway now. If, after the 2017 general election, when she lost her majority, the Prime Minister had sought consensus, she could probably have got Norway through. Many of us repeatedly pleaded with her to do so. But she stuck to her red lines, for fear of what the hard Brexiteers in her Cabinet and on her Back Benches would do to her. As recently as last spring, nearly 80 Labour Members defied our own party leadership and voted for a Norway-style solution. But we were rebuffed, as we have been repeatedly rebuffed, when we have tried to steer the Government in the direction of the least damaging Brexit.

We are now told that several Cabinet Ministers and others on the Government Benches—and some Members on the Opposition Benches—would like us to rescue this disintegrating Government by backing Norway now. I am sorry, but it is too late. The overwhelming majority of those of us on this side of the House who backed Norway a year ago would not do so now.

The rest of Europe, which has shown commendable patience with the British Government, has said we can have more time and we can extend article 50, but only for a general election or another referendum, not for a tortuous renegotiation of the withdrawal agreement with no certain end point. Labour's policy, unanimously agreed at our last conference, states that if the Government are confident in their Brexit deal, they

"should not be afraid to put that deal to the public."

The Prime Minister could, at this late stage, save her deal, by seeking parliamentary support for it conditional on ratification by the public in a referendum. But, if she will not do so, Labour must act. Britain is facing the most serious political, economic and constitutional crisis in our peacetime history. The time for dither, delay and constructive ambiguity is over. The country is crying out for decisive leadership.

So, let us have our motion of no confidence tomorrow. Let us test Parliament's appetite for an election. If we do not secure one, let us rule out no deal, test the Norway option if colleagues wish to do so, but then quickly pursue the only rational choice left for our country, which is to give the decision back to the people. I appeal to the Prime Minister for once—just this once—to put the national interest first. If she will not, Parliament must do it for her.

3.59 pm

**Justine Greening** (Putney) (Con): Every Member of Parliament faces a difficult vote this evening, representing as we do very different communities up and down the country. The additional challenge is that Brexit is not about party politics. All of us are genuinely asking ourselves how we can represent our communities and do what is in the best interest of this country. Like many other MPs, I cannot support this deal. I represent many remainers in my constituency who think that if we are still following so many rules, we should be around the table setting them. I also represent the many Brexiteers in my community, and they simply do not believe that this is the Brexit they felt they were voting for. It does not give them a clean break from the European Union. In many respects, Brexit has been a failure of party politics at leadership level on both sides of the House. Far from thwarting democracy, I feel that I am representing those in my community today, because they have told me clearly what they think about this particular deal and how they would like me to vote on it.

The failure on the Government Front Bench comes from the fact that all this has been clear since the summer. It is not a surprise that the withdrawal agreement and the political declaration have not found favour with enough MPs; it has been blindingly obvious. For those on the Front Bench to turn round and somehow suggest that the rest of the House has got it wrong is a bit like a person steering the Titanic towards an iceberg and then blaming the iceberg for not getting out of the way. This is a real failure on the part of No. 10, and a bit of recognition of that fact would not go amiss. The wasting of time and delaying of the vote before Christmas also did no good whatsoever.

I also think that this is a failure on the part of the Labour Front Bench. The dither and delay that have just been described have really shown party politics at its worst, at the very time when our British public need us to step up to the plate. The election in 2017 simply

compounded the problem, with the Government unwilling to compromise after a close Brexit result that frankly required compromise if enough people were to be brought with it. I urge Members of Parliament not to think about party loyalty tonight. That is not what this vote is about. It is about the future of our country.

Whatever happens tonight and in the coming weeks, we as a House need to start finding better ways to work together on the long-term issues that British politics has failed to deliver on sufficiently for the British public, including housing, social mobility and opportunity—something I care about—the environment and social care. The only difference with Brexit is that it was a long-term issue that had a deadline, and sure enough, we have not been able to meet that deadline. It looks very much as though we will move from a fudged deal to a fudged delay, but if we have that delay, it should be one that has a plan in mind rather than nothing. Maybe the House will be unable to agree on any path forward, and if that is the case, surely we need to do the right thing and recognise that in a democracy we have big unanswered questions, and that the public have to be allowed a say on them.

4.3 pm

**Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Brexit, and the way it is being handled, is a national embarrassment. Worse than that, it is a damaging international embarrassment. That great tactician, David Cameron, devised what he thought would be a cunning plan to staunch the decades-long Euro bloodletting in his party: a referendum. But the referendum, instead of acting as neat sutures to bind together the ideologically driven Brexiteers and their more rational colleagues, has taken a scalpel to the Tory party's jugular, and—critically, and far more significantly—to that of the country, too. Driving the country to the brink, and in some cases being willing to drive over it, is overwhelmingly the Tories' responsibility.

Of course, the Leader of the Opposition has a cameo in all this, demonstrating the same aptitude for leadership during the Brexit campaign as he has since. However, as a long-standing Member of Parliament, I share some of the blame for not tackling the conditions that led to a majority voting for Brexit. That blame must be shared by successive Governments—not this one, not the one before, not the one before and, indeed, probably not the one before that either. I regret not being active enough in promoting the benefits of being in the EU for students, research, common standards, medicines, and investment in, for example, the hospital where the PM launched the NHS 10-year plan, which received £50 million of EU financing, or the potteries factory where she gave her speech yesterday, which received £400,000.

I was not outspoken enough in rebutting the ludicrous, infantile and mendacious claims that Brussels-based British newspaper correspondents made about the threat to British pink sausages or standardised condom sizes. Most importantly, I regret the failure to tackle deep-seated concerns in some towns and cities over the failure to invest in infrastructure and underperforming schools and to rebuild proud communities devastated by the loss of heavy industry. I regret that devolution was not pushed hard and fast enough and that responsibility, funding and accountability for delivering jobs, skills training, bus and train services was not vested in politicians closer to those reliant on such services.

[Tom Brake]

Those challenges remain, and we owe it to those who voted for Brexit and, indeed, to those who voted remain to address them.

Does anyone in this Chamber believe that Brexit and the PM's so-called deal provide solutions? They do not. Nothing that leaves us poorer can. The PM's deal is nothing of the sort. It is a fiction, a chimera, a mirage. The political declaration comes in at a measly 26 pages. Compare that with 1,598 pages in the Canada-EU trade deal. According to the PM's statement yesterday, the real deal—our future relationship with the EU—may not be struck until as late as December 2022, and some consider that wildly optimistic. That is one of the reasons why her deal will be defeated today.

With the red lines that the Prime Minister chose for herself, I do not doubt that this is the best deal that she could secure. Unfortunately, it is a bad deal, so where next? We expect the PM's deal to be defeated later, no deal has been rejected by Parliament, and a fresh round of negotiations with the EU is unlikely to be sanctioned by the EU. The Prime Minister is left with one option: put the deal to the people in a people's vote and offer them the choice to stay in the EU.

4.7 pm

**Mr Owen Paterson** (North Shropshire) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake). He touched upon the fact that David Cameron introduced the referendum, but he forgot to mention that it was a Liberal Democrat idea to have an in/out referendum when the Conservatives opposed the Lisbon treaty.

We are facing a constitutional conundrum. The right hon. Gentleman quite rightly said that the Conservatives promised an in/out referendum if we won the 2015 election, and we then had a long parliamentary process to guarantee that we would give the people the power to decide. We then had the referendum, and the people decided overwhelmingly to leave—17.4 million people in the biggest vote in British history and the biggest majority on any one subject. Everyone then said, "What does leave mean?" and the Conservative party helpfully interpreted leave to mean leaving the single market, the customs union and the remit of the European Court of Justice. Sadly, however, what we have come up with here does not deliver that. The withdrawal agreement is a betrayal of what the people voted for.

In my previous speech, I touched on the impact on our laws. It is ludicrous that laws will be made by the 27 nations and then imposed upon us so that we cannot query them. On agriculture, an area which is totally dominated by the EU, it is extraordinary that our agricultural sector will be held back to 2019 levels of support throughout the whole transition period. Our competitors on the continent will be better funded and will have free access to our market, so agriculture will be a particularly badly penalised sector. We have to consider state aid; Sir Richard Dearlove and Lord Guthrie's letter this week showed the horrors of the impact upon defence; and there will be no exit from the deal, which has been confirmed by the Attorney General.

All that will cost us £39 billion with nothing promised in return. We will be paying £39 billion to have the right to keep talking and talking. There is no incentive for the

EU to end the talks. They have us trapped. They will be imposing laws upon us, they will have access to our market, they could clobber us through the ECJ when we do not obey those laws and we will be paying. What is not to like? We saw it from Herr Selmayr, who unwisely blurted out to *Passauer Neue Presse* that he had got everything, including the cost of losing Northern Ireland. That is the real horror for me in this withdrawal agreement, which carves out something called "UK(NI)", a new political entity in which not a single elected representative from Northern Ireland will have any impact on the law, which is shameful. It is a complete breach of the principle of consent, which is embedded in the Belfast agreement. As Lord Trimble has said, it is a breach of the demand for the Assembly to be consulted.

I will not be voting for this withdrawal agreement. Thankfully, a very large number of other Members also will not be voting for it. What should we do? I went to see Monsieur Barnier with Lord Trimble to discuss the problem of the Irish border, which can be solved with current techniques and processes. We had an incredibly instructive and constructive discussion. What we need to do is to go back to President Tusk's free trade offer of 7 March 2018. We should go back on Thursday morning and say, "Yes, we will engage in very serious discussions on your free trade agreement. In parallel, we will immediately go on to World Trade Organisation terms." WTO terms have come under the most ludicrous caricatured attack, because they are synonymous with leaving. WTO terms are not as good as a free trade agreement, but they do mean that we are leaving. That will galvanise the European Union into coming back to us.

Only today Heiko Maas, the German Foreign Minister, has said that he would come back to the talks. We will do the country a service tonight if we overwhelmingly vote down this completely unacceptable agreement, which will push the EU to go back to its generous offer of a free trade agreement. We will not get it through in time, so we should trigger article 24 of the general agreement on tariffs and trade, which means zero tariffs and zero quotas can continue during the discussions, possibly for up to five years.

4.11 pm

**Lisa Nandy** (Wigan) (Lab): For all the division in this House, I have not met a single Member, privately or publicly, who believes this motion has a chance of being passed tonight. For many Opposition Members, that is not because of the withdrawal agreement itself but because of the complete absence of clarity about what is to come next. Almost three years after one of the most divisive episodes in British history, it beggars belief that the Government are asking for our votes while being unable to tell us even the broad direction of travel.

I represent a constituency with a huge number of food manufacturing jobs, which are at stake. Two visions of the future are on offer, one in which we retain close economic ties with the EU, with the rights, working protections and living standards that go with them, and another in which we follow the US and China in a race-to-the-bottom, zero-hours, no-hope economy, which would have profound implications for my constituency and many others. I have discussed it with the Prime Minister, and I am grateful for her time but, with hours to go until the vote, there is no clarity about what comes next.



I have also been honest with the Prime Minister about the fact that Members of Parliament like me, who from the beginning have sought a way through this and who have looked for reasons to vote for the withdrawal agreement, need confidence that there is a role for Parliament in what comes next. We are a deeply divided country, and we represent a range of views in this House. All parts must be heard, but I say to my friends and colleagues that we, collectively, have not risen to the challenge. I have heard Members on both sides of the House pretend that no deal is a political hoax, not a legal reality. I have heard Members pretend that we can resolve no deal and avoid that catastrophic scenario simply by wishing or voting it so, but we cannot. We cannot continue to grandstand, to remain in our entrenched positions and to call one another “traitor,” as I have heard again in today’s debate, despite death threats, abuse and the murder of one of my colleagues in recent years. It will not do.

I say to both the Government Front Bench and the Labour Front Bench that none of us will hang on to power, or the prospect of power, by a sleight of hand. We are here to lead, and to lead in the country’s interest, not in our own interest. I have not seen this level of anger directed towards MPs since I was first elected nearly 10 years ago during the expenses scandal.

We are playing with fire, we are breaking our democracy, but there is the hope: the public are better than we are. For all that the extremes have tried to drown it out, there is a decent, sensible, pragmatic majority in this country that wants a way through. We cannot go on arguing about the will of the people or dividing people with our binary choices. Let’s ask them to help us to resolve it, as they did in Ireland, Canada, Australia and this week in France with President Macron responding to widespread unrest. In just seven weeks, a citizens’ assembly could make recommendations to this Parliament to help us to break the deadlock.

That said, a citizens’ assembly would not offer us an escape from hard choices, or respite from them. Choices have to be made. Every option facing the country has costs. There is a clear trade-off between democratic harm and economic harm and we have to be honest with people. Nearly three years after the referendum, we cannot continue to lie to the people. When this deal is voted down, it will be time to begin to work together and tell the truth.

4.15 pm

**Anna Soubry** (Broxtowe) (Con): I agree with the hon. Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy) that it is imperative, as we face this the most important decision the House has made in generations, that we be honest with our constituents, tell them the truth and act in the national interest, not just for our constituents but for the generations to come.

In that spirit, I do not hesitate to say that our great nation has made a terrible mistake in deciding to leave the EU. Notwithstanding that, I voted to honour the referendum result and to trigger article 50. Then I reached out to my Government across these Benches to find a consensus that would deliver on the referendum result while doing the least possible damage to our economy and avoiding a hard border in Northern Ireland. As you know, Mr Speaker, and as others know who follow this debate, it was all in vain, and so it was with a heavy heart that I and many others came to the conclusion

that the only way out of the impasse was to take it back to the British people. As we have thought about it and talked to people, it has become absolutely clear that that is the right thing to do: it is right for those who are entitled, now they know what Brexit looks like, to change their minds; it is right for older leave voters, as they consider their children and grandchildren, to put their interests first and change their minds; of course, it is also right, two and a half years on, for the young people who did not have the opportunity to vote, because of their age, to have a say in their future, because they will bear the burden of it all.

I agree with so much of what has been said by so many right hon. and hon. Members. If anybody in the Conservative party is still not sure how to vote tonight, I do not ask them to agree with me and my analysis. I come at this from a very different perspective from my hon. Friend the Member for North West Cambridgeshire (Mr Vara), who beautifully unpicked the whole deal and explained, in good, solid, careful terms, why it is such a bad deal and must be voted against. I would not for one moment say to him or anyone else in the Conservative party with whom I am in such huge disagreement that anybody is being undemocratic in voting against the deal. I do not agree with many of their reasons, but they are voting that way because they believe it to be right and in the national interest. That must be right.

It must also be wrong for anybody to vote in favour of this deal because they have in effect been blackmailed into thinking that the alternative is no deal; that is simply not the case. We have heard the alternatives available, whether a people’s vote or the Bill that has been proposed. I gently say to dear friends in the Conservative party that it also cannot be right to vote for this deal on the basis that it is a terrible deal. How on earth does that make sense? How does one explain that to one’s constituents? It cannot be right to vote for this deal on the basis that it is so bad that one has a cunning plan to put forward an alternative when it fails. I gently say to dear friends in the Conservative party that it cannot be right either to vote for the deal on the basis that, as one said to me, “My association would tear me to pieces if I didn’t”.

This is a bad deal and we must vote against it. Nobody voted to be poorer. It is also a terrible leap in the dark. I say with great respect to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) that it absolutely does not provide the certainty that British business is crying out for. The deal must be rejected. We are meant to be the party of business, and it is bad for business, and we are meant to be the party of the future, and it is bad for young people. Let’s all come together and vote against the deal.

4.19 pm

**Frank Field** (Birkenhead) (Ind): Over last weekend, as the way in which the political traffic was moving became clearer and clearer, I changed my mind about how to vote tonight. I had been going to vote against the Government’s motion; I will now vote for it, and I wish to explain that. For all the problems that we have had, the nastiness in the debate, which was mentioned by my hon. Friend—my very honourable friend—the Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy), has come because we indulged in a referendum. We thought that the people

[*Frank Field*]

would agree with us, and we found it impossible to incorporate in a representative system of government a delegate system of government operating from referendums. The idea that we want more of that poison by organising another vote is the last idea to which I would move.

I changed my mind because, for all the weaknesses of the agreement that the Government have presented to us, for all its failings, I believe that we now risk losing Brexit. That does not excuse the Government for their incredible incompetence. It does not mean that some of us, when this stage is over, will not push for a Dardanelles-type inquiry to find out why we landed in this desperate position at this late hour. I do not wish to live my time as Member of Parliament for Birkenhead aiding and abetting those whose real aim is to destroy Brexit.

The agreement gives us five advantages for which I campaigned in supporting Brexit. First, it fulfils the promise that we will control our borders. Secondly, after the transition zone we will be free from paying cash—any cash—to the European Union. Thirdly, it will give us British laws for British people. Fourthly, it will allow us to negotiate new trade agreements. Fifthly, as the Prime Minister has told me on three occasions when answering my questions in the House, it will offer us frictionless trade for our manufacturing industry. We have some manufacturing industry left in Birkenhead: we have Vauxhall’s manufacturing down in the Wirral, towards what I call the mainland. I take heart from the statement by the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders that this was the best deal it could accept and that, as far as Brexit went, the car industry would be safeguarded.

Let me end on a similar note to my hon. Friend the Member for Wigan. It is not just one person who has been roughed up. We are all pushed and poked by enthusiasts, let us call them, on the outside, who wish to prevent the views that they do not want to hear from being heard. One of the things that representative government—as opposed to delegate, referendum government—has done is this: it has always given us a Chamber in which people can listen to views without being held to account, as we are, by a group outside who have given us instructions. We may not like that in the House. We may have misjudged our electorate. We may think that they were foolish to give us those instructions. But we asked for instructions, and they gave us instructions to leave.

4.23 pm

**Sir Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough) (Con): You have selected amendment (b) to be voted on tonight, Mr Speaker. It is obvious that one of the problems with this agreement is the Northern Ireland backstop. We have no ability to end it unilaterally, and no end date has been set. My amendment addresses that problem by proposing that “if it becomes clear by the end of 2021 that the European Union will not agree to remove the Northern Ireland backstop, the United Kingdom will treat the indefinite continuation of the backstop as a fundamental change of circumstances”,

and will therefore abrogate those parts of the withdrawal agreement. This is a vital point because, under international law, if you sign a treaty saying that under the treaty something will be temporary and it turns out to be permanent, or semi-permanent, you surely have the right to abrogate those parts of the treaty. I ask those

who say that amendment (b) is defective in law to look at my amendment (r), which sets out international law in this regard and it would be perfectly possible, allowable and in accordance with precedent under international law for the Government when they sign this treaty to issue what is called a letter of reservation making it clear.

**Joanna Cherry:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Sir Edward Leigh:** Will the hon. and learned Lady allow me to continue, as so many Members wish to speak? [*Interruption.*] Yes, fewer Members get in if there are interventions.

My amendment is trying to achieve a compromise. It tries to unite as many people as possible around a deal. I must say that having done my level best to help the Government to achieve this compromise I am somewhat disappointed that the Attorney General appears to have slapped it down, following my intervention on him, and therefore I reserve the right, if the Government are not prepared to support this amendment, to vote against the main motion. Why? Because I believe the fundamental problem with this withdrawal agreement is the fear that the Northern Ireland backstop will become permanent; I think I speak for many Conservative Members in saying that. Therefore, we have to find a way of solving this problem. I have no doubt that, if the main motion is lost tonight, the Government will go back to Brussels and try to get some movement on this issue. But, actually, you do not need to unpick the withdrawal agreement; you can do this unilaterally under international law. It is perfectly possible and feasible for the Government to go back to Brussels and inform the EU of their right to issue a letter of reservation making it clear that we cannot allow this backstop to be permanent, and I do not believe that that would destroy the whole deal.

I agree that we have to try to get a deal. I want there to be a deal with the EU. That is what I have been arguing for. I do not want to risk Brexit. I follow the words of the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field). I am aware that this might be in many respects the best deal we are going to get. I do not want to walk through the same Lobby as Members of the Opposition. I do not want to please Tony Blair, who wants chaos so he can argue for a second referendum. I want to bind this party together and find a compromise, and the compromise is staring us in the face. This one last issue needs to be resolved. Then we can unite, get a deal and move things forward.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. After the hon. Member for Halton (Derek Twigg), who is the next speaker to be called, the time limit will have to be reduced to three minutes on account of the level of demand. It is a pleasure to welcome the hon. Gentleman back to the House: Mr Derek Twigg.

4.28 pm

**Derek Twigg** (Halton) (Lab): Over 57% of voters in Halton voted to leave the EU, and it is condescending and disrespectful to say that they did not know what they were doing. It was very clear: the overriding message I had from my constituents who voted to come out of

the EU was that they wanted to end free movement of labour and take back control and have more control over our laws. Whether rightly or wrongly, people genuinely feel that is the right thing to do, and that to leave would lead to a better future for us out there. I also recognise that a large number of my constituents wanted to stay in, and like me, believe passionately that Brexit is not in the UK's best interests, and we must also listen to their concerns. However, I made it clear at the 2017 general election that we must get on with Brexit and come up with the best possible deal.

It should surprise nobody to learn that this has proved difficult. The Prime Minister could have reached out to Parliament and the Opposition from an early stage but chose not to. She could also have reached out more to the country as a whole—to the public. She cannot command a majority, but acts as if she has one. She wanted to keep MPs at arm's length. The Prime Minister must take a great deal of responsibility for the mess we are now in. I should add that I have had constituents, including those who voted to remain, complain to me about the arrogance and behaviour of the EU in the negotiations, so it is not just the Prime Minister who has a share of the blame. However, it is only now that the deal is in trouble that the Prime Minister has wanted to have discussions with a wider set of MPs, including Opposition MPs. The idea that we should just accept the first deal she puts to this House and not challenge it just smacks of the arrogance I referred to earlier. She expects that Parliament should just roll over and accept it, and then to try to use the threat of a no-deal Brexit just insults our intelligence, as we know there is not a majority for that in this House. I might add that the leave campaign said it wanted to see a negotiated settlement, so I do not believe there is a majority in this country for leaving the EU without an agreement.

With this deal we are neither fully in, nor fully out. We would have to abide by rules but with no say in what others will be making decisions on; while we look on, we would be rule takers. We would be in a weaker position than we are now. There are too many unresolved issues of great importance to our national interest here; the Prime Minister is asking us to take a big leap into the dark. Some 90% of constituents who have written to me or whom I have spoken to in recent weeks believe this is a bad deal—that is coming from both leavers and remainers. If this deal is rejected, it will send a strong message back to Brussels that we must find a better way forward and a better agreement, and that this Parliament will not be deterred from demanding a better deal. I will be voting against this deal, because it is bad for my constituents in Halton and bad for the UK as a whole. We have got to find a way forward. We have got to co-operate and work together in the national interest to find a solution that the people want. That means talking more to people, and getting across the issues and difficulties that we envisage, but we must have that co-operation in order that we can move this forward. There may be a number of ways of doing that, and having indicative votes is one thing that has been talked about during this debate. The fact is that we have to listen, co-operate and find a better way of moving this forward, because it cannot continue the way it is.

**Mr Speaker:** Thank you very much indeed. The three-minute limit now applies.

4.31 pm

**Stephen Crabb** (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): It is a pleasure to be called in this important debate, Mr Speaker. We are being told that the defeat of the withdrawal agreement is a near certainty tonight as a result of the entirely predictable coming together of the no dealers and the no Brexiteers, and, crucially, the Government's failure to build a critical mass of centre ground support for the deal. Given the overwhelming numbers, voting against this deal almost feels like the easier thing to do. But what should someone who genuinely believes in respecting and implementing the outcome of the referendum result do? What happens if they also believe that Brexit was always going to be a process, rather than a one-off event? What happens if they believe that leaving the EU should be done in a way that is responsible and orderly, that certain vital economic and constituency interests should be taken into account, that squaring off Brexit against the Northern Ireland peace process was always going to require incredibly sensitive handling and that compromises were always going to be inevitable because the theory of a perfect Brexit was always just that—a theory? What is the right approach to be taken then? I am talking not about the easy approach, but the right approach. As someone who believes all those things, I am clear that voting for the deal tonight is the right thing to do.

We have a serious responsibility in this House today and it weighs most heavily on those on my side of the Chamber. We, as the party in government, made this referendum happen and we triggered article 50. We are responsible for the timetable and we helped to shape the Prime Minister's red lines in negotiation. So it is not the Prime Minister's deal on the table for discussion but our deal—it has all of our names already attached to it. The question for us tonight is whether we are responsible enough to come together to pragmatically support it in order to provide a way forward and direction for the country, or whether we abdicate our responsibility and disown the very deal that our party in government helped to shape. Let me say something respectfully to those colleagues of mine who for a long time have fought the battle for Brexit and were there at the very beginning. We have heard a number of good speeches from them this afternoon. The question I put to them is: is Brexit always going to be some sort of oppositional insurgency that is forever saying no to things—a vehicle for permanent discontent—or can Brexit be seriously implemented as a programme for government? I was serious when I promised my constituents that I would implement Brexit as a programme of government, which is why I am voting for the deal this evening. I do so because I believed what I said and took seriously the promises that I made to my constituents. It is too easy now to walk away, and the responsible thing to do is back this deal tonight.

4.35 pm

**Angus Brendan MacNeil** (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): It is six long weeks since this process began on 4 December, and I would just like to start with a book recommendation that I hope you will find very good reading, Mr Speaker. Fintan O'Toole's "Heroic Failure: Brexit and the Politics of Pain" is a great read that explains the psychology behind Brexit and exactly why the colonialists in there got themselves in this situation—will we be a colony—and explores the juxtaposition of every emotion, but it is



[*Angus Brendan MacNeil*]

really the madness of Brexit that is well captured by the Irishman Fintan O'Toole. The book starts off with a great Turkish proverb:

“An Englishman will burn his bed to catch a flea”.

That is exactly what Brexit feels like, so I appeal to you: please do not burn your beds; revoke article 50 for your own good. You probably will not listen, but anyway I have said it.

How did we get here? Well, the Prime Minister went and triggered article 50 on 29 March 2017, without much of a thought. I remember that I was fencing my potatoes a few weeks later when around came the news that she was now holding a general election. I was a bit surprised. I had thought maybe the Prime Minister had a plan, but from that moment on—when I was fencing my potatoes—it was very obvious that she did not have a plan.

Six months later, she went to Florence of all places—no idea why—to beg the European Union for two more years. The EU gave her 21 months, and this is what she is now fighting about. Her whole strategy was without any foresight whatever. It was only beaten by the Leader of the Opposition, who wanted to trigger article 50 immediately, meaning that the disaster would already have happened. The situation continued without any cognisance of the needs of the Falkland Islands or Gibraltar, which do not want any of this nonsense. This is damaging to them, and any hon. Member who speaks to their representatives will understand that.

When I spoke to the Prime Minister last week, when she eventually engaged with MPs, it was pretty clear that she was at sixes and sevens. She wanted frictionless trade, but seemed not to acknowledge that we would need to be in the customs union and the single market to achieve that. Today I saw the Attorney General being bamboozled by the idea of fish as a commodity. I do not blame him for being bamboozled; his own Prime Minister could not answer that point in July. She could not see the difference between fish quotas and the fish as a marketable commodity once they were landed. That is very important for my constituency. In the islands of Lewis, Harris, North Uist, Benbecula, South Uist and Barra, not to forget Vatersay, Eriskay, Scalpay, Berneray, Bernera and Grimsay, these are all very important matters. But the Prime Minister is not listening. She acknowledges the damage to GDP; she said so at the meeting. She only wants this deal to buy herself 21 months. She is again playing the Gloria Gaynor card—kicking it all down the road and hoping she will survive. She is running out of road now, and she knows that she is.

Earlier, this was all blamed on David Cameron, but it should be remembered that the Liberals were the ones who started this game in the beginning. Too many in the UK have played the game of Europe. This is why we want to get out of Europe—[*Interruption.*] I meant the United Kingdom; I was just checking that hon. Members were paying attention. We in Scotland want out of the UK to stay in Europe. We see what Ireland is doing; we will do the same.

4.37 pm

**Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): Because Brexit should mean Brexit and no deal is better than this bad deal, I shall vote no, no and no. Thank you.

4.38 pm

**Rachel Reeves** (Leeds West) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis).

This is not about what happens this evening, because that is a foregone conclusion. This is now about how the Prime Minister responds to the defeat tonight, and where she and the Government take us next. My Select Committee, the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee, took evidence on these issues back in November and December. I just want to give Members on all sides of the debate a sense of that evidence and of what businesses said to us.

Paul Everitt from ADS, the aerospace, defence, security and space business trade body, told us that the withdrawal agreement is “not as good” as the deal we have today and that it

“won’t ever be as good as it is today.”

Nestlé said that leaving the EU is

“like ripping all the wires out of the back of a huge mainframe, and then when you are standing there with all these wires, it will take an awful lot of time to rewire us into a different trading system.”

The chair of the American Pharmaceutical Group said, “we are trying to rebuild what we may have taken apart.”

Of course, we have also had the news from Jaguar Land Rover, which described a “perfect storm”, of which Brexit is one fierce element, that is now resulting in 4,500 job losses.

We are in a position in which the Government say that the deal they have negotiated is not as good for our economy as the one we have today, and we have businesses telling us that the deal the Government have negotiated is not as good as the one we have today; yet tonight, we are in a place where the Government are asking us to vote for a deal that we know will make our constituents poorer, our economy weaker and our security arrangements less secure.

I cannot in good conscience vote for that deal. I did not come to this decision lightly. My constituents voted the way the country voted—to leave—but I do not think there is a single person in my constituency who voted for the deal before us this evening. I do not think that by voting for this deal we will heal the divisions in our country. Since the referendum, nearly 1,000 young people in my constituency have turned 18. They are probably the people who will be most affected by the decision that we will make this evening, yet they had no say in it.

I hope that in the days ahead the Prime Minister will start to listen, as she has not listened so far, to the voices in this House and to the people in this country. I hope that she will rule out no deal in the interests of our country, of our economy and of building a better future for us all, and then allow the people to have a say on the deal she has negotiated.

4.41 pm

**Heidi Allen** (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): Let me begin by addressing the issue of our divided country, which is repeatedly emphasised by commentators. I disagree—people are totally united. They are united by a pride in their country and in a determination that their nation deserves the best. Regardless of which side

of the argument we are on, we all care passionately about the future of our country and our citizens. Although there is clearly disagreement, like in any family, about the path to get there, we are united in demanding nothing short of the best. I believe that this shared determination and sense of national dignity means that we will find a way to navigate these challenging times and come out stronger on the other side, but we have to find a way to unite this place and the people.

When I decided to become an MP, it was for one reason: I wanted to play an active role in assisting and serving our country. It was not for the job title or because I had a sudden urge for my friends and family to think me “honourable”—indeed, they are regularly quick to dispel that myth—and it was not because I wanted a job for life. It was because I wanted to play my part for as long or as short a time as my party and my electorate wanted me to. As a Member of Parliament, one is a custodian for a short time, with a responsibility to do the singular best for one’s constituency and country, and nothing else, so I have approached my role by applying analysis; through the consideration of facts, constant and changing; and by listening to and representing my constituents in South Cambridgeshire as best I can.

It angers me greatly when I hear MPs say that they will “reluctantly” or “with a heavy heart” vote for this compromise. That is not because I do not believe the Prime Minister has done her best—I have no doubt that she has—but none of us MPs should vote for something that might make the economy weaker and risk jobs. How on earth can we purport to be representing this country at a national level if we are prepared to advocate that? It is not good enough, I say—absolutely not good enough! If we are doing so to protect ourselves, our own jobs, our party, or our own reputation in our party, we should be ashamed.

If this sense of pride and unwillingness to compromise our nation’s future were to result in my losing my position, I am prepared for that, because I will look back at my time as a Member of Parliament in this country’s hour of need and say, “I did my bit.” Lest we forget, we are elected to consider carefully all the options and all the risks, to read these lengthy documents, and to make the tough decisions when required. I exercise those duties with the utmost seriousness. I recognise that, of course, I cannot please all the people all the time, but it appears from thousands of emails, letters and tweets from my constituents, and my conversations with them, that they are content with my approach.

**Justine Greening:** I am sure that many young people in my hon. Friend’s constituency who want to ensure that their views and concerns about Brexit are listened to will be particularly pleased to hear her talking about how she approaches this very important long-term decision, which affects them the most.

**Heidi Allen:** That is the most important point, because this is about the future, not today, and certainly not yesterday.

Here we are today with a non-binding political declaration that will inevitably—indeed, this is already the case—become a negotiating tool for leaders in other EU countries: France for access to fish; and Spain for game-playing with Gibraltar. The biggest risk for me is the possibility that our next Prime Minister may not

honour the negotiating principles in that declaration. With this Prime Minister’s position assured, I would perhaps have more confidence, but there is a very real danger that the Government may be led by someone who wants a hard, no-deal Brexit. In that instance, the political declaration, non-legally binding, would not be worth the paper it is written on.

I ask myself: will this deal definitely improve opportunities for my constituents, will it really safeguard jobs, and will it guarantee scientific and medical collaboration? No, no, no. Will it support our services industries, which make up 80% of our economy? No—they are not even part of the deal. So I have no regrets; I have no reluctance. For me, the decision is as clear as day. This is not good enough for my country. So let us harness what unites us in Great Britain and Northern Ireland—that pride and determination to demand the best for the future. Let the people be part of this serious decision. Let them vote on this deal. Let us ask them—is it good enough?

4.45 pm

**David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab):** We are coming to the end of a long process and today is the final day of the debate. Like the Prime Minister, I voted remain in the referendum. Like the Prime Minister, I voted to trigger article 50, because my constituents voted to leave in that referendum. Like the Prime Minister, I want a deal that meets the aspirations of our businesses and our community following the referendum, but that also brings our country together. Having reviewed the deal, I have to say that this deal is not it.

I speak as a former Justice and security Minister in this House under a Labour Government. I cannot see any proposals in this withdrawal agreement that give any comfort on the issues of Europol, Eurojust, the European arrest warrant or co-operation on SIS II, whereby we share information on criminals across Europe. There is no content at all on those issues for the future. I see nothing on trade in the deal before us today that will secure future employment across the United Kingdom or in my constituency.

I had the very great privilege of serving as a Northern Ireland Minister, and I can see no justification whatsoever for treating Northern Ireland as a different part of the United Kingdom, given the history of the difficulties in Northern Ireland. The Irish Republic and colleagues in the Chamber today share that view. I understand why that also means that this cannot be a deal. The Treasury’s own figures show that the Prime Minister’s deal will reduce the economy by at least 2.5%, so I cannot support it.

But I also cannot support no deal. I have Toyota in my constituency, which will face a cost of £10 million per day under a no-deal Brexit. Nearby I have Airbus, employing thousands of people who depend on the free and frictionless trade that no deal will destroy. I have farmers in my constituency who need to export their goods, and no deal will destroy that. I have Vauxhall near my constituency. Even the Prime Minister’s two-year transition period means that decisions about the next generation of vehicles at Vauxhall in Ellesmere Port will be taken with the shadow of no frictionless trade held over it, so I cannot support no deal.

[David Hanson]

But I say to the Prime Minister, to echo my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), that there is scope for a deal if she looks again at her red lines. If she looks again at what I stood on at my election 18 months ago regarding access to a single market, strong rights at work and strong environmental activity, there is scope for a deal.

I do not know what is going to happen in the next 48 hours. There may be a vote of confidence; it may be won, it may be lost. But whenever that dust settles, this Prime Minister and this Government, or another Prime Minister and the same Government, will need to contact the Opposition to find a way through this. It can be done; it should be done. I want to make sure that I defend the interests of my constituency. We will not be poorer because of a decision that we can work our way through.

4.48 pm

**Mark Pritchard** (The Wrekin) (Con): In June 2016, after 40 years—a generation—my constituents, along with the rest of the country, were given a voice on the European question. My constituency overwhelmingly voted to leave the European Union. Tonight I will honour their views and their voice, and—to paraphrase my right hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough (Nicky Morgan)—represent them despite the fact that I voted to remain.

Setting aside the details of the legally binding withdrawal agreement, I want to address conversations I have had with my constituents rather than with distinguished colleagues and friends in the House. My constituents' vote to leave did not suggest any fear of foreigners or concerns about wage deflation and immigration. It reflected an understanding of the universal and overarching principles of freedom, sovereignty and independence, as was so ably put by my right hon. Friend the Member for Esher and Walton (Dominic Raab).

My constituents' support for Brexit is not inconsistent with a fond affection for Europe, shared European values, and a belief in the rule of law, high environmental and employment standards, freedom of speech and, dare I say it, democracy. Their decision is also not inconsistent with a recognition of EU citizens' huge contribution to the NHS, UK farming—particularly in Shropshire—and car, food and defence manufacturing. In all those sectors, EU citizens make, and will, I hope, continue to make, a highly valued contribution to our economy and society.

Brexit was not a vote against Europe, but it was a vote for Britain—a free and independent Britain. I will not be supporting the withdrawal agreement because it puts the United Kingdom in a weaker position than under our current status as a full member of the European Union. It makes us rule takers, not rule makers. It does not set Britain free to implement bilateral trade deals with countries around the world.

Much has been said in this place over many weeks about those who voted to leave the European Union. We have heard some low commentary from both sides of the House, but it was a higher principle that led my constituents to vote to leave the European Union: the freedom, independence and sovereignty of this country.

4.51 pm

**Mr Gregory Campbell** (East Londonderry) (DUP): This withdrawal deal keeps us as an annexe of the EU, not exiting from it. In the past two years, a narrative has developed within the Chamber and across the nation, and it is a completely and utterly false premise. The narrative is that the EU, as constituted, is a place of safety, security and certainty. Many people have portrayed the United Kingdom leaving the EU as a ship in a storm facing an unfortunate and untimely departure from a port or harbour.

That completely and utterly negates all that has been going on in the EU over the past couple of years and the seabed of that, whether it is national populism in Italy, Germany, Hungary, Sweden, France or Poland, or people's sense of frustration, of isolation and of political establishments not listening or paying heed to what they say and want. That is what I detect in this country—a sense of frustration and alienation. Allowing an expansionist empire to keep us embodied as an annexe to the EU will not be a good future. It will not give our children and grandchildren a future to look forward to and aspire to.

Assuming that the vote is lost, as most people think it will be, we need the Prime Minister to go back to Brussels and say, "This is not going to win. We need an agreement that I can get past the House of Commons." People in the United Kingdom will be not just aspiring to but demanding something above and beyond a good trade deal. They aspire to something greater, and that is an ultimate sense of freedom beyond the EU.

4.54 pm

**Damian Collins** (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con): I, too, rise to speak against the withdrawal agreement, which I will not be voting for this evening. I believe the deal is not what people voted for in the referendum, and I believe it will leave us worse off and having less control in our relationship with the EU than we have today.

I believe there is a lack of good faith, which is why so many Members across the House have spoken against the deal. When the negotiations started, we were told that there would not be an agreement on anything until there was an agreement on everything. We were told that the future arrangement on trade would be part of the negotiations on the deal. We were then told that an agreement on the amount of money we would need to pay during the transition period would unlock the process of discussing the future trade agreement. We are now told that we must pay the money as part of the transition, with no obligation or requirement on the part of the EU that we should agree a trade deal. We will not get any of that money back if the negotiations fail.

My concern is not just that; it is the immediate future—what we are voting to happen now. To use the Attorney General's analogy of the key into his airlock room, which is really the backstop, he is right that we can turn the key and go into the backstop. However, what became clear from his remarks—he did not necessarily express this when he used the analogy—is that when we go into that room, our key is taken off us. We will neither have a key to go back to where we were, nor one to go through the door into the next space.

We are trapped in the backstop, and the EU has lots of good reasons to want to keep us there. It has us, by default, committed largely to the rules of the customs union.



It has us shadowing the rules of the European single market, with no say in how they are made. It can sit back and wait for something more favourable, and perhaps it would like something more punitive, too. The EU is left holding all the cards in any negotiation on our future relationship. That is not a situation this country should put itself in. It is not the basis on which to negotiate a good deal for the future that gives us a good trading relationship and protects the interests of this country, which we should not give away.

We are being asked to do something now that we were promised would never happen. We are being given a *fait accompli* and told that we have to accept this deal, otherwise there is no Brexit or there is no deal at all. I do not believe that. The German Foreign Minister has said today that, if the deal is voted down, talks can resume, and they must do. It would of course be a betrayal of the people of Northern Ireland to lock them into a different economic and political status, without ever having asked them whether that is what they would accept and whether that is what they wanted.

We have to reject this deal today. We have to go back to the negotiating table. We have to make sure that whatever option we choose gives us the freedom to choose our future direction and does not lock us into arrangements we have no power to get out of. That would be a betrayal of the interests of this country, and something that I could not accept.

4.57 pm

**Stephen Morgan** (Portsmouth South) (Lab): Of paramount importance is the notion that democracy is a process, not an event. It is our duty to defend and deliver the will of the people. From Portsmouth to Pickering and from Penzance to Peterborough, it is essential that the referendum result is respected. However, it is clear that no one voted in the referendum for this half-baked deal put forward by the Prime Minister.

This deal is a galaxy of uncertainty. The Treasury Committee has highlighted that, explaining that the Government analysis did not assess the short-term impact of leaving the EU. When that fact was put to the Chancellor, he agreed. If the Chancellor himself agrees that the deal is uncertain, how can the Prime Minister expect MPs to gamble with the lives of their constituents?

What does this Government's deal mean for Portsmouth? For the Queen Alexandra Hospital, it means staff shortages induced by the Prime Minister's continuation of the hostile environment and a reduction in shared research and international co-operation, and it threatens the prosperity needed to fund our much-loved local NHS. It rules out a permanent customs union with a British say, which is vital to support Portsmouth's businesses, local jobs and the manufacturing supply chains they depend on. It also threatens Portsmouth's international port, which generates £7 million directly to council coffers to fund local services in an area where a third of children live in poverty and a city forgotten for too long by the Government.

Will that continue under the Prime Minister's deal? I have asked, but unanswered questions remain. It is inevitable that multifaceted challenges are posed by exiting the EU. In my constituency, we have seen a 12% swing towards remain from the leave vote. Uncertainty perpetuated by this Government's deal has left many

others with unanswered questions. That is why 70% of people in Portsmouth South want some kind of final say when it comes to Brexit. The people need clarity. The people need control. The people need a final say. A no-deal scenario would see the most vulnerable bearing the brunt of decisions made by the few. If no-deal Brexit was imposed there would be a 29% increase in average food import costs, affecting people on the lowest incomes disproportionately.

The Palace of Westminster is the birthplace of democracy, where so many decisions have been made to shape not only our great country but the world. We can all agree that Brexit is the most important decision this country has taken since the second world war. My grandparents grew up in Portsmouth. My parents grew up in Portsmouth. I grew up in Portsmouth. The importance of this deal is not just for us here today, but for the generations that will inherit the consequences of our actions. It is a privilege to stand here and represent a constituency that has contributed so greatly to our nation's success. I cannot jeopardise Portsmouth's future by voting for a deal that will make my home city poorer.

5 pm

**Robert Halfon** (Harlow) (Con): I voted remain in 2016, because I felt it was better for Britain to belong to an alliance of democracies. However, in my heart I felt that the EU was both undemocratic and bureaucratic. I understood why people wanted to take back control and the pressures that ordinary people face in their daily lives, particularly with the cost of living. It was clear to me after the referendum that the public had had enough. My constituency voted 68% to leave and I made it very clear to the residents of Harlow that I would do all I could to ensure that their wishes on Brexit were followed through. That is why I am strongly opposed to a second referendum, which would divide the country once again and disenfranchise the 17 million people who voted to leave. It would potentially cause political unrest and extremism, as many who voted to leave would feel that their wishes had been ignored.

I do not for a moment believe that the people were not informed or were too stupid. Far from it. In fact, it was we politicians who were the foolish ones for not listening to the anguish of many working class communities over many years, with people struggling with the cost of living and the pressure on our public services, and doing the right thing by working hard yet facing obstacle after obstacle in their daily lives. My view is that any withdrawal agreement needs to follow the wishes of the British people.

The problem for me with the Prime Minister's deal is this: how do I go back to my community of Harlow and say we do not have money for our libraries, hospital and community groups, but we can give £39 billion of hard-earned taxpayers' money to the EU without even getting a trade deal at the end of it? When the House of Lords said there was no obligation to pay the £39 billion, should the Government not at least have published a cost-benefit analysis of the money we would have to give to the EU under the withdrawal agreement? We are tied to EU structures via the transition and the backstop, a spaghetti junction of EU bureaucracy that could potentially be infinite. I have never rebelled against this Prime Minister in this Parliament, but I will be voting against the deal tonight for those reasons. It would

[Robert Halfon]

create two different regimes for Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom, and that has the potential to weaken our Union.

We are in this spaghetti junction without a voice, a vote or a veto. That is why I am trying, with the hon. Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell), to offer an alternative with a common market 2.0. A common market would take back control by removing us from the common fisheries policy and the common agricultural policy, taking back control of our fish and our farms. It would take us out of the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice and offer us a brake on freedom of movement, but safeguard jobs, communities, business and our economy.

5.3 pm

**Shabana Mahmood** (Birmingham, Ladywood) (Lab): The Prime Minister said this morning, in setting up today's vote, that we—that is to say Parliament—must not “let the country down”. The real tragedy is that ever since the Prime Minister assumed her position and began the process of implementing Brexit, her way of handling the process has done exactly that: it has let the country down. A vote won by 52% to 48% required the language of compromise from the Government and the Prime Minister at the outset, not the language of red lines.

We are a divided nation. That is not surprising given that we asked our citizens to answer a binary question in a highly polarising and toxic debate. No genuine attempt has been made to reach out to the 48%, to bring people together and to tell those who found themselves in a minority by a very small margin on the day of the referendum result that this is still their country, too. No attempt has been made to state unequivocally that all those citizens who have been exercising their British rights and freedoms to dissent, to hold an unpopular or minority position and to still argue for remain are not acting as saboteurs or traitors, but are as British as it gets.

Instead, we have allowed toxic language and rhetoric to take hold, poisoning not only our politics, but our wider society. Just as there has been no reaching out to the rest of the country by the Government, there has been no reaching out to the rest of the House either. At the outset of his speech, which feels a long time ago, the Attorney General said that we have reached this point reluctantly. That is not true. All the choices made along the way—choices made willingly and wilfully by the Prime Minister—have led us not reluctantly but inexorably to the place we are in today.

It is unforgivable that we have lost a whole month to a simple running down of the clock because the Prime Minister was afraid of losing the vote, as she will inevitably this evening anyway. I cannot support the withdrawal agreement or the political declaration for many of the reasons that Members have already set out, not least because they ignore 80% of our economy—the services sector on which so many thousands of jobs depend.

I will, however, support all and any measures that allow Parliament to do what the Executive have so demonstrably failed to do, which is to commence the

search for a consensus. We should hold some indicative votes to find what will command a majority in the House. We must take all and any steps to rule out a no-deal Brexit. The real tragedy is that Brexit on any terms will not solve many of the reasons why the Brexit vote took place in the first place. At the very least, we as a House must make the best of it and find a consensus to go forward.

5.6 pm

**Mr Richard Bacon** (South Norfolk) (Con): A constituent of mine who voted leave recently said:

“I am sick and tired of being told I didn't know what I was voting for. I knew exactly what I was voting for.”

Recently on Bloomberg, the former Governor of the Bank of England, Mervyn King, wrote:

“Britain is not facing an economic crisis. It is confronting a deep political crisis. Parliament has brought this on the country. It voted overwhelmingly to hold a referendum. The public were told they would decide.”

Indeed they were. On 10 November 2015, David Cameron said at Chatham House that

“ultimately it will be the judgment of the British people in the referendum... You will have to judge what is best... Your decision. Nobody else's. Not politicians'. Not Parliament's. Not lobby groups'. Not mine. Just you. You, the British people, will decide... It will be your decision whether to remain in the EU on the basis of the reforms we secure”—

I emphasise those words—

“or whether we leave.”

In February 2016, David Cameron secured his reforms at the EU Council. There was the so-called red card, whereby enough national Parliaments combining together might be able to block a Commission proposal. There were temporary limits on access to in-work benefits for newly arriving EU workers. There were some limits on child benefit and a vague commitment to reducing regulation. It was not very impressive, but that was the deal. People voted on whether to stay in the EU on that basis or to leave, and they voted to leave.

The question in the Scottish referendum was, “Should Scotland be an independent country?” If the vote had gone the other way and Unionists had then said: “Well, it depends what one means by ‘an independent country’”, or, “Did people really know what they were voting for? This will make Scotland poorer, I cannot possibly support it”, there would justifiably have been outrage, yet that is exactly what is happening here, where the question was straightforward. The question was, “Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union or leave the European Union?”, and the people voted to leave.

The problem is that some people have no interest in respecting the result of the referendum and they think they know better. The present situation recalls Bertolt Brecht's poem, “The Solution”:

“After the uprising of the 17th June  
The Secretary of the Writers' Union  
Had leaflets distributed in the Stalinallee  
Stating that the people  
Had forfeited the confidence of the government  
And could win it back only  
By redoubled efforts.”

As Brecht put it so devastatingly in the final stanza:

“Would it not be easier  
In that case for the government  
To dissolve the people  
And elect another?”

I will be voting against the withdrawal agreement because it will not deliver Brexit. It gives the EU the right to impose laws on us indefinitely and a veto over whether that would ever change, while breaking up the country by requiring Northern Ireland to treat Great Britain as a third country and making us pay £39 billion, even though without a withdrawal agreement we are not legally obliged to pay a penny. The former Chief of the Defence Staff and the former chief of the Secret Intelligence Service both say that the withdrawal agreement will fundamentally affect our national security. People voted for change. What we want is a self-governing country where we rule ourselves. We do not need this deal; we just need to leave.

5.9 pm

**Hannah Bardell** (Livingston) (SNP): At the heart of this debate are opportunities and rights—the opportunities and rights of the next generation of young people across the UK, the 16 and 17-year-olds who did not get to vote in the referendum because the Government did not think that they were responsible enough.

It is hard to believe, I am sure, but it is some 13 years since I graduated from university. At the University of Stirling, I studied alongside Erasmus students from across the EU. They enriched our lives, our country and our education system. I also had colleagues and friends who went throughout the EU and had exactly the same experience. That we are going to deny such opportunities to the next generation is a human tragedy, and that we treat EU nationals in the UK with contempt is also a human tragedy.

In the first days after the referendum, when the Scottish Government and the First Minister of Scotland put out the hand of friendship, unfortunately the Labour party was calling for article 50 to be triggered. In recent months, when we put the hand of friendship out again, to say that we would pay the ridiculous fees that EU nationals were being asked to pay, this Government tried to block us. The Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights also set up a committee, which highlighted some of the concerns, such as those about EU funding and opportunities to work, study and travel abroad.

Much of what we hold dear about the EU has been about our rights. As a gay woman, I know that this Parliament and the Scottish Parliament have done a huge amount for LGBT people but, as Mark Townsend wrote in *The Guardian* last year:

“The Westminster parliament has played its part in making amends, but without the carrot and stick of European institutions would we enjoy the level of protection from discrimination that we now possess?”

That is a reasonable point to make—just look at the Government's record on trade union rights. What will happen when we do not have those protections anymore? Where will that leave us? In 2017, at the UK Supreme Court, John Walker had his pension rights instated so that his husband will have the same pension rights as others. That took an 11-year battle against the Government.

We must not forget the big boys who did this and ran away—those who got us into a mess and are now nowhere to be seen. We must remember that my constituents

and the people of Scotland voted to remain within the EU. When circumstances change and politics moves forwards, as it inevitably does, people should be allowed another choice.

5.12 pm

**Mr John Baron** (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): I rise to speak to amendment (f) in my name and that of other right hon. and hon. Members. Briefly, it would give the UK Government the unilateral right to exit the backstop at a time of their choosing. It is very straightforward: the UK could not find itself suspended indefinitely in a backstop. If the amendment is passed, it would allow the UK to choose the time to exit, had we entered the backstop; the UK would not have to seek EU approval to do so.

I speak with some sadness. The negotiations to date have been approached as a problem to be solved, rather than as an opportunity to be seized. I, for one, do not like the transition period, but in any negotiation—in particular after 40 to 45 years of integration—there has to be an element of compromise, and I am willing to accept that. The backstop, however, is the real problem for many on the Conservative Benches.

At the moment, the Government cannot answer this very simple question, which directly addresses the indefinite nature of the backstop: without any legal certainty with regards to our ability to exit the backstop unilaterally, what certainty is there that the EU would not play a long game, dragging out the negotiations? By further extending the transition period, which it could do, we could still be having this discussion in three, four or five years to come. That is not honouring the result of the referendum. We need to leave the EU. We need to be definite about that, and the backstop is not the answer because it is indefinite. We could be there for a very long time—

**Mr Kenneth Clarke:** Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Mr Baron:** I am sorry: others want to come in.

Passing amendment (f) would encourage both parties to negotiate constructively when it comes to the transition period and the trade deal, because if the EU knows that it cannot trap us in the backstop, it is more likely to constructively negotiate a trade deal for the benefit of both parties. The Prime Minister could then go back to the EU, which has a long track record of eleventh-hour deals. The amendment would go a long way to helping to unite our party, which is terribly, terribly important. If the amendment is not passed, unfortunately and reluctantly I will have to vote against the withdrawal agreement.

5.16 pm

**Richard Burden** (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab): I first declare an interest: I chair the all-party motor group, which receives support from the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders, the Motorsport Industry Association, and the RAC Foundation.

Yesterday, I attended the first meeting of the development partnership that has been established by the Business Secretary in response to the announcement that Jaguar Land Rover will cut 4,500 jobs this year. This is not a company in crisis. Indeed, in addition to the job loss announcement, the company also told us about its



[Richard Burden]

impressive forward investment plans. But this is still a time of great uncertainty for employees, and there will be a big role for the development partnership in standing by them.

I do not claim that the job losses at Jaguar Land Rover are to do only with Brexit. The downturn in the Chinese market is an important part of the picture, as has been the depression in sales of cleaner diesel engines. Shortage of time means that I cannot go into that today, but Brexit is also part of the picture. Yesterday's meeting reinforced my belief that the most important thing to do now is to rule out crashing out of the EU without a deal. That cannot be mitigated, whether by a ferry company with no ships or converting an airport runway into a lorry park. It is no answer for motor manufacturers or for companies in their supply chain to have somewhere to park their trucks when they cannot get those trucks to and from channel ports to deliver the parts needed every day to build 6,600 cars and 9,000 engines here in the UK. They need to be able to get the 1,100 trucks that carry those components across the channel every day to their plants not only on time, but in the right order, to keep their production lines going. It is the same for the £3.4 billion-worth of components from suppliers in the UK that go to the European Union to build vehicles over there. The only way to keep production going is not to make forlorn efforts to try to mitigate chaos—it is to stop the chaos happening in the first place.

Investment decisions are now on hold. If we want to guarantee and secure them, we have to rule out no deal. To do that, we have to decide what we will do after the Prime Minister's deal is defeated tonight, as it surely will be. We must buy ourselves some time to do that, because any other option will not be able to be completed by 29 March. If that means extending article 50, that is what we should do. We need to prevent a no-deal Brexit by default, and that is now the overriding priority.

5.19 pm

**Mr Marcus Jones** (Nuneaton) (Con): When this House gave the people a vote in 2016, the people had their say and the majority voted to leave. I did not vote to leave, but the majority did, and that must be respected.

There are many views on how we should leave the EU. I take the view that I want to stick as much as I can to our 2017 manifesto on which I was last elected, and that formed the basis of what we have in front of us today. Is the deal perfect? No. Does it get us out of the EU on 29 March? Yes. It also gives us the basis for taking back control of our laws, our money, our borders, our fishing and our agricultural policy, and the basis for a trade deal.

I totally accept the challenges that hon. Members across the House have raised in relation to the backstop. I have had to take a view on that, and balance that view against the wider imperative. I must admit that I am drawn to the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron), as well as to the one tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison). If the vote fails tonight, I hope that we will look at the situation in the context of those kinds of proposals and ask whether we could make further agreements with the EU.

I fear that if we do not work along those lines, we will have two distinct groups in Parliament: one that wants a no-deal Brexit and one that does not want Brexit at all. I fear that both groups want a race to 29 March, and that both think they are going to win. However, only one group can win. In racing terms, the favourite is probably no deal, because we already have the legislation in place to work towards that, but following last week's events, I would not rule out the people who want to prevent us from leaving the EU doing everything within their power between now and 29 March to achieve that.

I will back the deal—I am interested in supporting it because I think it is good for jobs and particularly for the manufacturing industry in my area—but I want to say to the House and to my constituents that I will not renege on the referendum, I will not support anything that would extend article 50 or stop Brexit and I will not support a second referendum. We must leave on 29 March. I am committed to that, and I hope that the House will also agree to that if we do not ratify this deal in the coming weeks.

5.22 pm

**Liz Kendall** (Leicester West) (Lab): Much of this debate has been dominated by questions about the Northern Irish backstop. While those questions are vital, we must not lose sight of the fundamental question we should be asking ourselves tonight. Is this agreement right for our country, and will it make us prosperous and stronger and help us to deal with challenges of the future? It will not. The agreement does not secure our future trading relationship with the EU, as people were promised in 2016. We have not even begun those negotiations, and despite what many businesses hope, they will face huge uncertainty for years to come.

The truth is that there is no free trade agreement that will deliver the same benefits as our current relationship with the EU. There will inevitably be barriers to trade that will make us poorer than we would otherwise have been. At the same time, during the transition period, we will be giving up our say over many of the rules that govern our lives—a say that, whatever the Brexiteers tell us, Britain has always exercised to powerful effect within the EU. How is that taking back control? Neither does the agreement provide answers to the reasons why people voted to leave in the first place. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden) has said, in many parts of the country the Brexit vote was driven by a deep sense of loss—the loss of industrial jobs and the pride and purpose they brought, and a rejection of what has come in their place.

I know from my own constituency that many people are angry, and that above all they want change, but the EU and immigration have not caused the very real problems people face, and Brexit will not solve them. Britain is better able to cope with the problems created by globalisation when we are part of a strong group of like-minded countries, and most of the powers to transform people's lives lie within our hands. We should be offering people the chance to succeed, not offering them something or someone to blame. We should be making changes to our economy and public services so that people in every part of the country can thrive in an inevitably uncertain world, rather than pretending that we can somehow stop the clock and make the rest of the world go away.

I will be voting against the agreement tonight, but time is running out. We cannot wait any longer to provide the leadership we need to get us out of this hole. I will support moves to try to build consensus across the House and to rule out the threat of no deal and the chaos it would bring. However, the best way of breaking the logjam is to put the question of where we go next back to the public, because what is on offer now is so different from what was on offer in 2016 and because it is right in principle to say, “This is the reality of Brexit. Do you want to go ahead or stick with the deal we have?” There is no jobs-first or sensible Brexit and we, particularly Labour Members, should have the courage to tell it like it is.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. A two-minute limit now applies.

5.25 pm

**Andrew Selous** (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): People had wanted to have their say on Europe for many years. When we gave them the referendum on the alternative vote, the main question in my constituency was, “Why aren’t you giving us a vote on our membership of the European Union?” Some 17.4 million voted to leave, including 58% of my constituents, and more people voted for Brexit than have voted for anything else. Importantly, 403 constituencies voted to leave. Those people were promised that their vote would be honoured, that it was the people’s decision, and that it would not be overturned by politicians or by this Parliament. It would be wrong to say to those people that we will have a second vote when we have not delivered on what they voted for the first time. It has become clear over the past month or so that there is a majority in this House against no deal. Therefore, if we vote down this deal, the remaining alternatives, including the Norway model or some version of it, are so far from what people voted for that we will have broken faith with the British people.

I say to my friends across the House—pragmatic Brexiteers and democratic remainers alike—that we must prevent an alliance of people who want to stop Brexit and people who want an even stronger Brexit from denying the people what they voted for. We know that business does not want a second referendum, which would lead to even more uncertainty. I heard today from trade unionists who want to leave the EU that it “will unleash an unprecedented level of disillusionment in British politics which will be unparalleled in our history” if we do not deliver Brexit.

5.27 pm

**Chris Bryant** (Rhondda) (Lab): To be honest, the withdrawal agreement is not a deal. It means we will pay £39 billion for the right to obey EU rules without the right to sit at the table when those rules are written. The political declaration is so woolly that it could mean whatever we want it to mean or, for that matter and more importantly, whatever the next Presidents of the European Council and European Commission want it to mean. We have no idea whether we shall have open trade with our closest neighbours or whether we shall continue to share information about dangerous international criminals or take part in Europol or be able to extradite criminals to face justice across European Union borders. The deal is bad for British jobs, and it puts our national security at risk.

I am angry that we have wasted so much money on Brexit—money that could have been spent on decent services in my constituency. However, what pains me most of all is that we British, who have always been proud to welcome strangers from other countries, who have travelled across Europe to build great British companies, who followed Churchill’s injunction to build a Europe of peaceful co-operation, and who prided ourselves on the rule of law and our robust parliamentary system, have utterly squandered two years on a massive distraction from the real subjects that matter: inequality, poverty wages, the state of our public services, and low productivity. In the process, we have become an international laughing stock—anxious, angry, uncertain, divided—and we have received death threats at our constituency offices. I have not heard a single Member say that this deal is better for Britain than our present deal—not even the Prime Minister—so how on earth can we vote for it? Consensus is a delusion. Party politics has failed. The PM must build a new coalition and the people must have the final say.

5.29 pm

**Craig Tracey** (North Warwickshire) (Con): It is no secret that I voted to leave the EU, as did 67% of my constituents and nearly 17.5 million people across the UK. The reasons for voting to leave varied across the country, but I spoke to thousands of my constituents before, during and after the referendum and they were clear about what they voted for. They want to see an end to free movement, they want control of our borders, they want sovereignty for our Parliament and they want the ability to trade freely around the world. I very much share those sentiments. I was keen to see an agreement delivered that I could support. Critically, the one on offer does not meet two of the criteria set out by my constituents: the return of our sovereignty and the ability to trade freely.

My personal concerns about the deal are similar to those of many in this House, mainly on the backstop and the future legal agreement. As it stands, the deal on the table potentially gives away our sovereignty and £39 billion of our money with absolutely nothing guaranteed in return.

Getting an agreement is the most favourable option, but not at any cost. I believe that, with the deal before us, we are giving too much away. It is not too late to change course. We can secure amendments that deliver wholly on the referendum result, and those changes need to include getting rid of the Northern Ireland backstop and having guarantees on our future relationship, both of which are likely to command a majority in this House and, importantly, deliver on the democratic will of the British people. It is important that that is delivered because people are so frustrated by the games of some politicians who seek to frustrate the result.

I implore the Prime Minister to go back to the EU—I know the EU has said the deal is final, but it has moved on other things and we have seen that it is able to move the goalposts when it suits it—and come back with a deal that we can get behind.

5.31 pm

**Liz Saville Roberts** (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): Before I start my speech, I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to Steffan Lewis, the Plaid Cymru Assembly

[Liz Saville Roberts]

Member, who very sadly passed away on Friday. At just 34, he still had so much to contribute. He was, without a shadow of a doubt, one of the party's best minds. His inspirational vision for lifting Wales's status in the world reached across the political divide. His influence and legacy will endure beyond our political lifetimes. We miss you, Steff.

The Prime Minister and her inner circle have reached endgame. They have run out of road in the project of misinformation, arm twisting and semantic chicanery, of "my way or no way" and of partnership proffered as the gateway to the future of her precious Union. She says she is reaching out across party boundaries, but it is just too little, too late. The spirit of acknowledging another vision, a vision of the respect implicit in the sweet moderation of compromise—sadly, such politics are beyond her. Her gaze has a way of swivelling back to the Brexiteers, fossilised in the strata of her own party. The rest of us, and especially the voices of Wales, have been invisible and unheeded. Here is a concept of parliamentary democracy in the age of devolution reduced to the absurd.

The Prime Minister claims that no solutions other than hers have been proffered or are, indeed, possible. This tired political gambit now looks desperate. It has neither credibility nor veracity. When we plead with her to give the people a final say on the biggest question of our generation, as many of us have, she commands us to honour the result of the Brexit referendum, yet in 1997 she voted against legislation to establish the National Assembly for Wales, and in 2005 she stood on a manifesto calling for another referendum, with the option to overturn the previous result.

History has shown that the Prime Minister is very much prepared to go back to the people of Wales, so why not Europe?

5.33 pm

**Mr Nigel Evans** (Ribble Valley) (Con): We have heard time and again in the Chamber today that the people should have a final say. Well, the people did have a final say, and it was in 2016. Just because hon. Members cannot quite come to terms with the fact that the public were not sufficiently scared witless to vote to remain in the European Union, it is no excuse for us not to listen to what they had to say. Fifty-seven per cent. of the Ribble Valley voted to leave, 75% of Conservative seats voted to leave, 61% of Labour seats voted to leave and, at the last election, the Labour party and the Conservative party both stood on manifestos that said they would deliver leaving, which is therefore what we have to do. I know democracy can be difficult at times, but that is no reason to deny the democracy that this Parliament gave to the people. Sovereignty went back from this House to the people, who had their final say.

I have problems with the deal as it currently stands, particularly on the backstop. The European Union basically has an opportunity to chain us to it, but it does not have the handcuffs. We are deciding whether to offer it the handcuffs and the key. That would be hugely dangerous.

I look forward to the opportunities we will have once we have left to do trade deals throughout the whole world, including with the European Union. We buy

£341 billion of goods from them, and they buy £95 billion less from us, so it is in both our interests to do a trade deal. We will have a 20-month transition period—when it can start—but the important thing is to leave on 29 March. It is almost like Christmas day—it is 25 December; it is what people look forward to. If we deny them the opportunity to leave on 29 March, they will never forgive us.

5.35 pm

**Dr Rosena Allin-Khan** (Tooting) (Lab): Yesterday, working in my emergency department as a doctor, I looked around the waiting room and saw it all on display: people's pain, their hopes, their fears, their courage. Whether it is a mother relying on food banks to feed her malnourished children or a father waiting too long for a cancer chemotherapy operation, this deal does nothing to improve lives. Just as the NHS is tasked with healing and prevention, so we are too in this House. Politicians and commentators continue to fuel the rhetoric and fan the flames of hatred. Parliament, once the symbol of hard-won rights through democratic discourse, is seeing voices forcefully suppressed by fear and intimidation. People are questioning the very character of our culture in order to tear apart the fabric of our society.

This deal, the language around it and the empty threats used to force us into supporting it are doing nothing to rebuild Britain. We can start the journey to rebuild Britain by looking at the rising use of food banks, the number of operations cancelled and the number of police on our streets. Now, more than ever in this place, we need to take a long hard look at ourselves and ask who we are. British people are tired of rhetoric, political games and uncertainty. In the absence of a Government who can lead—this Tory Government—it is imperative that the House set an agenda for repairing the deep wounds in our society. We need to dig deep in the coming days and ask what sort of leaders we want to be and how we are to heal our country once all is said and done.

5.37 pm

**Crispin Blunt** (Reigate) (Con): Thank you for calling me, Mr Speaker. I am amazed to make it into the top 50.

I want to make three points. First, I agree with the hon. Member for Halton (Derek Twigg) and my hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr Bacon) about the attitude towards the leave vote. It was not some cry of anguish or expression of concern. It was a decision. We gave the people the decision and they took it.

The second point is about the preparation for no deal. I am obliged to the anonymous civil servant who concluded his piece in *The Telegraph* on 28 December as follows:

"An enormous effort by thousands of hardworking civil servants has been made to ensure that if we leave the EU without a deal, 'crashing out' over a 'cliff-edge' is simply not going to be an option, and it is purely a political decision not to make this clear to the public and nervous backbench MPs. But if the Government was frank with Parliament and the country"—

we have authorised £4.2 billion of expenditure on this, by the way—



“what justification would be left for its disastrous Withdrawal Agreement? What would Remainers do without a Project Fear? They would need to think up convincing positive arguments for staying in the EU, something that has so far proved beyond them.”

The final point is about defence and intelligence. I know that my right hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Mid Sussex (Sir Nicholas Soames) has taken an extremely dim view of Lord Guthrie and Sir Richard Dearlove and the letter they have written to Conservative association chairmen, and he is perhaps right to wear the expression of an outraged Bateman cartoon in response to their behaviour, but their letter contained a real concern. Even my right hon. and gallant Friend was not able to address—his remarks last Friday were not time-limited—the substance of what they are warning about and all the issues over the common security and defence policy and the rest contained in the European acquis. We would do well to pay attention.

5.39 pm

**Marsha De Cordova** (Battersea) (Lab): When I first spoke in the meaningful vote debate, I spoke of the shambles of the Government’s handling of Brexit, of my alarm at the historic mess that was of their making, and of my anger at the contempt with which they had treated the House and the people whom we represent. I spoke of my constituents’ outrage at the turmoil that the Government were inflicting on the economy, and of the threat to workers’ rights and environmental standards that this Brexit deal represents. I spoke of the danger that the Government’s approach poses to EU citizens’ rights—rights that must be guaranteed; no ifs and no buts.

Now, five weeks later, what has changed? The Prime Minister said that she was going back to the EU to get “reassurances” to appease her disgruntled Back Benchers, but she has returned with nothing. Nothing has changed, as her saying goes. We are now being asked to accept the same botched deal as we were then. It is a deal that fails to protect jobs, rights or people’s livelihoods. It is a deal that the Government’s own analysis says would reduce GDP by 3.9% and make every region worse off. It is a deal that provides no guarantees on the maintaining of key rights such as those of disabled people, which are protected by the EU charter of fundamental rights. All that has changed since the Prime Minister pulled the vote is that there are now just 73 days left until 29 March.

It is clear that the Prime Minister is trying to run down the clock and hold the country to ransom. She is using the prospect of a catastrophic no deal to threaten the House into accepting her botched deal. That is unacceptable, and I know that the people of Battersea, and people across the country, are disgusted at this attempted blackmail. That is why I will be voting against the Prime Minister’s deal, and I encourage all Members on both sides of the House to do the same.

5.41 pm

**Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown** (The Cotswolds) (Con): I intend to change my mind. I am a Brexiteer through and through. It is in my DNA. We gave the British people the opportunity to vote in a referendum on 23 June in 2016, and I intend to vote to honour that in full. In return, however, I expect my colleagues on the Front Bench to pay very close attention to my concerns about this particular deal.

I happen to believe that we have a very bright future outside the EU. The current legal position is that we are leaving without a deal unless the House overturns the legislation. The ultimate irony is that all the people who vote against the deal tonight are more likely to end up with a no deal, and I do not want to see that happen. I want us to leave with an agreed deal, and an agreed deal that is acceptable to the British people.

I have two main reservations. First, I think that we need legal clarification about withdrawal from the Irish backstop within a specified time, preferably no longer than two years. My second major objection to the backstop is that it ties us into a customs union with the EU. I want us to get out of that customs union so that we can have an independent trade policy. I think that the best future for this country is to be outside the EU, trading with growing nations around the world, but we cannot do that while we are stuck in the backstop.

I therefore intend to vote for the deal tonight. I intend to sort this matter out for my constituents, as I promised, and I intend to give businesses certainty, but in return, I want the Government to come back with a better deal.

5.42 pm

**Tim Farron** (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): On the day of the 2016 referendum result, I called for a vote on the final deal. That did not instantly meet with wild approval. My motives may have been misunderstood, because I am used to losing elections. I have never called for one of those elections to be rerun. I am a very good loser: I have had bags of practice.

There is much talk about the legitimacy of our democracy, and about trust in Parliament being tarnished if we do not enact Brexit on 29 March, but what does it do for trust in politics if we force the people to accept a deal that most of them clearly do not want? Let us not fool ourselves: no one here speaks for the majority. There is no majority of the people any more. The Brexiteers in this place are voting both ways today. The Brexiteers out on the streets, peacefully protesting, are calling for votes in both directions. I had the joy of stopping for a few minutes of good-quality banter with many of them last week. We should do more of that, by the way. Some were asking me to vote for the deal, but most were asking me to vote against it. Of the minority of my constituents who favour Brexit, most are asking me to vote against the deal, although some are asking me to vote for it. The 17.4 million figure is now divided into at least two opposing camps.

Referendums are an awful means of sorting out any issue. They are divisive and they are dangerous—unless, of course, they concern an issue that no one cares about, such as the alternative vote. However, we have reached a point at which the only democratic, legitimate, peaceful and consensual way through this appalling mess is to give the people the final say. Let our future not be one that anyone can claim was foisted on Britain by politicians and by this Prime Minister’s Whitehall-Brexit stitch-up. Let our future be one that is owned by the British people, that was endorsed by the British people, and that has a legitimacy that brings a unity and a healing that only a final say can bring.

5.44 pm

**Mr Ranil Jayawardena** (North East Hampshire) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Westmorland

[*Mr Ranil Jayawardena*]

and Lonsdale (Tim Farron). He talks about winners and losers, but this is not about winners and losers; it is about what is right.

The Prime Minister has repeatedly said that no deal is better than a bad deal. I believe a deal is possible, but this is not it; this is a bad deal. I know that some, both in this place and beyond, have expressed their wish to agree it anyway: people who continued to campaign for remain after the referendum in order to guarantee we avoid no deal; or people who believed in leave but out of party loyalty or fear for Brexit seek to support the deal before us. I respect that others will vote as they see fit; it is important for every Member to act in good conscience, and it is for that very reason that I cannot support this so-called deal.

Trust in politics remains at an all-time low. To pretend that this deal delivers on the referendum only continues to foster the distrust we have seen out there. We must be honest with people: this deal does not deliver on the referendum. It retains the worst parts of the EU without the real benefits of Brexit. So I happen to agree with the vast majority of my constituents who have contacted me, both leave and remain voters, who have urged me to vote against this deal.

None the less, let me be clear: I do want to secure a deal with the EU, and I continue to believe that we can agree one. I believe that, sadly, the negotiation now potentially needs to continue even after a no-deal departure from the EU on 29 March. We must be bolder if we wish to strike the best deal for Britain, whether before D-day or beyond.

5.46 pm

**Mr Ivan Lewis** (Bury South) (Ind): This should be a historic day for the future of our country and Parliament. This was once the Chamber of Winston Churchill and Clement Attlee. Instead today is a day of high farce and self-delusion: the Government pressing ahead with a deal they have known for weeks is dead; the leadership of my former party offering the illusion of an election when it has no chance of winning a no-confidence vote; the no-deal camp who have no regard for the impact this would have on our constituents.

In the last chance saloon it is incumbent on us to seek a pragmatic compromise that can secure a majority in this House and in all political parties. I do not care whether this is presented by the Government or facilitated by this House. Putting Brexit back to the people would be an abdication of our responsibility; it has nothing to do with breaking a logjam and everything to do with seeking to reverse the result of the first referendum. It will further divide our country when we should be leading and healing.

I cannot support this worst of all worst deals, and genuinely believe the only option that can now secure a majority in this House is a common market 2. At its core that is a very simple idea: that we can be out of the political structures of the EU but maintain our economic and security partnership. This will require a radically reworked political declaration based on the EEA and the EFTA. After tonight this should form the basis of the Prime Minister's new negotiating position, or alternatively the House will have to take control and seek a pragmatic compromise. Common market 2 or something else: our duty is to lead and to heal this divided nation.

5.48 pm

**Damien Moore** (Southport) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bury South (Mr Lewis) and an honour to be taking part in this debate at a crossroads in our history.

In 2016 the British people voted to leave the European Union, and the Government and this Parliament need to respect their wishes. I accept that there are passionate views on both sides, and I have always treated those with differing views with respect, but it is wrong to suggest that most people did not know what they were voting for. Many who espouse those views really think that the people of this country should not have been given that decision in the first place. It is my belief that those who are calling for a second referendum are seeking to damage our democracy, as no decision by the British people would mean anything any longer because once a decision was reached those who were unhappy would try to undo it, and that might go on again and again and again. Division is healthy in a democracy and in our political process, but a second referendum would take our country to breaking point and undermine the dignity in our democracy.

The withdrawal agreement does allow for some control to be taken back, and I respect the endeavours of the Prime Minister. She has made a major commitment to this; her perseverance is commendable and her diligence unquestionable. There is only one point I wish to make on this agreement and it relates to the Northern Ireland backstop. The inclusion of the backstop is perhaps the most potent aspect of this agreement, given that it poses a real threat to the integrity of our United Kingdom. Although some have tried to allay fears with optimism, more concerning are those who have displayed a parochial indifference that fails to recognise our role as United Kingdom Members of Parliament, acting in the interests of the whole United Kingdom. The British people did not vote to have the foundations of our nation undermined in any way—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I call Jack Dromey.

5.50 pm

**Jack Dromey** (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): I will never forget Warren, whom I first met as an apprentice who was moving into a little Victorian terraced house with his partner. He said that as a consequence of having got a good and well-paid job at the Jaguar plant he was moving into the house of his dreams with the woman of his dreams. The plant and the success of Jaguar Land Rover have transformed the lives of thousands, including in my constituency, which is rich in talent but one of the poorest in the country.

This is a company producing 108,000 cars a year and at the heart of the midlands economy, and the relationship with Europe is key. Half the company's market is in Europe and if it had to fall back on WTO terms, that would put up prices of the cars it sells by between £3,000 and £5,000. We are talking about millions of parts every day and thousands of lorries. The frictionless trade and that relationship have been key to the success of the automotive industry in our country. Ralf Speth, JLR's inspiring chief executive officer, together with the whole industry, has warned of the consequences of not getting this right. What was the response of some Government Members? The response of the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson)

was “f\*\*\* business”. The response of the hon. Member for Harwich and North Essex (Sir Bernard Jenkin) was that Ralf Speth was “making it up”. The right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip also said that he was not sure that Ralf knows more about the automotive industry than he does. The right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith) said that

“not a single job will be lost”

as a consequence of Brexit. What planet do they live on?

That is why two things are key. First, this is not a good deal and we have to get to a good deal that works for Britain. We have to get to that, honouring the obligation that we gave to the people of Britain at the time of the referendum. Secondly, in the meantime, there can be no question of a no-deal Brexit. In the words of Ralf Speth, we should say no to no deal, because to go over the cliff on 29 March without a deal would be utterly catastrophic for our country.

5.52 pm

**Dr Andrew Murrison** (South West Wiltshire) (Con): Some 57% of my constituents voted to leave and so did I. It may be unfashionable but I will be supporting the Government tonight, because after the sophistry, chicanery and obfuscation of last week, I genuinely feel that we may not have Brexit at all. The Attorney General is absolutely right to say that there is risk in the backstop, and we need to de-risk it. My amendment would have done that, had it been selected, as would the amendment tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Sir Hugo Swire). Amendments (b) and (f) have pretty much the same effect, as they would introduce a time limit, and I commend them to the Government.

In 2016, people were not being thick or ignorant, and they were not overwrought. They were not racist and they were not prejudiced. They were not needing to be given a second chance, and they were not “anguished”, to use the word of the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn). They just wanted to leave. They are sovereign. We serve them. Let’s get on with it.

5.55 pm

**Mr Adrian Bailey** (West Bromwich West) (Lab/Co-op): The Attorney General opened this debate by saying that this situation was ineluctable. The fact is that it was not. It only became ineluctable when the Prime Minister, failing to recognise the need to build a consensus across the country and in Parliament, started to adopt inflammatory language about the EU, set out red lines that ruled out much-needed conditions for any settlement that would help our manufacturing industry and the situation with the Irish border, and opposed any parliamentary involvement in the process. By doing so, she alienated a body of people in this House and across the country who she needed to build the necessary consensus to get a deal that would be acceptable both to Parliament and to the country.

I represent a constituency that voted 70% Brexit, and I am a remainer. I do not pretend that that is a comfortable position to be in. I voted to trigger article 50 because I felt that I had to honour the referendum result, and I have been lobbied heavily to say that, as a representative, I should do what my constituency wanted. The problem is that I am also being lobbied by people who want a better health service and access to the doctor, who are

worried about their jobs at Jaguar Land Rover, and about policing and the rise of crime in the locality. I know that all these things, which I am equally obliged to deliver, will be jeopardised by voting for this settlement, because it does not give us what we have now. What we need is for this to be defeated, for the Prime Minister to extend article 50 and for a consensus to be reached in the ensuing months.

5.56 pm

**Sir Hugo Swire** (East Devon) (Con): I would have liked to be able to support the Government’s motion. I voted remain and I certainly have deep concerns about this whole process. I have looked at the whole issue of the backstop, and I have been consistent in this respect, which was why I tabled an amendment, which was not selected. Indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison)—the Chair of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee—tabled a similar, rather better, amendment, building on mine, but that was not selected either.

I just cannot reconcile myself to the fact that, as an MP, I can vote this evening effectively to commit this country to a backstop from which it has no unilateral right to withdraw, so it is with a heavy heart that I shall not be supporting the Government this evening. I believe that there is still a fair deal to be done with the European Union—a good deal that respects all our peoples, all our industries and all our businesses. There is a deal to be done, but this is not that deal.

5.57 pm

**Neil Gray** (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): I wish to set out why I will vote against the Prime Minister’s deal. I start from the position of respecting the result of the EU referendum in Scotland. The people of Scotland resoundingly rejected the idea of Brexit. According to the polls, they continue to reject Brexit and the Prime Minister’s deal in even greater numbers. And no wonder: it has all been about self-interest for this Prime Minister and the Tory party. She triggered article 50 without a plan. She held a snap general election for her own self-interest, but lost her majority. She ignored the Scottish Government’s offer of a compromise, which would have carried the House. She set herself red lines aimed at satisfying her extreme Brexiteer Back Benchers, but that boxed her into an impossible corner and left her facing a no-confidence vote anyway.

Failing to prepare is preparing to fail, which is why the biggest mistake was triggering article 50 when the Prime Minister had not done her homework. She tipped the hourglass with no plan, no idea and no backing. Today—two years on—as the sands start to run out, nothing has changed. She has no credible plan, no idea and no backing. Now she is trying to make it a Hobson’s choice in order to deflect from the politically inconvenient choices that do remain open to us. She should request an extension to article 50 to allow the people to have their say.

The Tory leadership is not the only one to have acted purely out of self-interest in this process. The Leader of the Opposition wants to renegotiate Brexit, but will not say what he would renegotiate. He wants a general election, but no plan to achieve one, and he will not say what his Brexit policy would be. He cannot decide whether to back another EU referendum, and does not know if he would campaign for leave or remain.



[Neil Gray]

It could have been so different. On BBC Radio Scotland this morning, the hon. Member for East Renfrewshire (Paul Masterton) rightly encouraged the Prime Minister to ignore the extreme Brexiteers. Sadly, his very sensible advice was two years too late. The sands of time have moved on. Instead, the warnings of Brexit leading to a greater chance of independence are becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy.

5.59 pm

**Dr Caroline Johnson** (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): I voted to leave, my constituents voted to leave, the country voted to leave and leave we must, but I say to my fellow Brexiteers in the House that we must accept that we are a majority in the country, but not in Parliament. Let me give an analogy: we are 10 players on a pitch playing a team of 11, and the odds are now even further stacked against us, since the referee has demonstrated that he is prepared to change the rules.

This deal is not perfect, and I am particularly concerned about the indefinite nature of the backstop, but the risk of not supporting it is that, as was demonstrated last week, Members will seek to water down even this Brexit or to stop it altogether. I will support the deal because once the withdrawal agreement is signed, the door to remain will shut firmly, and we can all come back together and focus on delivering the best future for the UK outside the EU.

**Mr Speaker:** I have not changed any rules of the debate. What I have done is chaired the debate from start to finish, facilitating every right hon. and hon. Member of every conceivable hue of opinion to have every opportunity to put his or her view. It is a point so blindingly obvious and so transparently fair that all reasonable people would, I think, accept it.

6.1 pm

**Karin Smyth** (Bristol South) (Lab): My constituency of Bristol South voted to remain by 53% to 47%. I have since sought to represent that vote and understand its closeness, but the Prime Minister cannot say that my constituents will be better off. The best I have been told, even in private by Brexiteers, is that there will be a period of uncertainty for some 15 or so years and we will then perhaps know that we have made the right decision. I will not make that monumental leap into the unknown for my family or my constituency. It is a shocking dereliction of responsibility by the Prime Minister that she asks us to do so.

I wish to talk briefly about our precious Union. The word “precious” means not to be wasted or treated carelessly, but the Government have treated this Union carelessly. Not only have the past two and a half years done nothing to heal the 48-52 division, but they have done nothing to bring together the views and interests of people throughout this Union. They have only let the destructive nationalist and separatist genies out of the bottle and caused great uncertainty across our land. The Prime Minister has not even done what her predecessor said he would do and involved the devolved Executives, Governments and regional powerhouses properly in her negotiations.

There seems to be a glimmer of hope as of last week, when the latest Brexit Secretary started to talk about targeting regional Assemblies and Governments, but

that is not the sort of tone or approach that we need—it is more of the same. If the Government are to salvage anything from past two and a half years, they must recognise the mutual interests of all our people throughout the constituent parts of the United Kingdom, and they need to start to treat the English cities and regions with a modicum of respect. They have to start healing this country.

6.3 pm

**Leo Docherty** (Aldershot) (Con): I rise to support the deal—I do so as someone who voted to leave the European Union, like 58% of my constituents—because in my judgment it is the only sane and sensible path to an orderly Brexit that will allow us to reset our relations with the European Union, not as an unwilling member of the federal club, but as a close friend and ally. When we do this reset, we must bear in mind the positive vision laid out by Sir Winston Churchill in Zurich in 1946, when he implored a Europe that had been ravaged by war to unite for the sake of peace. He famously exclaimed that we should “Let Europe arise”. He said that the role of Great Britain should be as “the friends and sponsors of the new Europe”, and that we “must champion its right to live and shine.”

That positive vision still applies today and should guide our future relations with our European friends. More than that, it should guide our relations with countries beyond Europe and our role on the world stage. More than ever before, in the new era, we must be more confident, positive, international and global than ever before. We should be confident in the ability of British commerce, culture, diplomacy and law to have a far-reaching, highly positive impact around the world. To do that, we must take the first step of achieving the prize of Brexit. That first step is passing this withdrawal agreement, and I will be supporting it tonight.

6.4 pm

**Joanna Cherry** (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): Yesterday the Prime Minister wondered what the history books will make of all this, and I would like to venture a few suggestions. She will be remembered as the Prime Minister who presided over the biggest failure of government and leadership in the United Kingdom in modern times. Instead of having the moral courage to face up to the fact that the EU referendum was won on the back of lies and fraud, she set out to achieve the unachievable—a deal better than the deal we currently enjoy.

In doing so, she has ignored the weight of expert evidence. She has ignored the economic assessments of her own Government and advisers, presided over a regime so incompetent and questionable that no-deal Government contracts are being awarded without competitive tendering to dubious entities without any legal justification whatsoever, and spent hundreds of thousands of pounds of taxpayers’ money trying to prevent us from knowing the answer to the question of whether article 50 could be unilaterally revoked. She barely has the confidence of her own party, and its Members only put up with her because none of them has the gumption to step up to the plate to sort out this mess.

It is likely that the Prime Minister soon will not have the confidence of this House. In Scotland, she has never had our confidence and never will. She should not take

the Scots for fools. The majority of us voted to remain, and the majority of Scots now realise that they were lied to during the 2014 independence referendum. Those lies were that Scotland was an equal partner and that the only way to guarantee staying in the EU was to vote to stay in the UK. The results of referendums won on the back of lies cannot stand. That is why I am voting down this deal. I want a second EU referendum and there should also be a second Scottish independence referendum.

6.6 pm

**Mike Wood** (Dudley South) (Con): I had planned to support amendment (q) this evening, because the safeguards sought on the backstop are necessary and supported by a substantial number of Members. However, I shall now be voting for the similar amendment (f), which was tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron). I arrived in Westminster yesterday expecting to resign today as a PPS to vote against the motion. While there is much to support in the withdrawal agreement and future partnership, under a prolonged backstop we could not take back the control that I campaigned for in the referendum and 71% of my constituents in Dudley South voted for. That has not changed, and this still worries me.

I have concluded, however, that there is now a much greater threat to the Brexit that my constituents voted for. Events over the past week show that there are some in this House who will stop at little to frustrate Brexit, leaving no convention and no established practice of the House safe. I cannot risk those who have never accepted the referendum result stealing the Brexit that my constituents and people around the country voted for in record numbers. My constituents are not stupid; they were not misled. They knew that they were voting to take back control of our laws, our borders, our trade and our money. They knew it would not be plain sailing, but they knew it was a battle worth fighting. They expect us to deliver.

I do not expect the motion to pass tonight, so the Government must listen to genuine concerns across the House. The deal with which they come back to the House must genuinely take back the control that the people voted for in 2016. I will support that work, starting tonight with this evening's vote. It is the last chance and the best chance we have to deliver on the promise of Brexit, and our democracy desperately needs it to succeed.

6.8 pm

**Mr Paul Sweeney** (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): Today is the last day of my 20s, and as I reflect back on the last decade, I have to wonder: how did I end up here, and how did the country end up in this almighty fankle? It seems that the root cause of a lot of our problems in this country is economic alienation caused by a crisis of neo-liberalism that has failed the poorest people in our society. The root cause of a lot of the problems that erupted with so many people voting to leave the European Union and—I look back as a veteran of two referendum campaigns—to leave the United Kingdom can only be the failure of established structures in this country to deliver prosperity and security for so many people.

When I look at my constituency, where only 51% of people participated in the EU referendum, it seems that many people have disengaged from the political process entirely. Members have to be cognisant of that if we are

to repair the trust in our political system between those who vote for us as representatives and the body politic at large, who in many cases have disengaged from our political process. Simply talking about a deal or no deal will not heal that rift in our democracy. We must have a much greater and more thoughtful approach to how we heal the division in our society.

I do not think that the Prime Minister, who has just joined us in the Chamber, is equipped to do that. She has failed miserably in her efforts and through her partisan approach in delivering this deal. We must adapt and deliver for the young people of this country, including myself, who have to face the consequences of the actions of this House and this Prime Minister. She must rise to the occasion, and so far she has failed miserably to do so.

6.10 pm

**Kirstene Hair** (Angus) (Con): The British people directed us to take the United Kingdom out of the European Union, and it is our duty to put that into effect. We must not tell them to vote again until they give a different answer or deliver a non-Brexit that keeps us in the EU in all but name. There are clear opportunities, and we must embrace them. No parliamentarian is 100% comfortable with what is in front of them. That was inevitable for a whole host of reasons, including the lack of clear direction for the outcome of a leave vote.

Too often, self-interest takes over the decision-making process. The SNP is determined to force a no-deal situation, in the hope that that would accelerate its case for independence. My fellow Scottish Conservative MPs and I have always been robust in our support for the fishing industry. No one can say that the industry has not been pragmatic when it comes to our departure from the EU. Whatever happens today, let me be clear that I will not accept any extension of the transition period beyond December 2020. We must embrace the sea of opportunity that Brexit presents.

I have concerns about the Northern Irish backstop, and it is deeply disappointing that we have not reached a technological solution. I would also have felt much more comfortable if there were an end date for the establishment of a future economic partnership. However, for me, this decision is about the businesses and constituents I represent. A deal is a negotiation with a large dose of pragmatism. I have spoken to many of my largest employers and my constituents on the doorstep or in the supermarket, and what they want is the uncertainty removed.

The withdrawal agreement may not be perfect, but does it deliver on the decision taken by the people of our United Kingdom in 2016? Yes. Does it return to us full control of our borders, as so many people wished? Yes. Does it provide long-term stability for our businesses, farmers and fishermen? Yes. Of all the options on the table, is this agreement the one that is most in the national interest? I believe that it is, and that is why I will be supporting this deal tonight.

6.13 pm

**Anneliese Dodds** (Oxford East) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Angus (Kirstene Hair), who made a thoughtful speech, although I cannot agree with the thrust of it.

[Anneliese Dodds]

More than 2,000 of my constituents have contacted me about this deal. Only a handful say that they support it, and I agree with the majority. I cannot support it for four reasons. First, it gives inadequate protection for EU citizens who are our neighbours, friends and workmates. I see the Prime Minister looking at me. She will know that I have had repeated communication with her and the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union over many weeks to try to get confirmation about the exact criteria for settled status. We still do not have the clarity that we need. That is now coupled with an arbitrary salary level for those coming to our country from the EU, which will starve our hospitals, universities and many other employers of the staff they desperately need. I cannot support the deal because of that.

Secondly, I cannot support the deal because of its inadequate plans for research co-operation, which is so essential for the two universities in my constituency. Thirdly, I cannot support it because of insufficient certainty on customs. Huge firms and important manufacturers such as BMW in Cowley in my constituency do not only need certainty for two years; they need it for 20 years, and they certainly do not get it from this deal. Finally, there are no legally binding guarantees in this deal to stop a race to the bottom on environmental standards or working rights.

This deal has got to be voted down, and after such a failure of leadership, this Government must go. If they will not, then all options should be on the table, including a third public vote, to find a way forward for our country. Whatever the process, all parliamentarians here need to remember that we are the ones who have power, not those vulnerable people affected by the politics of hate out in our country. We have that responsibility, and we must always reject that hate. The onus is on us.

6.15 pm

**Alex Burghart** (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): There is a peculiar irony, is there not, Mr Speaker, in the fact that today marks the anniversary of Henry VIII styling himself the Supreme Head of the English Church in 1535? Five hundred years on, here we are arguing over the same questions of who rules, on what authority—*[Interruption.]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Stop the clock. *[Interruption.]* Order. There is a very unseemly atmosphere. The hon. Gentleman must and will be heard.

**Alex Burghart:** Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. Five hundred years on, we find ourselves still arguing about our relationship with Europe and about who rules. I have little confidence that, 500 years from now, we will have resolved these questions.

Tonight and in the weeks to come, the House has three choices it can make: there can be a deal; there can be no deal; or we can stay in the European Union. If it is not this deal, then it must be another deal. By all the rumours going around, that deal will be worse than the one on the table. It will keep us more closely aligned to the EU, and give us less say. In fact, it will be worse than staying in the EU.

Those people in the House who want to stay in the EU hide behind the idea of a second referendum. I say to hon. Members who think the first referendum was

divisive that, goodness me, they have not seen anything yet. If those Members who want us to stay in the EU believe it, they should call on this House to have a vote to revoke article 50, but they will not do that.

The deal before us is what we have. This is a deal that, treated right and taken in the right direction, will give us control of our borders, our laws, our waters and our trading opportunities. We have had time enough to go over these issues. It is time now for the House to make a decision. I will vote for the deal for tonight, and let us move on.

6.17 pm

**Kate Green** (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): I did not come into Parliament to spend my time working on the future of the European Union. It is not what my constituents, when they elected me first in 2010, intended me to spend my time on either. They wanted me to concentrate on their living standards, their security, the future for their children and grandchildren, and a better planet for the future of our world.

Actually, however, all these things are encompassed in the decision we make tonight about whether we accept the deal before us, and about our commitment to our ongoing relationship with our European Union neighbours. I will not vote for a deal that will make my constituents poorer, that will make them less secure, and that means we will have less influence in the decisions taken that will affect them and that will reduce our highly respected and highly regarded standing in the world.

I am distressed, as all hon. Members are, at the divisions that this Brexit story has revealed and opened up in our country, but our duty now is to concentrate on healing them. I do not believe it will ever be possible to do that if we deliberately make our country poorer, more unstable and less influential than it would otherwise have been. We need to concentrate on building a positive, prosperous, powerful future for this nation. Voting to leave the EU, and voting for the Prime Minister's way of leaving tonight, will not enable us to do so.

6.19 pm

**Matt Warman** (Boston and Skegness) (Con): Mine is the constituency that voted more than any other to leave the European Union in 2016. If we do not get back control of our laws, borders and money, it will be hard to say that this country is a democracy. The people heard in 2016 all the apocalyptic predictions that we now hear about WTO, and they made a choice. In part, the country did that because Parliament, rightly or wrongly, had come to be seen as out of touch with the people on a host of issues. If we do not deliver what the people voted for, we will prove them right. We will damage a democracy further in which people already lack faith.

So how do we get there? It is clear that this House does not want to back a no-deal departure. It has already been clear that people on both sides of the House will vote to stop it. So I say to those of my constituents who have called me a traitor and worse that when I vote tonight with the Prime Minister, I do so because I am committed to Brexit and voting against this deal would put wind in the sails of those who seek to stop it. Those people have had too much success already. Voting against this deal will not bring about a



harder Brexit; it will bolster this House's dangerous attempts to undermine it. To those who say that no deal is in law and will happen, I say that this House will rewrite the law.

I am voting tonight for the only way out of this conundrum: a necessary gateway, however painful it might be. There is a risk that we will get stuck in the backstop, but it is now smaller than the risk of not leaving at all. We in Parliament are better than letting the people down. We deserve to get on with it and deliver this Brexit. We should, like it or in many cases not, support this deal tonight.

6.21 pm

**Simon Hoare** (North Dorset) (Con): I am going to be incredibly parochial. In the 2017 general election, my personal manifesto to the voters of North Dorset said:

"I am working for a Brexit right for North Dorset that will support business, protect jobs and workers' rights, promote local farming, safeguard the environment and give opportunities for our young."

Having reviewed the deal, I am confident that it meets those commitments and the referendum decision to leave.

We live, as we know, in a representative democracy where the voters of North Dorset send me to Westminster to exercise my judgment and support the policies of the Conservative Government. I do not possess the judgment of Solomon. None of us does. All I can do is assure them that I am trying to do my best for them and for our country. I am conscious that in so doing I will not please everyone, but I do not think that that is the purpose of politics.

I am a democrat. I voted remain and my side lost. The referendum was not, as we know, our finest hour. The majority of the House made it clear that it would support the decision and that Parliament would deliver it. I maintain that view. A second referendum is fool's gold. Our country's use of referendums is on constitutional issues, and Brexit is now an issue of domestic policy.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has worked her fingers to the bone, if I may say so, to get this deal right. It has my full and unequivocal support. To deliver Brexit, and to maintain and build faith in our democracy, this House should stop the posturing and support my right hon. Friend in the Lobby tonight.

6.23 pm

**Sir Peter Bottomley** (Worthing West) (Con): The UK is to leave the EU. That decision was taken two years ago. The question is whether we crash out or support the withdrawal agreement, to be followed by a period of transition and the future arrangements on trade and relationships.

Assuming that we are not trying to reverse the referendum—I think there is no majority, either in the country or in the House, for that—the majority of us support the Prime Minister's deal. The majority of Conservative supporters support that, and I suspect that the majority of Labour supporters support that. Other parties, including from Northern Ireland, would as well, given the choice.

Our responsibility is to find where there is an overlap between what is possible and what is right. I believe that the negotiated agreement on withdrawal is that position.

The Opposition, to be reasonably polite, seem to resemble members of the scarabaeidae family who are upside down, pushing in the wrong direction and do not quite know where they are going. If the choice for the country is between chaos and compromise, I think this agreement is the right way of being sensible. I back the plan in the national interest.

6.24 pm

**Jeremy Corbyn** (Islington North) (Lab): This has been a vitally important debate for the future of our country and our future relationship with the European Union, following the decision of the people in the 2016 referendum. The debate today is the culmination of one of the most chaotic and extraordinary parliamentary processes I have ever experienced in my 35 years as a Member of this House. Parliament has held the Government in contempt for the first time ever for failing to publish their legal advice. Then, for the first time in a generation or more, on 10 December the Government failed to move their own business in the House. The Government have been defeated on a vote on their own Finance Bill for the first time since the 1970s.

The Prime Minister opened the debate on her deal more than one month ago. The debate was due to end on 11 December, but she pulled it in a panic. As she conceded, the deal would have been rejected by a significant margin. She has run down the clock in a cynical attempt to strong-arm Members into backing her deal. Despite her promises, she has failed to negotiate any changes to her deal with Europe. No wonder the Prime Minister has suddenly discovered the importance of trade unions. She voted to clip their wings in the Trade Union Act 2016, and she has utterly failed to convince them that she has anything to offer Britain's workforce. That is the heart of the matter: the Prime Minister has treated Brexit as a matter for the Conservative party, rather than for the good of the country.

But the Prime Minister has failed to win over even her own party. Many Conservative Members who voted remain are opposed to this deal, as are dozens of Conservative Members who voted leave. After losing her majority in the 2017 general election, the Prime Minister could have engaged with Members across the House. She could have listened to the voices of trade unions. If she had been listening, both businesses and trade unions would have told her that they wanted a comprehensive and permanent customs union to secure jobs and trade. The decision to rule out a new customs union with a British say and the lack of certainty in the deal risks business investment being deferred on an even greater scale, threatening jobs and threatening living standards. Even worse, it risks many companies relocating abroad, taking jobs and investment with them. Many workers know exactly that situation, because they face that reality now. Their jobs are at risk, and they know their jobs are at risk.

The First Ministers of Wales and Scotland have made clear to the Prime Minister their support for a customs union to protect jobs and the economy. This deal fails to provide any certainty about future trade. It fails to guarantee our participation in European agencies and initiatives. Losing that co-operation undermines our security, denies our citizens opportunity and damages our industries.

[Jeremy Corbyn]

The withdrawal agreement is, in short, a reckless leap in the dark. It takes this country no closer to understanding our post-Brexit future, and neither does the future partnership document. Under this deal, in December 2020 we will be faced with a choice: either pay more and extend the transition period or lock us into the backstop. At that point, the UK would be over a barrel. We would have left the EU, have lost the UK rebate and be forced to pay whatever was demanded. Alternatively, the backstop would come into force—an arrangement for which there is no time limit or end point—locking Britain into a deal from which it cannot leave without the agreement of the EU. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) has pointed out on so many occasions, that is unprecedented in British history.

The past two years have given us no confidence that this Government can do a deal in under two years, so at some point before December 2020 the focus would inevitably shift from negotiations on the future relationship to negotiations on an extension to the transition period, including negotiations on what further payments we should make to the European Union. The vague partnership document says that it

“can lead to a spectrum of different outcomes...as well as checks and controls”.

That does not show to me any clarity whatsoever in that document. There is not even any mention of the famed frictionless trade which was promised in the Chequers proposals. The former Brexit Secretary—that is, one of the former Brexit Secretaries—promised a “detailed”, “precise” and “substantive” document. The Government spectacularly failed to deliver it.

I can confirm this: Labour will vote against this deal tonight, and Labour will vote against it because it is a bad deal for this country. As we have heard over the past week, Members in all parties, including many in the Conservative party, will join us in rejecting this botched and damaging deal.

I welcome the fact that there is a clear majority to reject any no-deal outcome. The amendment to the Finance Bill last week demonstrated the will of the House on rejecting the danger—and it is a danger—of a no-deal outcome that would cause such chaos to so many people across this country.

But it is not enough for the House to vote against the deal before us, and against no deal; we also have to be for something. [HON. MEMBERS: “Ah!”] So, Mr Speaker—[*Interruption.*] So in the coming days, it is vital that this House has the opportunity to debate and vote on the way forward, to consider all the options available. The overwhelming majority of the House voted to respect the result of the referendum and therefore voted to trigger article 50. So I say this to our negotiating partners in the European Union: if Parliament votes down this deal, reopening negotiations should not and cannot be ruled out.

We understand why after two frustrating years of negotiations, the European Union might want this resolved, but this Parliament, our Parliament here, has only one duty, to represent the interests of the people of this country—and the deal negotiated by the Government does not meet the needs of the people of this country.

The people of Britain include many EU nationals who have made their lives here. These people have contributed to our country, to our economy and to our public services, including our national health service. They are now anxious, and have no faith in this Government to manage the process of settled status fairly or efficiently, and the early pilots of the scheme are very far from encouraging.

The Prime Minister claimed that this is a good deal, and so confident was she of that that she refused to publish the Government’s legal advice, but her Government’s own economic assessment clearly tells us that it is a bad deal. It is a product of two years of botched negotiations, in which the Government spent more time arguing with themselves, in their own Cabinet, than they did negotiating with the European Union.

It is not only on Brexit that the Government have failed. Under this Government, more people are living in poverty, including—[*Interruption.*] I am talking about the half a million more children who have fallen into poverty while this Government have been in office. I am also talking of those who have been forced into rough sleeping and homelessness, which have risen every year. Too many people are stuck in low-paid and insecure work. Too many people are struggling to make ends meet and falling deeper and deeper into personal debt on credit cards and with loan sharks. Nothing in this Brexit deal and nothing on offer from this Government will solve that. That is why Labour believes that a general election would be the best outcome for the country, if this deal is rejected tonight.

We need to keep in mind that the vast majority of the people of this country do not think of themselves as remainers or leavers. Whether they voted leave or remain two and a half years ago, they are all concerned about their future, and it is their concerns that the House must be able to answer and meet. I hope that tonight the House votes down this deal and we then move to a general election, so that the people—[*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Nobody is going to shout the right hon. Gentleman down, just as nobody will shout the Prime Minister down. All they are doing by causing me to intervene is taking time away. It is not necessary, rather foolish and thoroughly counter-productive.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** The people need to be able to take back control, and a general election would give them the opportunity to decide who their MPs were, who their Government were, and who would negotiate on their behalf. It would give a new Government the mandate that is needed to break the deadlock that has been brought to the House by this Government.

I ask this of the House: vote against this deal. We have had a very long and detailed debate. More hon. Members have spoken in this debate than almost any other debate I can remember, and they have given a heartfelt analysis of the deal. A very large number have explained why they will vote against this deal. Quite simply, this deal is bad for our economy, a bad deal for our democracy and a bad deal for this country. I ask the House to do the right thing tonight: reject this deal because of the harm it would do, and show that we as MPs are speaking up for the people we represent, who recognise that the deal is dangerous for this country, bad for them, their living standards and our collective future.

6.38 pm

**The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May):** This debate has lasted some eight days, over 54 hours, with speeches of powerful sincerity from more than 200 right hon. and hon. Members. It has been historic for our Parliament and for our country. We have heard contributions from every perspective, looking at all aspects of this complex and vital question. We have seen the House at its most passionate and vigorous, and I thank everyone who has contributed. No one watching this debate can be in any doubt about the strength of this House of Commons as the fulcrum of our democracy.

This is a debate about our economy and security, the livelihoods of our constituents and the future for our children and the generations to come. It goes to the heart of our constitution, and no one should forget that it is a democratic process that has got us to where we are today. In 2015, my party stood on an election manifesto that had as a centrepiece the promise of an in/out referendum on the UK's membership of the European Union. The British people responded by electing a Conservative Government to follow through on that promise, and that is what we did when this House voted overwhelmingly to hold the referendum and put the choice in the hands of the British people. Indeed, 470 current Members voted in favour of it, and only 32 opposed it.

That campaign was keenly fought. It caught the public imagination like few campaigns before it. The turnout was 72%—higher than for any national poll for a quarter of a century—and while not overwhelming, the result was clear and it was decisive. That was something that this House accepted when we voted overwhelmingly to trigger article 50, with 436 current Members voting to do so and only 85 opposed. Parliament gave the people a choice. We set the clock ticking on our departure, and tonight we will determine whether we move forward with a withdrawal agreement that honours the vote and sets us on course for a better future. The responsibility of each and every one of us at this moment is profound, for this is an historic decision that will set the future of our country for generations.

So, what are the alternatives that present themselves? First, we could decide that it is all too difficult and give up, either by revoking article 50 or by passing the buck back to the British people in a second referendum. But I believe we have a duty to deliver on the democratic decision of the British people, and to do so in a way that brings our country together. A second referendum would lead instead to further division. There would be no agreement to the question, let alone the answer. It would say to the people we were elected to serve that we were unwilling to do what they had instructed.

The second possible outcome is that we leave on 29 March without a deal, but I do not believe that that is what the British people voted for, because they were told that, if they voted to leave, they could still expect a good trading relationship with the European Union. Neither would it be the best outcome. Our deal delivers certainty for businesses, with a time-limited implementation period to prepare for the new arrangements of the future relationship. No deal means no implementation period. Our deal protects the rights of EU citizens living in the UK, and of UK citizens living in the EU, so that they can carry on their lives as before. No deal means no reciprocal agreement to protect those citizens' rights. Our deal delivers the deepest security partnership

in the EU's history, so that our police and security services can continue to work together with their European partners to keep all our people safe. No deal means no such security partnership. Our deal delivers the foundations for an unprecedented economic relationship with the EU that is more ambitious—[*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I said earlier that this was becoming a rather noisy and unseemly atmosphere, and that has now resumed. It must stop. The Prime Minister must be heard.

**The Prime Minister:** Our deal delivers the foundations for an unprecedented economic relationship with the EU that is more ambitious than anything it has ever entered into with a third country. It will give us the benefits of trading with the European Union and the ability to forge new trade deals in our own right. No deal means those new trade deals come at the expense of a trade deal with Europe, not in addition to it. So, while it is categorically wrong to suggest that our country could not ultimately make a success of no deal, it is equally wrong to suggest that this is the best outcome.

Thirdly, there is the path advocated by the Leader of the Opposition of calling a general election, and we have heard it again tonight. But today's vote is not about what is best for the Leader of the Opposition; it is about what is best for the country. At the end of a general election, whatever the result, the choices facing us will not have changed. It will still be no Brexit, leaving with no deal, or leaving with a deal. There is no guarantee that an election would make the parliamentary arithmetic any easier. All it would gain is two more months of uncertainty and division. In 2017, the two main parties both stood on manifestos that pledged to deliver the result of the referendum, and they got over 80% of the vote. People had the opportunity to vote for a second referendum by supporting the Liberal Democrats, but just 7% of voters did so. It is the job of Parliament to deliver on the promises made at the last election, not to seek a new one.

Some suggest that there is a fourth option: to agree that we should leave with a deal on 29 March, but to vote this deal down in the hope of going back to Brussels and negotiating an alternative deal. However, no such alternative deal exists. The political declaration sets the framework for the future relationship, and the next phase of the negotiations will be our chance to shape that relationship, but we cannot begin those talks unless or until we agree the terms of our withdrawal. The European Union will not agree to any other deal for that withdrawal.

Having ruled out all those options, we are left with one: to vote for this deal tonight. It is one that delivers on the core tenets of Brexit—taking back control of our borders, laws, money, trade and fisheries—but in a way that protects jobs, ensures our security and honours the integrity of our United Kingdom. It strikes a fair balance between the hopes and desires of all our fellow citizens—those who voted to leave and those who voted to stay in—and if we leave with the deal that I am proposing, I believe that we can lay the foundations on which to build a better Britain.

As Prime Minister, I would not stand at this Dispatch Box and recommend a course of action that I do not believe is in the best interests of our country and



[*The Prime Minister*]

our future. There are differences in this House today, but I believe that we can come together as we go forwards. Let me reassure anyone who is in any doubt whatsoever that the Government will work harder at taking Parliament with us, and as we move on to the next phase of the negotiations we will be looking to work with Parliament to seek that consensus.

**Sir Edward Leigh:** My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister knows that what concerns many of us is the possibility of the permanent nature of the Northern Ireland backstop. May I refer her to my amendment (b) on the Order Paper, which sets a deadline for that backstop? What is the attitude of the Government towards my amendment?

**The Prime Minister:** I thank my right hon. Friend for his question and for the work he has been doing to try to find a way through on this issue. I know that he has spent a long time consulting with international lawyers. The Government are unable to accept my right hon. Friend's amendment, which has been selected, because we have a different opinion and a different interpretation of the Vienna convention. However, I note that he has put down alternative proposals relating to this issue, and the Government are willing to look at creative solutions and will be happy to carry on working with my right hon. Friend.

Turning to the Northern Ireland protocol—[*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The House must calm itself—zen, restraint, patience—and hear the Prime Minister.

**The Prime Minister:** I set out the Government's position in detail in my statement yesterday, so I am not going to go over it again. The key thing to remember is that this is not a commitment we are making to the European Union; it is a commitment to the people of Northern Ireland and Ireland that they will be able to carry on living their lives as they do today. It is about saying that, whatever happens when we leave the EU, we will honour the Belfast agreement.

The Belfast agreement's success has been built on allowing people from both communities in Northern Ireland to feel that their identities are respected under the principle of consent. For many people in Northern Ireland that means having a seamless land border between the UK and Ireland, which is also essential for their economy. For others, it means fully respecting the fact that Northern Ireland is an intrinsic part of the United Kingdom. No one wants to see the return of a hard border. As a proud Unionist, I share the concerns of Members who are determined that we do not undermine the strength of our United Kingdom, but it is not enough simply to make these assertions. We have to put in place arrangements that deliver those ends, and it is not as simple as some would like it to be.

As Prime Minister for the whole UK, it is my duty to provide a solution that works for the people of Northern Ireland. The answer lies in agreeing our future economic relationship, but we need an insurance policy to guarantee that there will be no hard border if that future relationship is not in place by the end of the implementation period.

**Nigel Dodds:** Does the Prime Minister agree that, whatever one's view of this withdrawal agreement and whatever arguments people deploy, we should not be using the peace or the political process in Northern Ireland as arguments for voting for this deal or for voting against it? Does she agree that that is completely and utterly out of order, and will she make that clear to all her Cabinet colleagues as well?

**The Prime Minister:** Everybody in this House is committed to ensuring that we maintain the arrangements of the Belfast/Good Friday agreement and that we maintain the many benefits that have come from the peace process in Northern Ireland. That should not be disrupted or affected in any sense.

Whatever future relationship is negotiated, or that people want to see negotiated, the insurance policy is essential. All of the other proposals—Canada, Norway or any number of variations on those models—require the insurance policy, which is the so-called backstop. No backstop simply means no deal, now and for the foreseeable future. I do not want to see anybody being able to exploit no deal, and bringing doubt about the future of our Union as a result.

Let us remember what the withdrawal agreement delivers for the people of Northern Ireland: an implementation period—certainty for businesses; protection of citizens' rights—certainty for thousands of families; no hard border—unfettered access to British and EU markets; protection of the single electricity market across the island of Ireland, securing energy supply in Northern Ireland; continued security co-operation with our European allies, which the Police Service of Northern Ireland says is essential; and, above all, the protection of the historic Belfast/Good Friday agreement. The deal we have puts our Union first.

The Leader of the Opposition's speech is characteristic of his whole approach to Brexit: long on criticism and short on coherence. He claims that he will be able to renegotiate the deal in a matter of weeks and get a drastically different outcome, despite the European Union making it clear that that is impossible. Everything he does is designed to avoid taking any difficult decisions. He says one thing to one group and another thing to another group. His general election manifesto said that freedom of movement will end; on Sunday he said:

"I am not against the free movement of people."

When asked about Brexit by a German newspaper, he said that we cannot stop it, that the referendum took place and that article 50 has been triggered; in his speech at Wakefield last week, and again this evening, he said that a second referendum is an option on the table. He says that Labour would run an independent trade policy, but he wants to join the customs union. He says he is opposed to no deal, but he also says he is opposed to the withdrawal agreement and the backstop, without which there is no deal. The question is: what is his position? He has failed in his responsibility to provide a credible alternative to the Government of the day. By pursuing from the start a cynical course designed to serve his own political interest, not the national interest, he has forfeited the right to command loyalty from those of his MPs who take a more pragmatic view. He does not care whether we leave or not, with a deal or not, as long as he can maximise disruption and uncertainty and the likelihood of a general election.

I hope that Labour Members who faithfully pledged to their constituents that they would respect the result of the referendum think carefully before voting against a deal that delivers Brexit, and I hope that those who fear leaving without a deal whose constituents rely on manufacturing jobs think very carefully before rejecting a deal that is the only guaranteed way to take no deal off the table.

This is the most significant vote that any of us will ever be part of in our political careers. After all the debate, all the disagreement and all the division, the time has come for all of us in the House to make a decision—a decision that will define our country for decades to come, a decision that will determine the future for our constituents, their children and their grandchildren, a decision that each of us will have to justify and live with for many years to come.

We know the consequences of voting for the deal—they are laid out in black and white in the pages of the withdrawal agreement—but no one who votes against the deal will be able to tell their constituents what real-world outcome they voted for, because a vote against the deal is a vote for nothing more than uncertainty, division and the very real risk of no deal.

**Ian Blackford:** On any of the analyses of Brexit, economic growth will be lower than if we stay in the EU. Will the Prime Minister not realise, on the basis of the knowledge and the fact that people will lose opportunities as a consequence of Brexit, that the alternative is to extend article 50, go back and give the people a say? Let's act in all our interests on the basis of the information we now have.

**The Prime Minister:** Parliament gave the British people a choice. The Government of the time, all parties and all those campaigning in the referendum were absolutely clear that, whatever the decision of the referendum, it would be respected by Government and Parliament. I believe we have a duty to deliver on that referendum vote and to do so in a way that protects people's jobs and our security and Union. A vote against the deal is a vote for nothing more than uncertainty, division and the very real risk of no deal or no Brexit at all.

It does not have to be that way. Tonight, we can choose certainty over uncertainty. We can choose unity over division. We can choose to deliver on our promise to the British people, not break that promise and endanger trust in politics for a generation. As Members of Parliament, we have a duty to serve not our own self-interest or that of our parties, but the people we were elected to represent. It is the people of this country we were sent here to serve—the people of this country who queued up at polling stations, cast their ballots and put their faith in us.

The people of this country entrusted us with the sacred right to build for them and their children and grandchildren the brighter future they expect and deserve. If we act in the national interest and back this deal tonight, tomorrow we can begin to build that future together. If we act in the national interest and back this deal tonight, we can build a country that works for everyone. Together, we can show the people whom we serve that their voices have been heard, that their trust was not misplaced, that our politics can and does deliver, and that politicians can rise above our differences

and come together to do what the people asked of us. That is the test that history has set for us today, and it will determine the future of our country for generations.

We each have a solemn responsibility to deliver Brexit and take this country forward, and, with my whole heart, I call on this House to charge that responsibility together. I commend the motion to the House.

7 pm

*The Speaker put the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that time (Orders, 4 December and 9 January).*

**Mr Speaker:** As I explained the sequence earlier, it should now be familiar to colleagues. I begin by inviting the Leader of the Opposition to move amendment (a).

**Jeremy Corbyn:** Not moved, Mr Speaker.

**Mr Speaker:** I turn now to amendment (k), in the name of the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford).

**Ian Blackford:** Not moved, Mr Speaker.

**Mr Speaker:** I call on the right hon. Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh), to move, if he so wishes, amendment (b).

**Sir Edward Leigh:** In view of the positive response from the Prime Minister, Mr Speaker, not moved.

**Mr Speaker:** Finally, I invite the hon. Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron) to move amendment (f).

*Amendment proposed: (f): at end, add*

“subject to changes being made in the Withdrawal Agreement and in the Ireland/Northern Ireland Protocol so that the UK has the right to terminate the Protocol without having to secure the agreement of the EU.”—(Mr Baron.)

*Question put, That the amendment be made.*

*The House divided: Ayes 24, Noes 600.*

**Division No. 292]**

**[7.2 pm**

**AYES**

Afriyie, Adam	Metcalfe, Stephen
Amess, Sir David	Murrison, Dr Andrew
Baron, Mr John	Parish, Neil
Blackman, Bob	Percy, Andrew
Brady, Sir Graham	Rosindell, Andrew
Davies, Chris	Sturdy, Julian
Field, rh Frank	Vickers, Martin
Hands, rh Greg	Watling, Giles
Hart, Simon	Wiggin, Bill
Hayes, rh Sir John	Wood, Mike
Henderson, Gordon	
Johnson, Dr Caroline	<b>Tellers for the Ayes:</b>
Leigh, rh Sir Edward	<b>Sir Mike Penning and</b>
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian	<b>Mr Nigel Evans</b>

**NOES**

Abbott, rh Ms Diane	Allan, Lucy
Abrahams, Debbie	Allen, Heidi
Adams, Nigel	Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
Afolami, Bim	Amesbury, Mike
Aldous, Peter	Andrew, Stuart
Ali, Rushanara	Antoniazzi, Tonia

Argar, Edward	Chope, Sir Christopher	Eagle, Ms Angela	Griffiths, Andrew
Ashworth, Jonathan	Churchill, Jo	Eagle, Maria	Grogan, John
Atkins, Victoria	Clark, Colin	Edwards, Jonathan	Gwynne, Andrew
Austin, Ian	Clark, rh Greg	Efford, Clive	Gyimah, Mr Sam
Badenoch, Mrs Kemi	Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth	Elliott, Julie	Haigh, Louise
Bailey, Mr Adrian	Clarke, Mr Simon	Ellis, Michael	Hair, Kirstene
Baker, Mr Steve	Cleverly, James	Ellman, Dame Louise	Halfon, rh Robert
Baldwin, Harriett	Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey	Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias	Hall, Luke
Barclay, rh Stephen	Clwyd, rh Ann	Elmore, Chris	Hamilton, Fabian
Bardell, Hannah	Coaker, Vernon	Elphicke, Charlie	Hammond, rh Mr Philip
Bebb, Guto	Coffey, Ann	Esterson, Bill	Hammond, Stephen
Beckett, rh Margaret	Coffey, Dr Thérèse	Eustice, George	Hancock, rh Matt
Bellingham, Sir Henry	Collins, Damian	Evans, Chris	Hanson, rh David
Benn, rh Hilary	Cooper, Julie	Evennett, rh Sir David	Hardy, Emma
Benyon, rh Richard	Cooper, Rosie	Fabricant, Michael	Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Beresford, Sir Paul	Cooper, rh Yvette	Fallon, rh Sir Michael	Harper, rh Mr Mark
Berger, Luciana	Corbyn, rh Jeremy	Farelly, Paul	Harrington, Richard
Berry, Jake	Costa, Alberto	Farron, Tim	Harris, Carolyn
Betts, Mr Clive	Courts, Robert	Fellows, Marion	Harris, Rebecca
Black, Mhairi	Cowan, Ronnie	Field, rh Mark	Harrison, Trudy
Blackford, rh Ian	Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey	Fitzpatrick, Jim	Hayes, Helen
Blackman, Kirsty	Coyle, Neil	Fletcher, Colleen	Hayman, Sue
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta	Crabb, rh Stephen	Flint, rh Caroline	Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Blomfield, Paul	Crausby, Sir David	Ford, Vicky	Healey, rh John
Blunt, Crispin	Crawley, Angela	Foster, Kevin	Heapey, James
Bone, Mr Peter	Creagh, Mary	Fovargue, Yvonne	Heaton-Harris, Chris
Bottomley, Sir Peter	Creasy, Stella	Fox, rh Dr Liam	Heaton-Jones, Peter
Bowie, Andrew	Crouch, Tracey	Foxcroft, Vicky	Hendrick, Sir Mark
Brabin, Tracy	Cruddas, Jon	Francois, rh Mr Mark	Hendry, Drew
Bradley, Ben	Cryer, John	Frazer, Lucy	Hepburn, Mr Stephen
Bradley, rh Karen	Cummins, Judith	Freer, Mike	Herbert, rh Nick
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben	Cunningham, Alex	Frith, James	Hermon, Lady
Brake, rh Tom	Cunningham, Mr Jim	Furniss, Gill	Hill, Mike
Braverman, Suella	Daby, Janet	Fysh, Mr Marcus	Hillier, Meg
Brennan, Kevin	Dakin, Nic	Gaffney, Hugh	Hinds, rh Damian
Brereton, Jack	Davey, rh Sir Edward	Gale, rh Sir Roger	Hoare, Simon
Bridgen, Andrew	David, Wayne	Gapes, Mike	Hobhouse, Wera
Brine, Steve	Davies, David T. C.	Gardiner, Barry	Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
Brock, Deidre	Davies, Geraint	Garnier, Mark	Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Brokenshire, rh James	Davies, Glyn	Gauke, rh Mr David	Hollern, Kate
Brown, Alan	Davies, Mims	George, Ruth	Hollingbery, George
Brown, Lyn	Davies, Philip	Gethins, Stephen	Hollinrake, Kevin
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas	Davis, rh Mr David	Ghani, Ms Nusrat	Hollobone, Mr Philip
Bryant, Chris	Day, Martyn	Gibb, rh Nick	Holloway, Adam
Buck, Ms Karen	De Cordova, Marsha	Gibson, Patricia	Hopkins, Kelvin
Buckland, Robert	De Piero, Gloria	Gill, Preet Kaur	Hosie, Stewart
Burden, Richard	Debbonaire, Thangam	Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl	Howarth, rh Mr George
Burghart, Alex	Dent Coad, Emma	Girvan, Paul	Howell, John
Burgon, Richard	Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh	Glen, John	Huddleston, Nigel
Burns, Conor	Dinenage, Caroline	Glendon, Mary	Hughes, Eddie
Burt, rh Alistair	Djanogly, Mr Jonathan	Godsiff, Mr Roger	Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
Butler, Dawn	Docherty, Leo	Goldsmith, Zac	Huq, Dr Rupa
Byrne, rh Liam	Docherty-Hughes, Martin	Goodman, Helen	Hurd, rh Mr Nick
Cable, rh Sir Vince	Dodds, Anneliese	Goodwill, rh Mr Robert	Hussain, Imran
Cadbury, Ruth	Dodds, rh Nigel	Gove, rh Michael	Jack, Mr Alister
Cairns, rh Alun	Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.	Grady, Patrick	James, Margot
Cameron, Dr Lisa	Donelan, Michelle	Graham, Luke	Jardine, Christine
Campbell, rh Sir Alan	Dorries, Ms Nadine	Graham, Richard	Jarvis, Dan
Campbell, Mr Gregory	Double, Steve	Grant, Bill	Javid, rh Sajid
Campbell, Mr Ronnie	Doughty, Stephen	Grant, Mrs Helen	Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
Carden, Dan	Dowd, Peter	Grant, Peter	Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair	Dowden, Oliver	Gray, James	Jenkyins, Andrea
Cartlidge, James	Doyle-Price, Jackie	Gray, Neil	Jenrick, Robert
Cash, Sir William	Drax, Richard	Grayling, rh Chris	Johnson, rh Boris
Caulfield, Maria	Drew, Dr David	Green, Chris	Johnson, Diana
Chalk, Alex	Dromey, Jack	Green, rh Damian	Johnson, Gareth
Champion, Sarah	Duddridge, James	Green, Kate	Johnson, Joseph
Chapman, Douglas	Duffield, Rosie	Greening, rh Justine	Jones, Andrew
Chapman, Jenny	Duguid, David	Greenwood, Lilian	Jones, Darren
Charalambous, Bambos	Duncan, rh Sir Alan	Greenwood, Margaret	Jones, rh Mr David
Cherry, Joanna	Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain	Grieve, rh Mr Dominic	Jones, Gerald
Chishti, Rehman	Dunne, rh Mr Philip	Griffith, Nia	Jones, Graham P.



Jones, Helen	McCarthy, Kerry	Platt, Jo	Snell, Gareth
Jones, rh Mr Kevan	McDonagh, Siobhain	Pollard, Luke	Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
Jones, Mr Marcus	McDonald, Andy	Poulter, Dr Dan	Sobel, Alex
Jones, Sarah	McDonald, Stewart Malcolm	Pound, Stephen	Soubry, rh Anna
Jones, Susan Elan	McDonald, Stuart C.	Pow, Rebecca	Spellar, rh John
Kane, Mike	McDonnell, rh John	Powell, Lucy	Spelman, rh Dame Caroline
Kawczynski, Daniel	McFadden, rh Mr Pat	Prentis, Victoria	Spencer, Mark
Keegan, Gillian	McGinn, Conor	Prisk, Mr Mark	Starmer, rh Keir
Keeley, Barbara	McGovern, Alison	Pritchard, Mark	Stephens, Chris
Kendall, Liz	McInnes, Liz	Pursglove, Tom	Stephenson, Andrew
Kennedy, Seema	McKinnell, Catherine	Quin, Jeremy	Stevens, Jo
Kerr, Stephen	McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick	Quince, Will	Stevenson, John
Khan, Afzal	McMahon, Jim	Qureshi, Yasmin	Stewart, Bob
Killen, Ged	McMorrin, Anna	Raab, rh Dominic	Stewart, Rory
Kinnock, Stephen	McPartland, Stephen	Rashid, Faisal	Stone, Jamie
Knight, rh Sir Greg	McVey, rh Ms Esther	Rayner, Angela	Streeter, Sir Gary
Knight, Julian	Mearns, Ian	Redwood, rh John	Streeting, Wes
Kwarteng, Kwasi	Menzies, Mark	Reed, Mr Steve	Stride, rh Mel
Kyle, Peter	Mercer, Johnny	Rees, Christina	Stringer, Graham
Laird, Lesley	Merriman, Huw	Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob	Stuart, Graham
Lake, Ben	Miliband, rh Edward	Reeves, Ellie	Sunak, Rishi
Lamb, rh Norman	Miller, rh Mrs Maria	Reeves, Rachel	Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Lammy, rh Mr David	Milling, Amanda	Reynolds, Emma	Sweeney, Mr Paul
Lamont, John	Mills, Nigel	Reynolds, Jonathan	Swinson, Jo
Lancaster, rh Mark	Milton, rh Anne	Rimmer, Ms Marie	Swire, rh Sir Hugo
Latham, Mrs Pauline	Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew	Robertson, Mr Laurence	Syms, Sir Robert
Lavery, Ian	Monaghan, Carol	Robinson, Gavin	Tami, rh Mark
Law, Chris	Moon, Mrs Madeleine	Robinson, Mr Geoffrey	Thewliss, Alison
Leadsom, rh Andrea	Moore, Damien	Robinson, Mary	Thomas, Derek
Lee, Karen	Moran, Layla	Rodda, Matt	Thomas, Gareth
Lee, Dr Phillip	Mordaunt, rh Penny	Ross, Douglas	Thomas-Symonds, Nick
Lefroy, Jeremy	Morden, Jessica	Rowley, Danielle	Thomson, Ross
Leslie, Mr Chris	Morgan, Stephen	Rowley, Lee	Thornberry, rh Emily
Letwin, rh Sir Oliver	Morris, Anne Marie	Ruane, Chris	Throup, Maggie
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma	Morris, David	Rudd, rh Amber	Timms, rh Stephen
Lewer, Andrew	Morris, Grahame	Russell-Moyle, Lloyd	Tolhurst, Kelly
Lewis, rh Brandon	Morris, James	Rutley, David	Tomlinson, Justin
Lewis, Clive	Mundell, rh David	Ryan, rh Joan	Tomlinson, Michael
Lewis, Mr Ivan	Murray, Ian	Sandbach, Antoinette	Tracey, Craig
Lidington, rh Mr David	Murray, Mrs Sheryll	Saville Roberts, Liz	Tredinnick, David
Linden, David	Nandy, Lisa	Scully, Paul	Trevelyan, Anne-Marie
Little Pengelly, Emma	Neill, Robert	Seely, Mr Bob	Trickett, Jon
Lloyd, Tony	Newlands, Gavin	Selous, Andrew	Truss, rh Elizabeth
Long Bailey, Rebecca	Newton, Sarah	Shah, Naz	Tugendhat, Tom
Lopez, Julia	Nokes, rh Caroline	Shannon, Jim	Turley, Anna
Lopresti, Jack	Norman, Jesse	Shapps, rh Grant	Turner, Karl
Lord, Mr Jonathan	Norris, Alex	Sharma, Alok	Twigg, Derek
Loughton, Tim	O'Brien, Neil	Sharma, Mr Virendra	Twigg, Stephen
Lucas, Caroline	Offord, Dr Matthew	Sheerman, Mr Barry	Twist, Liz
Lucas, Ian C.	O'Hara, Brendan	Shelbrooke, Alec	Umunna, Chuka
Lynch, Holly	O'Mara, Jared	Sheppard, Tommy	Vaizey, rh Mr Edward
Mackinlay, Craig	Onasanya, Fiona	Sherriff, Paula	Vara, Mr Shailesh
Maclean, Rachel	Onn, Melanie	Shuker, Mr Gavin	Vaz, rh Keith
MacNeil, Angus Brendan	Onwurah, Chi	Siddiq, Tulip	Vaz, Valerie
Madders, Justin	Opperman, Guy	Simpson, David	Villiers, rh Theresa
Mahmood, Mr Khalid	Osamor, Kate	Simpson, rh Mr Keith	Walker, Mr Charles
Mahmood, Shabana	Owen, Albert	Skidmore, Chris	Walker, Mr Robin
Main, Mrs Anne	Paisley, Ian	Skinner, Mr Dennis	Walker, Thelma
Mak, Alan	Patel, rh Priti	Slaughter, Andy	Wallace, rh Mr Ben
Malhotra, Seema	Paterson, rh Mr Owen	Smeeth, Ruth	Warburton, David
Malthouse, Kit	Pawsey, Mark	Smith, Angela	Warman, Matt
Mann, John	Peacock, Stephanie	Smith, Cat	Watson, Tom
Mann, Scott	Pearce, Teresa	Smith, Chloe	West, Catherine
Marsden, Gordon	Pennycook, Matthew	Smith, Eleanor	Western, Matt
Martin, Sandy	Penrose, John	Smith, Henry	Whately, Helen
Maskell, Rachael	Perkins, Toby	Smith, Jeff	Wheeler, Mrs Heather
Masterton, Paul	Perry, rh Claire	Smith, rh Julian	Whitehead, Dr Alan
Matheson, Christian	Phillips, Jess	Smith, Laura	Whitfield, Martin
May, rh Mrs Theresa	Phillipson, Bridget	Smith, Nick	Whitford, Dr Philippa
Maynard, Paul	Philp, Chris	Smith, Owen	Whittingdale, rh Mr John
Mc Nally, John	Pidcock, Laura	Smith, Royston	Williams, Hywel
McCabe, Steve	Pincher, rh Christopher	Smyth, Karin	Williams, Dr Paul

Williamson, Chris  
Williamson, rh Gavin  
Wilson, Phil  
Wilson, rh Sammy  
Wishart, Pete  
Wollaston, Dr Sarah  
Woodcock, John  
Wragg, Mr William

Wright, rh Jeremy  
Yasin, Mohammad  
Zahawi, Nadhim  
Zeichner, Daniel

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
**Wendy Morton and**  
**Iain Stewart**

*Question accordingly negated.*

*Main Question put forthwith.*

*The House divided: Ayes 202, Noes 432.*

**Division No. 293]**

**[7.24 pm**

**AYES**

Adams, Nigel  
Afolami, Bim  
Aldous, Peter  
Andrew, Stuart  
Argar, Edward  
Atkins, Victoria  
Austin, Ian  
Badenoch, Mrs Kemi  
Baldwin, Harriett  
Barclay, rh Stephen  
Barron, rh Sir Kevin  
Bellingham, Sir Henry  
Benyon, rh Richard  
Beresford, Sir Paul  
Berry, Jake  
Boles, Nick  
Bottomley, Sir Peter  
Bowie, Andrew  
Bradley, rh Karen  
Brereton, Jack  
Brine, Steve  
Brokenshire, rh James  
Buckland, Robert  
Burghart, Alex  
Burt, rh Alistair  
Cairns, rh Alun  
Cartlidge, James  
Chalk, Alex  
Churchill, Jo  
Clark, Colin  
Clark, rh Greg  
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth  
Cleverly, James  
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey  
Coffey, Dr Thérèse  
Costa, Alberto  
Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey  
Crabb, rh Stephen  
Davies, Chris  
Davies, David T. C.  
Davies, Glyn  
Davies, Mims  
Dinenage, Caroline  
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan  
Docherty, Leo  
Donelan, Michelle  
Dowden, Oliver  
Doyle-Price, Jackie  
Duguid, David  
Duncan, rh Sir Alan  
Dunne, rh Mr Philip  
Ellis, Michael  
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias  
Eustice, George  
Field, rh Frank

Field, rh Mark  
Ford, Vicky  
Foster, Kevin  
Fox, rh Dr Liam  
Frazer, Lucy  
Freeman, George  
Freer, Mike  
Gale, rh Sir Roger  
Garnier, Mark  
Gauke, rh Mr David  
Ghani, Ms Nusrat  
Gibb, rh Nick  
Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl  
Glen, John  
Goodwill, rh Mr Robert  
Gove, rh Michael  
Graham, Luke  
Graham, Richard  
Grant, Bill  
Grant, Mrs Helen  
Grayling, rh Chris  
Green, rh Damian  
Griffiths, Andrew  
Hair, Kirstene  
Hall, Luke  
Hammond, rh Mr Philip  
Hammond, Stephen  
Hancock, rh Matt  
Harrington, Richard  
Harris, Rebecca  
Harrison, Trudy  
Hart, Simon  
Heald, rh Sir Oliver  
Heapey, James  
Heaton-Harris, Chris  
Heaton-Jones, Peter  
Herbert, rh Nick  
Hermon, Lady  
Hinds, rh Damian  
Hoare, Simon  
Hollingbery, George  
Hollinrake, Kevin  
Howell, John  
Huddleston, Nigel  
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy  
Hurd, rh Mr Nick  
Jack, Mr Alister  
James, Margot  
Javid, rh Sajid  
Jenrick, Robert  
Johnson, Dr Caroline  
Jones, Andrew  
Jones, Mr Marcus  
Keegan, Gillian  
Kennedy, Seema

Kerr, Stephen  
Knight, Julian  
Kwarteng, Kwasi  
Lancaster, rh Mark  
Leadsom, rh Andrea  
Lefroy, Jeremy  
Leigh, rh Sir Edward  
Letwin, rh Sir Oliver  
Lewis, rh Brandon  
Lidington, rh Mr David  
Lloyd, Stephen  
Lopresti, Jack  
Maclean, Rachel  
Mak, Alan  
Malthouse, Kit  
Mann, John  
Masterton, Paul  
May, rh Mrs Theresa  
Maynard, Paul  
McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick  
Menzies, Mark  
Merriman, Huw  
Miller, rh Mrs Maria  
Milling, Amanda  
Milton, rh Anne  
Mordaunt, rh Penny  
Morgan, rh Nicky  
Morris, David  
Morris, James  
Mundell, rh David  
Murrison, Dr Andrew  
Neill, Robert  
Newton, Sarah  
Nokes, rh Caroline  
Norman, Jesse  
O'Brien, Neil  
Opperman, Guy  
Parish, Neil  
Pawsey, Mark  
Penrose, John  
Percy, Andrew  
Perry, rh Claire  
Philp, Chris  
Pincher, rh Christopher  
Poulter, Dr Dan  
Pow, Rebecca  
Prentis, Victoria  
Prisk, Mr Mark

Abbott, rh Ms Diane  
Abrahams, Debbie  
Afriyie, Adam  
Ali, Rushanara  
Allan, Lucy  
Allen, Heidi  
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena  
Amesbury, Mike  
Amess, Sir David  
Antoniazzi, Tonia  
Ashworth, Jonathan  
Bacon, Mr Richard  
Bailey, Mr Adrian  
Baker, Mr Steve  
Bardell, Hannah  
Baron, Mr John  
Bebb, Guto  
Beckett, rh Margaret  
Benn, rh Hilary  
Berger, Luciana  
Betts, Mr Clive

Quin, Jeremy  
Robinson, Mary  
Rudd, rh Amber  
Rutley, David  
Sandbach, Antoinette  
Scully, Paul  
Seely, Mr Bob  
Selous, Andrew  
Sharma, Alok  
Shelbrooke, Alec  
Simpson, rh Mr Keith  
Skidmore, Chris  
Smith, Chloe  
Smith, rh Julian  
Soames, rh Sir Nicholas  
Spelman, rh Dame Caroline  
Spencer, Mark  
Stephenson, Andrew  
Stevenson, John  
Stewart, Rory  
Streeter, Sir Gary  
Stride, rh Mel  
Stuart, Graham  
Sunak, Rishi  
Swayne, rh Sir Desmond  
Throup, Maggie  
Tolhurst, Kelly  
Tomlinson, Justin  
Tredinnick, David  
Truss, rh Elizabeth  
Tugendhat, Tom  
Vaizey, rh Mr Edward  
Walker, Mr Charles  
Walker, Mr Robin  
Wallace, rh Mr Ben  
Warburton, David  
Warman, Matt  
Whately, Helen  
Wheeler, Mrs Heather  
Whittaker, Craig  
Williamson, rh Gavin  
Wood, Mike  
Wright, rh Jeremy  
Zahawi, Nadhim

**Tellers for the Ayes:**  
**Wendy Morton and**  
**Iain Stewart**

**NOES**

Black, Mhairi  
Blackford, rh Ian  
Blackman, Bob  
Blackman, Kirsty  
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta  
Blomfield, Paul  
Blunt, Crispin  
Bone, Mr Peter  
Brabin, Tracy  
Bradley, Ben  
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben  
Brady, Sir Graham  
Brake, rh Tom  
Braverman, Suella  
Brennan, Kevin  
Bridgen, Andrew  
Brock, Deidre  
Brown, Alan  
Brown, Lyn  
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas  
Bruce, Fiona

Bryant, Chris	Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain	Hodge, rh Dame Margaret	Mann, Scott
Buck, Ms Karen	Eagle, Ms Angela	Hodgson, Mrs Sharon	Marsden, Gordon
Burden, Richard	Eagle, Maria	Hoey, Kate	Martin, Sandy
Burgon, Richard	Edwards, Jonathan	Hollern, Kate	Maskell, Rachael
Burns, Conor	Efford, Clive	Hollobone, Mr Philip	Matheson, Christian
Butler, Dawn	Elliott, Julie	Holloway, Adam	Mc Nally, John
Byrne, rh Liam	Ellman, Dame Louise	Hopkins, Kelvin	McCabe, Steve
Cable, rh Sir Vince	Elmore, Chris	Hosie, Stewart	McCarthy, Kerry
Cadbury, Ruth	Elphicke, Charlie	Howarth, rh Mr George	McDonagh, Siobhain
Cameron, Dr Lisa	Esterson, Bill	Hughes, Eddie	McDonald, Andy
Campbell, rh Sir Alan	Evans, Chris	Huq, Dr Rupa	McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
Campbell, Mr Gregory	Evans, Mr Nigel	Hussain, Imran	McDonald, Stuart C.
Campbell, Mr Ronnie	Evennett, rh Sir David	Jardine, Christine	McDonnell, rh John
Carden, Dan	Fabricant, Michael	Jarvis, Dan	McFadden, rh Mr Pat
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair	Fallon, rh Sir Michael	Jayawardena, Mr Ranil	McGinn, Conor
Cash, Sir William	Farrelly, Paul	Jenkin, Sir Bernard	McGovern, Alison
Caulfield, Maria	Farron, Tim	Jenkyns, Andrea	McInnes, Liz
Champion, Sarah	Fellows, Marion	Johnson, rh Boris	McKinnell, Catherine
Chapman, Douglas	Fitzpatrick, Jim	Johnson, Diana	McMahon, Jim
Chapman, Jenny	Fletcher, Colleen	Johnson, Gareth	McMorrin, Anna
Charalambous, Bambos	Flint, rh Caroline	Johnson, Joseph	McPartland, Stephen
Cherry, Joanna	Fovargue, Yvonne	Jones, Darren	McVey, rh Ms Esther
Chishti, Rehman	Francois, rh Mr Mark	Jones, rh Mr David	Mearns, Ian
Chope, Sir Christopher	Frith, James	Jones, Gerald	Mercer, Johnny
Clarke, Mr Simon	Furniss, Gill	Jones, Graham P.	Metcalfe, Stephen
Clwyd, rh Ann	Fysh, Mr Marcus	Jones, Helen	Miliband, rh Edward
Coaker, Vernon	Gaffney, Hugh	Jones, rh Mr Kevan	Mills, Nigel
Coffey, Ann	Gapes, Mike	Jones, Sarah	Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Collins, Damian	Gardiner, Barry	Jones, Susan Elan	Monaghan, Carol
Cooper, Julie	George, Ruth	Kane, Mike	Moon, Mrs Madeleine
Cooper, Rosie	Gethins, Stephen	Kawczynski, Daniel	Moore, Damien
Cooper, rh Yvette	Gibson, Patricia	Keeley, Barbara	Moran, Layla
Corbyn, rh Jeremy	Gill, Preet Kaur	Kendall, Liz	Morden, Jessica
Courts, Robert	Girvan, Paul	Khan, Afzal	Morgan, Stephen
Cowan, Ronnie	Glindon, Mary	Killen, Ged	Morris, Anne Marie
Coyle, Neil	Godsiff, Mr Roger	Kinnock, Stephen	Morris, Grahame
Crausby, Sir David	Goldsmith, Zac	Knight, rh Sir Greg	Murray, Ian
Crawley, Angela	Goodman, Helen	Kyle, Peter	Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Creagh, Mary	Grady, Patrick	Laird, Lesley	Nandy, Lisa
Creasy, Stella	Grant, Peter	Lake, Ben	Newlands, Gavin
Crouch, Tracey	Gray, James	Lamb, rh Norman	Norris, Alex
Cruddas, Jon	Gray, Neil	Lammy, rh Mr David	Offord, Dr Matthew
Cryer, John	Green, Chris	Lamont, John	O'Hara, Brendan
Cummins, Judith	Green, Kate	Latham, Mrs Pauline	O'Mara, Jared
Cunningham, Alex	Greening, rh Justine	Lavery, Ian	Onasanya, Fiona
Cunningham, Mr Jim	Greenwood, Lilian	Law, Chris	Onn, Melanie
Daby, Janet	Greenwood, Margaret	Lee, Karen	Onwurah, Chi
Dakin, Nic	Grieve, rh Mr Dominic	Lee, Dr Phillip	Osamor, Kate
Davey, rh Sir Edward	Griffith, Nia	Leslie, Mr Chris	Owen, Albert
David, Wayne	Grogan, John	Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma	Paisley, Ian
Davies, Geraint	Gwynne, Andrew	Lewer, Andrew	Patel, rh Priti
Davies, Philip	Gyimah, Mr Sam	Lewis, Clive	Paterson, rh Mr Owen
Davis, rh Mr David	Haigh, Louise	Lewis, Mr Ivan	Peacock, Stephanie
Day, Martyn	Halfon, rh Robert	Lewis, rh Dr Julian	Pearce, Teresa
De Cordova, Marsha	Hamilton, Fabian	Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian	Penning, rh Sir Mike
De Piero, Gloria	Hands, rh Greg	Linden, David	Pennycook, Matthew
Debbonaire, Thangam	Hanson, rh David	Little Pengelly, Emma	Perkins, Toby
Dent Coad, Emma	Hardy, Emma	Lloyd, Tony	Phillips, Jess
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh	Harman, rh Ms Harriet	Long Bailey, Rebecca	Phillipson, Bridget
Docherty-Hughes, Martin	Harper, rh Mr Mark	Lopez, Julia	Pidcock, Laura
Dodds, Anneliese	Harris, Carolyn	Lord, Mr Jonathan	Platt, Jo
Dodds, rh Nigel	Hayes, Helen	Loughton, Tim	Pollard, Luke
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.	Hayes, rh Sir John	Lucas, Caroline	Pound, Stephen
Dorries, Ms Nadine	Hayman, Sue	Lucas, Ian C.	Powell, Lucy
Double, Steve	Healey, rh John	Lynch, Holly	Pritchard, Mark
Doughty, Stephen	Henderson, Gordon	Mackinlay, Craig	Pursglove, Tom
Dowd, Peter	Hendrick, Sir Mark	MacNeil, Angus Brendan	Quince, Will
Drax, Richard	Hendry, Drew	Madders, Justin	Qureshi, Yasmin
Drew, Dr David	Hepburn, Mr Stephen	Mahmood, Mr Khalid	Raab, rh Dominic
Dromey, Jack	Hill, Mike	Mahmood, Shabana	Rashid, Faisal
Duddridge, James	Hillier, Meg	Main, Mrs Anne	Rayner, Angela
Duffield, Rosie	Hobhouse, Wera	Malhotra, Seema	Redwood, rh John



Reed, Mr Steve	Sturdy, Julian
Rees, Christina	Sweeney, Mr Paul
Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob	Swinson, Jo
Reeves, Ellie	Swire, rh Sir Hugo
Reeves, Rachel	Syms, Sir Robert
Reynolds, Emma	Tami, rh Mark
Reynolds, Jonathan	Thewliss, Alison
Rimmer, Ms Marie	Thomas, Derek
Robertson, Mr Laurence	Thomas, Gareth
Robinson, Gavin	Thomas-Symonds, Nick
Robinson, Mr Geoffrey	Thomson, Ross
Rodda, Matt	Thornberry, rh Emily
Rosindell, Andrew	Timms, rh Stephen
Ross, Douglas	Tomlinson, Michael
Rowley, Danielle	Tracey, Craig
Rowley, Lee	Trevelyan, Anne-Marie
Ruane, Chris	Trickett, Jon
Russell-Moyle, Lloyd	Turley, Anna
Ryan, rh Joan	Turner, Karl
Saville Roberts, Liz	Twigg, Derek
Shah, Naz	Twigg, Stephen
Shannon, Jim	Twist, Liz
Shapps, rh Grant	Umunna, Chuka
Sharma, Mr Virendra	Vara, Mr Shailesh
Sheerman, Mr Barry	Vaz, rh Keith
Sheppard, Tommy	Vaz, Valerie
Sherriff, Paula	Vickers, Martin
Shuker, Mr Gavin	Villiers, rh Theresa
Siddiq, Tulip	Walker, Thelma
Simpson, David	Watling, Giles
Skinner, Mr Dennis	Watson, Tom
Slaughter, Andy	West, Catherine
Smeeth, Ruth	Western, Matt
Smith, Angela	Whitehead, Dr Alan
Smith, Cat	Whitfield, Martin
Smith, Eleanor	Whitford, Dr Philippa
Smith, Henry	Whittingdale, rh Mr John
Smith, Jeff	Wiggin, Bill
Smith, Laura	Williams, Hywel
Smith, Owen	Williams, Dr Paul
Smith, Royston	Williamson, Chris
Smyth, Karin	Wilson, Phil
Snell, Gareth	Wilson, rh Sammy
Sobel, Alex	Wishart, Pete
Soubry, rh Anna	Wollaston, Dr Sarah
Spellar, rh John	Woodcock, John
Starmer, rh Keir	Wragg, Mr William
Stephens, Chris	Yasin, Mohammad
Stevens, Jo	Zeichner, Daniel
Stewart, Bob	
Stone, Jamie	
Streeting, Wes	
Stringer, Graham	

**Tellers for the Noes:**

**Vicky Foxcroft and  
Nick Smith**

*Question accordingly negatived.*

**The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May):** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. The House has spoken and the Government will listen. It is clear that the House does not support this deal, but tonight's vote tells us nothing about what it does support; nothing about how, or even if, it intends to honour the decision the British people took in a referendum that Parliament decided to hold. People, particularly EU citizens who have made their home here and UK citizens living in the EU, deserve clarity on these questions as soon as possible. *[Interruption.]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order. It is no good people shouting. There will be an opportunity for other points of order, but the Prime Minister must and will be heard.

**The Prime Minister:** Those whose jobs rely on our trade with the EU need that clarity. So with your permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to set out briefly how the Government intend to proceed.

First, we need to confirm whether the Government still enjoy the confidence of the House. I believe that they do, but given the scale and importance of tonight's vote it is right that others have the chance to test that question if they wish to do so. I can therefore confirm that if the official Opposition table a confidence motion this evening in the form required by the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011, the Government will make time to debate that motion tomorrow. If, as happened before Christmas, the official Opposition decline to do so, we will on this occasion consider making time tomorrow to debate any motion in the form required from the other Opposition parties should they put one forward.

Secondly, if the House confirms its confidence in this Government, I will then hold meetings with my colleagues, our confidence and supply partner the Democratic Unionist party, and senior parliamentarians from across the House to identify what would be required to secure the backing of the House. The Government will approach those meetings in a constructive spirit, but given the urgent need to make progress we must focus on ideas that are genuinely negotiable and have sufficient support in this House.

Thirdly, if those meetings yield such ideas the Government will then explore them with the European Union.

Mr Speaker, I want to end by offering two reassurances. The first is to those who fear that the Government's strategy is to run down the clock to 29 March. That is not our strategy. I have always believed that the best way forward is to leave in an orderly way with a good deal, and I have devoted much of the past two years to negotiating such a deal. As you confirmed, Mr Speaker, the amendment to the business motion tabled last week by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve) is not legally binding, but the Government respect the will of the House. We will therefore make a statement about the way forward and table an amendable motion by Monday.

The second reassurance is to the British people who voted to leave the European Union in the referendum two and a half years ago. I became Prime Minister immediately after that referendum. I believe it is my duty to deliver on their instruction and I intend to do so.

Every day that passes without this issue being resolved means more uncertainty, more bitterness and more rancour. The Government have heard what the House has said tonight, but I ask Members on all sides of the House to listen to the British people who want this issue settled, and to work with the Government to do just that.

**Several hon. Members rose—**

**Mr Speaker:** I will come to other colleagues, but first of all a point of order from the Leader of the Opposition, Jeremy Corbyn.

**Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab):** Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. The result of tonight's vote is the greatest defeat for a Government in this House since the 1920s. This is a catastrophic defeat for

this Government. After two years of failed negotiations, the House of Commons has delivered its verdict on the Prime Minister's Brexit deal and that verdict is absolutely decisive.

I hear the words of the Prime Minister, but the actions of her Government over the past two years speak equally clearly. She is only attempting to reach out now to try to keep her failed process and deal alive after it has been so roundly rejected by Parliament on behalf of the people of this country. Labour has laid out its priorities consistently: no deal must be taken off the table; a permanent customs union must be secured; and people's rights and protections must be guaranteed so they do not fall behind.

At every turn, the Prime Minister has closed the door on dialogue. Businesses begged her to negotiate a comprehensive customs union. Trade union leaders pressed her for the same thing. They were ignored. In the last two years, she has had only one priority: the Conservative party.

The Prime Minister's governing principle of delay and denial has reached the end of the line. She cannot seriously believe that after two years of failure, she is capable of negotiating a good deal for the people of this country. The most important issue facing us is that the Government have lost the confidence of this House and this country. I therefore inform you, Mr Speaker, that I have now tabled a motion of no confidence in this Government, and I am pleased that that motion will be debated tomorrow so that this House can give its verdict on the sheer incompetence of this Government and pass that motion of no confidence in the Government.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** I will come to the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford), but first, a point of order from the Leader of the House.

**The Leader of the House of Commons (Andrea Leadsom):** With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a short business statement regarding the business for tomorrow and the remainder of this week—

**Mr Speaker:** I am extraordinarily grateful to the right hon. Lady. I accept that she cannot be psychic as to what I am thinking, and I cannot be psychic as to what she is thinking. The smooth and orderly way to proceed with this matter is to deal with points of order first and then to come to her statement, which would be entirely proper and doubtless helpful to the House.

**Ian Blackford** (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): Further to the Prime Minister's point of order, Mr Speaker. We should be aware of the situation we are in. The clock is ticking and we have little time to resolve this. The fact that it has taken us so long to get to this point is frankly shameful. This is a humiliating defeat for the Government. When I listen to the Prime Minister, it sounds like everyone else is at fault rather than her. She has to accept responsibility for what has happened this evening.

I am delighted that the Leader of the Opposition has come round to a motion of no confidence. That should have happened before, but we will support it. As I mentioned, it is clear that the clock is ticking.

The Government need to secure the safety of all our nations, and they should immediately postpone the article 50 process and immediately have talks with all the leaders of the Opposition parties. Let us work together in all our interests, but let us listen to the voices of the parliamentarians who have been sent here. There is no support for the deal. It must not come back again. The obvious and right thing to do is to suspend article 50 and put the matter to the people in a people's vote.

**Mr Speaker:** I know the right hon. Gentleman will not take offence when I say that he was using the device of a point of order, as is entirely understandable in these circumstances, to say what he wanted to say, but he was more interested in what he had to say to the House than in anything I might have to say to him. It is not a matter for the Chair. He has registered his view, and these sorts of issues can be quite properly aired in debate and quite conceivably in discussions that take place with the Prime Minister and other party leaders. He has made his point with force and alacrity, and it is on the record for colleagues to study.

**Jo Swinson** (East Dunbartonshire) (LD): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. This result is of a scale that is unprecedented in recent times, and it is clear that neither this deal, nor any tweaks to it, will get through the House of Commons. May I ask for your guidance on how Parliament can assert its authority to ensure that we can give the people of this country a say on the deal to resolve this matter? It is a mess that needs to be resolved by the people in a people's vote.

**Mr Speaker:** My response to the hon. Lady is as follows. First, there may well be an opportunity for her to air her own thoughts on the situation we face and the suggested way forward in the course of debate. As the Prime Minister referred to in her point of order, that prospect is potentially unfolding. That is one opportunity for the hon. Lady.

The second would be the discussions to take place in coming days. I dare say that the hon. Lady will want to take the chance to participate in them. More widely, where there is discussion about Parliament's role, what it might do and what options it might have, I think I can predict with complete confidence that the hon. Lady will have a view about that, and that view, which is important, will be heard.

**Angus Brendan MacNeil** (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. The Prime Minister spoke about the will of Parliament, and we have to investigate that further. When can we test the will of this House on the choices that are now left—no deal versus revoking article 50? Can we test those in the House, bearing in mind that in Scotland the European Union is more popular in the polls than the United Kingdom, as the Prime Minister should know?

**Mr Speaker:** There will be plenty of opportunity for testing in the days ahead.

**Dr Philippa Whitford** (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. This is not a political point of order. Yesterday, the issue of the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) was raised. She should have been undergoing a caesarean section today

[Dr Philippa Whitford]

for a high-risk pregnancy—she is comfortable with me saying that she has gestational diabetes—and she was asked by her medical team to undergo it as an early possibility. She has had to defer it, Mr Speaker, despite your advice and comments from the Chair yesterday, which apparently were given no comfort from the Government Benches. That is shocking. I have to say, as a doctor, that to put our colleague and her baby at risk because we cannot have a method to allow for those who are sick or pregnant to vote is disgraceful.

**Mr Speaker:** I note what the hon. Lady says, and I do not cavil at it at all. I made the point yesterday that I thought the situation was lamentable—I used that word several times—[*Interruption.*] I am not interested in people chuntering from a sedentary position to no obvious benefit or purpose. I am ruling on a matter, and I require no assistance in the process of doing so.

The situation was lamentable. I thought that it would be better for the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) to have the opportunity of a proxy vote—that was my view, and it was a view widely shared. The matter was debated in February last year and in September, and I had indicated my strong support. It would have been necessary for a resolution to be tabled by the Leader of the House, but for reasons that others can explain—it is not my job to do their explaining for them—that has not happened. It is regrettable, but it cannot be sorted tonight.

Nevertheless, the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford) has registered her concern, and it is one that I share—with a sense of very deep disappointment, to put it mildly. It will doubtless be dealt with in the days or weeks to come. My great sympathies go to the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn, who in my judgment should not have been put in this position.

**Yvette Cooper** (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. The Prime Minister has now said that she will listen to voices from right across this House. She has obviously had 30 months

in which to do that, and it has led to this defeat for the Government tonight, which is the greatest for more than 100 years. We must all hope that she will indeed listen to voices from across the House, but we also all recognise that that will take time, and people, businesses, Government organisations and institutions will now be worried that only just over 70 days are left. The Prime Minister did not mention article 50—[*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. People talk about respect in this House, but there is a Minister of the Crown shouting at the right hon. Lady. I say in the kindest way, he is normally a very genial fellow—stop it, you are capable of much better than that.

**Yvette Cooper:** Given the scale of the challenge, with the clock now really ticking down, the Prime Minister did not mention what will happen to article 50. Mr Speaker, will you advise the House on what we might be able to do to urge the Prime Minister, for the sake of businesses, jobs and people throughout the country, to seek an immediate extension of article 50 so that this can be sorted out?

**Mr Speaker:** The answer in the first instance is that those are matters that can be aired in debate tomorrow. It is not right for me, tonight, to give a ruling on what the right hon. Lady or others should or should not do. She will be aware of the presentation of a Bill that took place in the name of another Member, who I believe also has views on these matters. Those matters will, I am sure, be discussed in the days ahead, not merely in private meetings but, I feel certain, on the Floor of the House. Of one thing I am sure: that which Members wish to debate and which they determine shall be subject to a vote will be debated and voted upon. That seems to me to be so blindingly obvious that no sensible person would disagree with the proposition. If MPs want to debate and vote on a matter, that opportunity will, I am sure, unfold in the period ahead.

If there are no further points of order, and I do not think that we need any, it is right for us to hear the supplementary business statement by the Leader of the House.



## Business of the House

7.54 pm

**The Leader of the House of Commons (Andrea Leadsom):** I am extraordinarily grateful, Mr Speaker—*[Laughter.]*

**Mr Speaker:** To be honest, I do not really mind whether the Leader of the House is grateful or not, but she has the chance.

**Andrea Leadsom:** Thank you for that clarification, Mr Speaker.

With permission, I should like to make a short business statement regarding the business for tomorrow and the remainder of this week.

WEDNESDAY 16 JANUARY—The House will be asked to consider a motion of no confidence in Her Majesty's Government under section 2(4) of the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011, in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

THURSDAY 17 JANUARY—Debate on a motion on mental health first aid in the workplace, followed by a general debate on children's social care in England. The subjects for these debates were determined by the Backbench Business Committee.

I shall make a further business statement in the usual way on Thursday.

**Mr Speaker:** I remind the House that the supplementary business statement is subject to questioning, but its terms are comparatively narrow, and I implore Members to recognise the implication and spirit of that fact.

**Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab):** I thank the Leader of the House for the statement. In the circumstances of the vote, the Opposition concur with the scheduling of the debate tomorrow.

**Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP):** I wonder whether we can confirm that the whole day's business tomorrow will be given to the vote of no confidence. According to the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011, there is only a requirement for an hour and a half—*[Interruption.]* The Government Chief Whip is nodding his head, so I am sufficiently persuaded that that will be the case.

**Andrea Leadsom:** Yes, subject to the agreement of the House.

**Mr Speaker:** It would be useful to know the timings. Ordinarily, the Chair is approached about these matters, which is the sensible way to deal with them. We need to know the timings, and I hope that the right hon. Lady will either be able to advise now or confer with colleagues later in the evening, so that there is clarity on that matter and we will all be very satisfied.

**Andrea Leadsom:** I can confirm that your office, Mr Speaker, has the proposal for a business motion tomorrow that proposes that the debate take place over the whole day, until 7 pm.

**Mr Speaker:** I am grateful.

**Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab):** I am not sure whether we are asking questions on the business statement or making points of order.

Given the scale of defeat, the Government must surely have seen the inevitable coming. The issues for debate on Thursday are important, but every day wasted is another day closer to exit, particularly without a deal. Are we really to debate two motions with no consequence on Thursday rather than deciding how we will move forward on a crucial issue facing our country?

**Mr Speaker:** The Leader of the House can add to what she has said in the supplementary business statement if she likes. If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me for saying so, that seemed to me a curious hybrid between an attempted point of order and a question on the supplementary business motion. If he had to plump for one or the other, I am not sure which it would be.

These matters can be aired in debate tomorrow, in the business question on Thursday and on subsequent days. I completely understand that the hon. Gentleman is seized of the importance of early progress, but that opportunity will unfold in days to come, and I can predict with confidence that he will be in his place, ready to leap to his feet to share his point of view with the House.

**Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con) rose—**

**Mr Speaker:** Is this really going to be necessary? I call Simon Hoare.

**Simon Hoare:** Can you confirm, Mr Speaker, that the timetable set out by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House perfectly accords with the amended programme motion that the House voted on last week, which I guess the hon. Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting) voted for, that the Prime Minister would have three sitting days—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. It would not have been agreed if that were not the case. I do not mean to be unkind to the hon. Gentleman, but he is frankly not adding anything by making that point of order. Although I am sure it was perfectly well intended, no additional public service has been provided. If there are further questions to the Leader of the House, I am sure that she will be happy to take them within the confines of the supplementary business motion. If not, I suggest to the House that we proceed to subsequent motions.

## Business without Debate

### DELEGATED LEGISLATION

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),*

#### ENERGY CONSERVATION

That the draft Energy Efficiency (Private Rented Property) (England and Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2018, which were laid before this House on 27 November 2018, be approved.—*(Mark Spencer.)*

*The Speaker's opinion as to the decision of the Question being challenged, the Division was deferred until Wednesday 16 January (Standing Order No. 41A).*

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),*

#### EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (NUCLEAR SAFEGUARDS)

That the draft Nuclear Safeguards (Fissionable Material and Relevant International Agreements) (EU Exit) Regulations 2018, which were laid before this House on 29 November 2018, be approved.—(*Mark Spencer.*)

*Question agreed to.*

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),*

#### RATING AND VALUATION

That the draft Local Government Finance Act 1988 (Non-Domestic Rating Multipliers) (England) Order 2018, which was laid before this House on 4 December 2018, be approved.—(*Mark Spencer.*)

*Question agreed to.*

#### EUROPEAN UNION DOCUMENTS

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 119(11)),*

#### UK PARTICIPATION IN THE EU AGENCY FOR CRIMINAL JUSTICE COOPERATION (EUROJUST): POST-ADOPTION OPT-IN DECISION

That this House takes note of Regulation 2018/1727 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation (Eurojust), and replacing and repealing Council Decision 2002/187/JHA; endorses the Government's decision to request to opt in under Protocol 21 on the Position of the United Kingdom and Ireland in respect of the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice annexed to the EU Treaties; and supports the Government's assessment that Eurojust provides a valuable service to the UK and that opting in would enable us to maintain operational continuity and minimise disruption for UK law enforcement and prosecution authorities during the proposed Implementation Period.—(*Mark Spencer.*)

*The Speaker's opinion as to the decision of the Question being challenged, the Division was deferred until Wednesday 16 January (Standing Order No. 41A).*

#### Chester-le-Street: Rail Services

*Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Mark Spencer.)*

8.1 pm

**Mr Kevan Jones** (North Durham) (Lab): On this historic night, I am sorry that Members are now leaving the Chamber and will not be listening to the problems that my constituents are facing at Chester-le-Street railway station. However, I am pleased to have secured this debate to highlight the problems in Chester-le-Street and the surrounding area for people who use the station. Tonight we have been consumed by the debate on Brexit, but it is worth reminding ourselves that other issues are important to our constituents and that, despite our serious deliberations today, many of our constituents are just getting on with their lives.

Chester-le-Street railway station serves not only the town of Chester-le-Street but the surrounding villages and communities of North Durham. As Members might know, my constituency borders the Tyneside conurbation. Over the years, traditional industries in Chester-le-Street and large parts of my constituency have moved and closed, and the area has now become a commuter town for the area north of the Tyne and for parts of Durham and Teesside. Good transport links are therefore important for the economic viability of my constituency. In Durham County Council's new economic plan, the transport links for the north of the county are highlighted as an important part of County Durham's economic future. The journey time to Newcastle from Chester-le-Street and the south of Durham is less than 10 minutes, so in many ways it is an attractive option for people to live in my constituency and commute to work on Tyneside, down in Teesside or in Durham. That is why many people have located themselves in Chester-le-Street and the surrounding areas.

The main rail morning and evening services are provided by three operators—TransPennine Express, Northern and CrossCountry—but, since May last year, the main problem has been the reliability of services, particularly those run by TransPennine Express. Not only have trains been late, but they have often been cancelled altogether. Those two things are particularly difficult for people at the two main commuter times: first thing in the morning, when people are keen to get to work at 9 o'clock, and in the evening, when people want to get home. Commuters often find themselves either late for work because trains have been cancelled, or stuck in Newcastle or other stations further south in the evening with no ability to get home. In some cases, people have not made it home until 7 o'clock or later.

Due to the concern of many of my constituents who rely on Chester-le-Street station for their main commute, I called a public meeting in November, and it will be useful to highlight some of comments that were made not only at that meeting, but in the numerous emails and other correspondence that I have received from worried constituents. The first reads:

"In summary this week the Chester-le-Street to Darlington commuter trains have been cancelled on 7 out of 10 journeys."

Another constituent said:

"The service continues to go from bad to worse with the morning service having been totally cancelled on 3 out of 4 days in the last week."

One constituent, a working mother, said that she was finding it difficult to hold down a senior executive job in Newcastle as it had become untenable for her to regularly miss prearranged times to pick up her children from school because she was stuck in Newcastle station due to evening train cancellations. Another constituent wrote that the

“08:24 commuter train from Chester-le-Street to Durham has been cancelled again. We are all late for work again.”

Another said:

“How can the region be taken seriously if our trains aren’t on time 50% of the time.”

A further constituent said:

“While financial compensation does indeed help, it does not compensate for the trouble that working parents have to cause to others to get their children home.”

Another constituent mentioned not only childcare, but the fact that those who look after elderly relatives in the evening find it difficult to get home from Newcastle.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the right hon. Gentleman for giving way. He is always generous with his time, and I am here to support him, as I support others when it comes to Adjournment debates. From my research, I have found that the idea with trains is that they take people away from cars and buses. Unfortunately, in this instance—I think he mentioned this earlier—people are unable to get on to trains when they come into the station. Does he agree that one way of addressing overcrowding is to run longer trains? Is that an option?

**Mr Jones:** It is. The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point. This should be a way of getting people out of their cars and off other forms of transport into Tyneside, Durham and Teesside. I accept that longer trains are an option, but if the trains do not turn up in the first place, that is a problem.

Delays and cancellations are causing real hardship to many of my constituents. I even had one resident contact me a few weeks ago to say that he had turned down a promotion at work because he could not guarantee to his employer that he was able to get in on time. These are real-life situations that are causing my constituents a lot of hardship.

**Ian Mearns** (Gateshead) (Lab): My right hon. Friend and near constituency neighbour is outlining the fact that the Northern franchise has failed. The service that it provides to the people of the north-east, the north-west, Yorkshire and Humberside is disastrous. Everyone knows that, yet the franchise is allowed to get away with this nonsense and put the jobs of the constituents of my right hon. Friend and many others in jeopardy due to its shoddy service.

**Mr Jones:** I do not disagree with my hon. Friend. This is the economic case. People are losing the ability to access the jobs in Tyneside, Teesside and Durham. Many constituents feel hopeless because what can Government do about it? He raises an interesting point about the franchise and how it is operating. Whatever we do about the franchise, the penalties need to be tightened.

The other issue facing my constituents is that, when trains are cancelled, the trains that do turn up are overcrowded. It is only a short-distance commute, but

we have had situations where people have been unable to get on later trains. One of my constituents was travelling further afield for a day out in York and had booked his seat some three months in advance because he was suffering from a bad back and was travelling with a friend with cancer, and they had to stand all the way from Chester-le-Street to York, which cannot be acceptable.

Some of the issues affecting the regularity of services to Chester-le-Street are directly related to the timetable. There has rightly been a lot of publicity on the issues in Manchester and Leeds, but a lot of that congestion has been having a knock-on effect further north, because the companies are then cancelling trains. The trains might go to York but they go no further north and other services are cancelled altogether.

The chaos in the Manchester and Leeds areas has been well publicised, but I remind the Minister, and certainly the operators, that the north is further north than Leeds and Manchester. The people who rely on this service in my constituency should not be sacrificed to ensure that the operators get their times right in Manchester and Leeds.

My constituents’ other frustration has been with the appalling way in which TransPennine Express deals with customers. No information is given to stranded commuters when trains travelling south from Newcastle to Chester-le-Street are cancelled in the evening, and no alternatives are offered for getting them home. People are just left to make their own way or make alternative provision. When that happens regularly to people with childcare responsibilities, it is not acceptable, and I know of one constituent in particular who has to care for her elderly mother. When a person is expected home at quarter past 5, it is not acceptable for them to arrive after 7 o’clock. I have raised the lack of information with TransPennine Express. There are not even staff at Newcastle to give information or to provide alternative forms of transport, be it replacement buses or alternative train options.

There is a compensation scheme but, again, TransPennine Express is not good at advertising the fact that people are entitled to compensation. As a one-off goodwill gesture, I think TransPennine Express should offer all regular travellers a month’s free travel, because people have had to put up with this for far too long. I would be interested to know whether the Minister has any powers to intercede in making sure that TransPennine Express pays reasonable compensation to people.

I come back to the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead (Ian Mearns) about the franchise. It is clearly not working. Either TransPennine Express needs to up its game and start acting like an organisation that cares about its customers, or the franchise should be taken off it. If we are going to rebrand, we should look in detail at how appallingly it has operated it so far.

Given the location of Chester-le-Street, travel by train should be an ideal opportunity for people to access jobs around our region, but an inconsistent service is not going to endear train travel to people. It certainly will not attract people to live in Chester-le-Street. It is not a selling point if people cannot rely on what should be an easy commute.

I have been raising for many years now the issue of why later in the day the service goes to a two-hourly service. In any future franchise, we should be looking at



[Mr Kevan Jones]

a more regular service. There is the capacity to grow the usage of Chester-le-Street station and—to reinforce the point made by the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon)—to take people off the roads and on to the railways.

I would like to raise an issue about the CrossCountry service that stops at Chester-le-Street railway station. There is a consultation about reducing the number of stops that CrossCountry does, and one of the proposals is to remove the service stopping at Chester-le-Street to increase the connectivity between major cities and towns on the CrossCountry route. If that happens—I have made representations on this, as has the county council—it will be important that those lost stopping services be replaced. Will the Minister ensure that that is taken into account in the consultation? If those stopping services are taken away, it is important that we have a replacement service, especially in the evenings.

**Ian Mearns:** There is speculation in the industry that CrossCountry is proposing that some if not all the services from the south coast of England terminate at York, not serving Chester-le-Street, which is obviously between York and Newcastle.

**Mr Jones:** If that happened, it would be a detrimental step for the north-east. It reinforces my point that many people look at the north and perhaps think it goes as far as York, Manchester and Leeds and no further.

I want to raise the issue of investment in Chester-le-Street. I have raised this with Network Rail. The footbridge over the station is in an appalling state of repair, but I have been told it will not be painted until 2020. Anything the Minister can do to get Network Rail to address that would be very important because, again, if we are going to encourage more people to use the station, the facilities need to be improved. Network Rail leaving it until 2020 to paint a bridge is not acceptable.

My constituents have had an appalling experience and rail service through no fault of their own. The purpose of this debate is to raise their concerns and the terrible way they have been treated, but there is also an important point about the economy and future of my constituency and how viable it is to attract people to come and live in what is a pleasant part of County Durham.

8.19 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Andrew Jones):** I congratulate the right hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) on securing the debate. He has raised a number of important issues relating to his constituency and to County Durham more broadly, and I will address them all.

I entirely recognise the importance of Chester-le-Street station as a vital local link for the right hon. Gentleman's constituents. I know how much they rely on it. The right hon. Gentleman said that the service was growing, and I can confirm that. The number of passengers has increased by about 30,000 a year over the past six years, and an average of just over 600 a day use the station. Those people play a vital role in the local economy: for instance, as the right hon. Gentleman said, they provide access to employment in both Newcastle and Durham. Nearly all

the services are provided by TransPennine Express, with a handful of additional peak services provided by Northern and CrossCountry.

The right hon. Gentleman rightly focused on the central issue of performance—about which the hon. Member for Gateshead (Ian Mearns) also expressed concern—and how bad it became, particularly after the May timetable change. Let me stress that I entirely agree: the services that were offered to several parts of the country, including those offered by franchises in the north of England, were unacceptable. I must also stress, however, that important lessons have been learnt, some of which have already been implemented by the industry and have led to a significant improvement in performance.

The planned December 2018 timetable changes in the north were deliberately scaled back in favour of a phased approach. Risks were mitigated to the extent that this was largely a rollover of the May timetable, but with a focus on some performance “fixes” to improve the resilience and reliability of the network. They included changes to local TransPennine services between Leeds and Manchester, although I fully recognise that “the north” extends further than Leeds and Manchester. Indeed, I represent a constituency that is north of Leeds and Manchester. Those changes have already delivered significant improvements and the provision of standby trains at key locations to help recovery should things go wrong.

I observe performance daily, and I know that many Members on both sides of the House do the same. Performance on Northern and TPE has improved significantly since December. On TPE, according to the public performance measure—which can be found online—the number of trains that are on time has increased to about 83%. That figure still presents a significant amount of room for manoeuvre, and it is below target, but it is also 18% higher than the figure during the last period before the December changes. Although there has been an improvement in punctuality and a reduction in the number of cancellations, I agree with colleagues throughout the House that that is still not good enough.

As for Northern, the January figures so far show that about 89% of trains are on time, which is an improvement of about 10% on the figure for December. I am pleased to report that the number of trains that are late, very late or cancelled has substantially declined. This month fewer than 1 in 10 have been late, and just 1.3% have been very late or cancelled. However, I am aware of the base from which they are starting; I also know that the recovery of passenger trust is critical, and will only be delivered by a relentless focus on reliability and punctuality.

**Mr Kevan Jones:** I agree with the Minister, but what concerns me about TransPennine is that it does not care. A company that should be focusing on what is good for customers has no customer ethos at all. I would love to know how we can change that.

**Andrew Jones:** The right hon. Gentleman has made a significant point. I have to say that that has not been my experience when I have been dealing with the train operating companies, but it is nevertheless clear that the communication to which he referred in his speech has not been good enough. I shall say more about that shortly.

As part of the wider drive to improve performance in the north, the Government commissioned Richard George, a respected industry figure, to review the performance of the region's rail network. He will recommend operational improvements to increase reliability in the short and medium term. Richard will co-ordinate and lead the efforts of Network Rail and the operators. His remit is to help industry reach the right conclusions so that passenger impact is central to every planning decision; the passenger must be at the centre of all of our decisions. He has already helped highlight problem areas and will provide his conclusions later this year.

In addition, since the May timetabling issues Network Rail has established a programme management office. This will also help to ensure future timetable changes can be better planned and managed. There will be no repeat of the processes that led to the failure of May 2018 and that timetable change.

I thank the right hon. Member for North Durham for raising the issue of communication and poor information about cancellations and delays. I hear it in other parts of our network too, and it is simply not good enough. There are customer information screens at Chester-le-Street station, and both TPE and Northern publish updated information on their websites and social media channels, but we continue to stress to these operators and the whole industry the absolute importance of giving passengers the information they need when things go wrong. I have raised this with the train operating companies and will continue to do so. It has not been good enough. Obviously I want to get to a place where we do not have to make these comments, but until then a focus on communication is important.

**Ian Mearns:** In my experience trains that serve Chester-le-Street moving both north and south can suffer from cancellations, because if a train is coming from the south to the north and is late it is the habit of the operator to terminate the train at Darlington, and therefore not to allow it to travel on through to Durham, Chester-le-Street and Newcastle and then make the return journey. Can we ask the franchises to stop that practice, please?

**Andrew Jones:** The hon. Gentleman's point is important, but there is also a point that the operators must consider in the operation of a timetable: how do they recover? If something goes wrong, how is that timetable recovered?

**Ian Mearns:** Additional rolling stock, Minister.

**Andrew Jones:** That is exactly what is happening, and I will come on to rolling stock in a moment. I understand the hon. Gentleman's point and also where train operating companies are coming from, but regularly disadvantaging the same customers is not acceptable. I want to get to the place where we do not have to have these questions in the first place.

If things do go wrong, I also want to make sure we have compensation schemes. There have been delay-repay schemes and after May the Government asked Northern and TPE to implement special compensation schemes that quickly and fairly reimburse those passengers most adversely affected, and that included regular service users from Chester-le-Street. To date, over £1 million has been paid in compensation for the summer disruption.

Passengers will see the benefit of the new huge investment in rail in the north of England when the new rolling stock enters service this year. As part of the investment in TPE three new fleets of Nova trains will be introduced, starting from May this year until the end of 2020. For Chester-le-Street longer brand new trains will be in service, while on Northern the outdated and unpopular Pacers will be removed by the franchise by the end of this year. Passengers using the Northern services in County Durham will see refurbished trains offering increased capacity.

What does that actually mean? Nova trains are faster and have more capacity, and we are moving from three to five carriage trains; that means over 150 extra seats. The Pacers will in some cases be replaced by refurbished stock cascaded down from Scotland. These are class 170 trains which are longer than those they replace; they are increasing in size from 18 metres to 23 metres per carriage, again increasing capacity. The vast majority of the 500 brand new carriages from Northern and TransPennine will be delivered in less than a year from now, and every other train that is not brand new will be refurbished to be as-new.

The CrossCountry consultation was a concern. It ended on 30 August and we are conducting a thorough review of its findings. No decisions have been made about the CrossCountry timetable. The east coast main line timetable will be rewritten for all operators in 2020-21 and that will be an opportunity to review the current train services at Chester-le-Street, alongside wider long-distance service changes. The only decision that has been taken so far is to cancel the franchise competition because of the rail review. The current franchise ends in October, with the option to extend by one year. We are looking at options for the franchise and we are aware of severe overcrowding on that network, so we are looking to bring in additional trains as soon as the appropriate carriages are available within the existing rolling stock market. But the importance of Chester-le-Street and the north-east to the CrossCountry franchise is noted. Colleagues here asked me to note it and I have done so, and I give them my assurance that it will be considered.

Let me turn to the services at Chester-le-Street station. It is managed by Northern, which is conducting improvements throughout the life of its franchise to ensure that the station is well maintained. I understand of course how inconvenient it has been for passengers in the interim, but the waiting room and toilets are due to be refurbished very soon. As for the bridge, we are painting a structure that spans the east coast main line, so it is not as simple as a regular painting job. It is one that needs to be planned such that it minimises disruption. However, the point made by the right hon. Member for North Durham has been heard and I will ensure that Network Rail is aware of his concerns.

Our railways have to be fit for the future. This requires investment, vision, innovation and ambitious thinking, so that our rail network meets the needs of the people who rely on it. That is the point of our rail review. The service that we have and the structures we have had have served us well, taking us from 700 million passenger journeys a year to 1.7 billion. But times are changing and we are seeing huge investment. We are on the cusp of experiencing the benefits of the billions of pounds of investment. Our railways are undergoing much-needed transformation that, as a country, we have never

*[Andrew Jones]*

experienced before. That will improve rail services in the north of England for good and it will see rail play its part in driving economic growth right across the north.

*Question put and agreed to.*

8.32 pm

*House adjourned.*



# House of Commons

*Wednesday 16 January 2019*

*The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock*

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## Speaker's Statement

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Colleagues will no doubt have seen a number of images taken by Members of scenes in the Division Lobby last night. I would like to remind all colleagues that, as the recently issued guide to the rules of behaviour and courtesies of the House makes explicitly clear, Members

“must not use any device to take photographs, film or make audio recordings in or around the Chamber.”

I well understand that yesterday's events were exciting and that these days many people regularly take photographs, which they feel compelled to share with a wider audience, but Members featured in these photographs have not given their permission, and to that extent this represents an invasion of privacy. I hope I have made it clear that this practice should cease.

## Oral Answers to Questions

### SCOTLAND

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### Leaving the EU: Immigration

1. **Martyn Day** (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with the Home Secretary on the potential effect on Scotland of UK immigration policy after the UK leaves the EU. [908506]

4. **Neil Gray** (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with the Home Secretary on the potential effect on Scotland of UK immigration policy after the UK leaves the EU. [908509]

7. **Dr Philippa Whitford** (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with the Home Secretary on the potential effect on Scotland of UK immigration policy after the UK leaves the EU. [908512]

8. **Deidre Brock** (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with the Home Secretary on the potential effect on Scotland of UK immigration policy after the UK leaves the EU. [908513]

10. **David Linden** (Glasgow East) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with the Home Secretary on the potential effect on Scotland of UK immigration policy after the UK leaves the EU. [908515]

12. **Marion Fellows** (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with the Home Secretary on the potential effect on Scotland of UK immigration policy after the UK leaves the EU. [908517]

14. **Drew Hendry** (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with the Home Secretary on the potential effect on Scotland of UK immigration policy after the UK leaves the EU. [908519]

#### **The Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell):**

This has been a momentous week for Andy Murray, so I am sure you will agree, Mr Speaker, that it is appropriate that at this Scottish questions we acknowledge in this House Andy's extraordinary contribution to British sport, and his personal resilience and courage, and express our hope that we will once again see Andy Murray on court.

I am in regular contact with the Home Secretary on a range of issues of importance to Scotland, including future immigration policy after the UK leaves the European Union.

**Mr Speaker:** Apart from his enormous talent, can I agree with the Secretary of State more widely about Andy Murray? He is the embodiment of guts and character, and the most terrific ambassador for Scotland, for tennis and for sport. His mother Judy must be the proudest mother in the world.

**Martyn Day:** The Tories' obsession with slashing immigration to the tens of thousands will see Scotland's working-age population decline by 4.5%—that is 150,000 people—by 2041. Is the Secretary of State happy standing over such a policy that will cause economic harm to our country?

**David Mundell:** The hon. Gentleman does not correctly characterise the situation. The immigration White Paper that this Government have set out is an undertaking to embark on a year-long engagement process across the whole UK to enable businesses and other stakeholders to shape the final details of a post-Brexit immigration policy and process.

**Neil Gray:** May I concur, Mr Speaker, with your comments and those of the Secretary of State regarding Andy Murray? I would encourage all Members to sign my early-day motion recognising his achievements.

Immigration has been and continues to be good for Scotland. Scottish Government modelling suggests that a Brexit-driven reduction in migration will see real GDP drop by 6.2% by 2040, which has a monetary value of about £6.8 billion and a £2 billion cost to Government revenue. Does the Secretary of State believe that this cost to Scotland is a price worth paying for his Government's Brexit mess and immigration folly?

**David Mundell:** I do not want to end up repeating my first answer on seven occasions. I want to make it clear that the immigration White Paper that we have published is a consultation. It is an undertaking of a year-long engagement process across the whole UK, including Scotland. I expect Scottish businesses, Scottish stakeholders and, indeed, the Scottish Government to play an active part in that process.

**Dr Whitford:** Scrapping freedom of movement will make recruiting staff for NHS Scotland harder. Despite being paid the real living wage, lab technicians, admin staff and social care workers do not earn anywhere close to £30,000. So what did the Secretary of State do to try to convince the Home Secretary to take into account Scotland's needs?

**David Mundell:** I am not going to take any lectures on Scotland's needs in relation to the NHS from the hon. Lady or the SNP—a party that has put up tax in Scotland such that doctors and nurses in Scotland pay more tax than anywhere else in the UK.

**Deidre Brock:** I was interested to hear the Secretary of State's comments about Scottish businesses. CBI Scotland has said that White Paper proposals "don't meet Scotland's needs" and were a "sucker punch". Is it not the case that this hostile immigration policy proves that the Tory Government are anti-business?

**David Mundell:** I am really pleased to hear the hon. Lady supporting the CBI, because it could not have been clearer that it does not want a separate Scottish immigration policy. It wants one immigration policy for the whole United Kingdom, and I agree.

**David Linden:** I am sorry, but this is absolutely pathetic. We have an ageing population, and we need people to come and look after the folk at Greenfield Park care home in my constituency, for example. The Secretary of State is out of touch. When will he get a grip and understand that Scotland's immigration needs are entirely different from the London-centric policy pursued by this British Government?

**David Mundell:** I well understand the issues facing Scotland, and I do not believe that it would be better served by a separate immigration policy. I also do not believe that immigration into Scotland is well served by a Scottish Government who put up tax and have a poor record on infrastructure and housing.

**Marion Fellows:** The policy chair of the Federation of Small Businesses in Scotland has said:

"The UK Government's obstinate approach to immigration is a clear threat to... local communities"

making it

"nigh impossible for the vast majority of Scottish firms to"

get the labour and skills

"they need to grow and sustain their operations."

With what part of that comprehensive statement would the Secretary of State care to disagree?

**David Mundell:** I set out in my previous answers that the immigration White Paper is a consultation. The FSB and others are contributing to it, and we will listen to them. I am clear that Scotland benefits from a UK-wide immigration policy, but I also believe that there are things that the Scottish Government could do to make Scotland more attractive.

**Drew Hendry:** Following the disgraceful Christmas video aimed at EU nationals and then the Government's catastrophic defeat last night, will the Secretary of State urge his Government to end the hostile approach to our EU friends, neighbours and colleagues, who are vital to the Scottish economy and Scotland's communities?

**David Mundell:** I agree that EU nationals have played an enormous part in the Scottish economy and more widely in civic society. I want to give them certainty on their position, which is why I voted for the deal last night.

**Ross Thomson (Aberdeen South) (Con):** Is the Secretary of State aware that *The Times* reported on 10 January that a study conducted by one of Britain's leading social surveys showed that Scots do not want immigration to be devolved? Does he agree that that is a hammer blow to the Scottish National party's calls and that the biggest danger to Scotland is the SNP's drive towards another independence referendum, which puts people off wanting to come to Scotland?

**David Mundell:** It is certainly clear that the SNP does something to put people off coming to Scotland. I read last night that Boy George was going to be moving to Scotland, but the Scottish First Minister engaged with him this morning, and now we hear that he is not coming.

**David Duguid (Banff and Buchan) (Con):** Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the Home Office and the Government in general have been engaging and will continue to engage with Scottish businesses on the consultation around the immigration Bill?

**David Mundell:** Yes, we will continue to engage. The White Paper is part of an engagement process. My hon. Friend, who is a great champion of the fishing industry, has already raised issues in relation not just to fishing vessels, but to fish processing.

**Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con):** I welcome this Government's move to guarantee EU citizens' rights here in the UK. That is unlike the SNP in 2014, when it threatened EU citizens that 160,000 of them would be stripped of their right to remain in Scotland. No unilateral guarantee was given to EU citizens by the SNP in 2014, but this Government are doing so now. Will my right hon. Friend clarify the direct communications that this Government are having with EU citizens in my constituency and elsewhere in Scotland to ensure that they know that they are a welcome and valued part of our community?

**David Mundell:** The Government are not just engaging with EU citizens, but setting out how they can proceed in the settled status process.

**John Stevenson (Carlisle) (Con):** The borderlands area needs to attract more people to live and work on both sides of the border. Does the Secretary of State agree that the way to do that is through investment, both private and public, and by creating the business environment for that investment, not by increasing taxes and regulation?

**David Mundell:** I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. As he knows, this Government fully support the borderlands initiative. It is investing in the improvement of infrastructure and housing that will make the south of Scotland and the north of England more attractive, not putting up taxes.

**Colin Clark** (Gordon) (Con): Tax divergence by the Scottish Government is damaging my Gordon constituency, which is struggling to attract overseas workers to Aberdeen Royal Infirmary and the oil and gas industry. Does the Secretary of State agree that this is economic madness and that it makes Scotland unattractive?

**David Mundell:** As I have said many times in the Chamber, I remain at an absolute loss to understand why the SNP thinks that making Scotland the most highly taxed part of the United Kingdom is an attractive proposition to bring people to Scotland.

**Stephen Kerr** (Stirling) (Con): May I, as the Member of Parliament for Dunblane, add my admiration for Sir Andy Murray and, indeed, for his mother?

On the White Paper on future immigration, does my right hon. Friend agree that the salary floor of £30,000 makes it difficult for Scotland to retain international graduates when the average graduate salary is £21,000? There has to be the opposite of London weighting, does there not?

**David Mundell:** My hon. Friend makes a very good point, which I am sure will be taken into account as we move forward with the engagement process on the White Paper.

**Mr Paul Sweeney** (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State's Government have been responsible for pursuing an agenda in which immigrants are demonised. We saw it over the past year with the hostile environment policy; we saw it over the Christmas break as the Home Secretary declared a national crisis when a handful of refugees made the perilous journey across the channel; and we now see it in black and white in the immigration White Paper. My question is simple: will the Secretary of State apologise for his Government's demonisation of immigrants and its harmful consequences for the Scottish economy?

**David Mundell:** Of course I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's characterisation of events. Scotland remains a place where migrants should be welcome, wherever they come from. The White Paper sets out the basis for a consultation on developing a new immigration policy post Brexit, and I encourage everyone to take part in that consultation.

## Defence Sector

2. **Kelvin Hopkins** (Luton North) (Ind): What recent estimate he has made of the value of the defence sector to the Scottish economy. [908507]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence** (**Stuart Andrew**): The Ministry of Defence spent nearly £1.6 billion with Scottish businesses in 2016-17, supporting some 10,500 jobs. This demonstrates the vital contribution of the workforce in Scotland to defending the UK from the growing threats we face from across the globe.

**Kelvin Hopkins:** At Defence questions on 26 November, I raised concerns about the desperate shortage of Royal Navy coastal defence vessels, which number just three according to the Minister for the Armed Forces. It is

also the case that Scottish shipyards have suffered from major cuts in defence orders. Will the Government now right both those wrongs by allocating new orders for coastal defence vessels from Scottish shipbuilders?

**Stuart Andrew:** I am afraid that I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman. We have secured 20 years' worth of work for the Clyde shipyards. We would be hard-pressed to find any industry in the UK that could say it has secured 20 years' worth of work to help its workforce for the future.

15. [908520] **Kirstene Hair** (Angus) (Con): Armed forces personnel in my constituency of Angus and across Scotland warmly welcomed the UK Government's intervention last year to mitigate the Scottish Government's income tax increase. Can my hon. Friend confirm that the UK Government will seek to continue that mitigation to ensure our armed forces personnel in Scotland are not out of pocket?

**Stuart Andrew:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise this important issue. The Ministry of Defence is reviewing the Scottish Government's plans for next year's tax, and we await the final outcome and ratification from the Scottish Parliament. We will review the situation and determine whether the impact on the UK armed forces warrants an offer of financial mitigation. Once a decision has been made, an announcement will be made to this House and to those affected personnel.

**Mr Speaker:** Happy birthday, Mr Sweeney. I gather it is a significant birthday—30 today and you do not look a day older than 20.

**Ian Murray** (Edinburgh South) (Lab): The defence sector is critical for the Scottish economy, but so are other sectors, such as financial services, higher education, food and drink, and fisheries. So will the Minister have a chat with the Secretary of State to make sure that in Cabinet the Secretary of State is insisting that a no-deal outcome is ruled out?

**Stuart Andrew:** I admire the hon. Gentleman's ingenious way of bringing in defence industry issues. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is constantly fighting for Scotland around the Cabinet table and he will continue to do so long into the future.

11. [908516] **Chris Stephens** (Glasgow South West) (SNP): Glasgow has a proud shipbuilding tradition, and long may that continue, but the Minister will be aware of the situation on key land platform contracts. What is he doing to make sure that Scotland gets a good share of those contracts?

**Stuart Andrew:** As I said, we are trying to build in a good shipbuilding programme so that shipyards around the country know what the Ministry of Defence's requirements are going to be for the next 30 years and they can plan accordingly. We also want them to be incredibly competitive, so that they are able to compete for commercial lines, and not just in this country—we want them to be able to compete for opportunities around the world.



**Mike Wood** (Dudley South) (Con): What would the impact of the break-up of the Union be on defence supply companies based in Scotland?

**Stuart Andrew:** Catastrophic.

**Lesley Laird** (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (Lab): I wish to start by adding my sentiments to those expressed by the Secretary of State on our wonderful sportsman Andy Murray.

The Secretary of State has turned his back on Scotland's great shipbuilding tradition by putting the fleet solid support contract out to international tender. He will no doubt trot out the line, "These are not warships." However, the Minister of State for Defence, Earl Howe, responded to a written question by saying that a ship such as this is a "non-complex warship". I grew up in a shipbuilding community. A warship carried weapons, explosives and ammunition, which is exactly what these ships do. So if these are not warships, what are they?

**Stuart Andrew:** I have made this point consistently, as the hon. Lady will know: the national shipbuilding strategy defines warships as frigates, destroyers and aircraft carriers. The primary role of the FSS ships is the replenishment of naval vessels with bulk stores. They are non-combatant naval auxiliary support ships, and therefore they will go out to international competition. What I am delighted to see is that there is a British bid in that competition.

**Lesley Laird:** May I suggest to the Secretary of State that he might want to visit a shipyard, as I am sure plenty of workers there would like to give him a different account of that strategy? We are talking about highly skilled, high-paid jobs that could return £2.3 billion of revenue to the Treasury, while providing sustainable employment and ensuring that communities continue to thrive. Instead, the Secretary of State is torpedoing Scottish shipbuilding in favour of bargain basement deals. So will he allow this Prime Minister to continue the destructive legacy of Thatcher or will he support the Scottish Labour party and the Labour party by backing our plans to finally stand up for Scottish shipbuilding, and protect and create jobs in the industry?

**Stuart Andrew:** It may have escaped the hon. Lady's attention but I am not the Secretary of State, and I have visited many of the shipyards around this country and in Scotland. I have seen for myself how well they are doing. We want them to be competitive, so that they can have a long-term future. We have 20 years of work guaranteed for Scotland's shipyards, and Conservative Members can be proud of that.

### Moray Growth Deal

3. **Douglas Ross** (Moray) (Con): What progress has been made on securing the Moray growth deal. [908508]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Stuart Andrew):** We have been making good progress since the Government's intention to negotiate a Moray deal was announced in September 2018. The partners there have submitted a number of project proposals, which are currently being scrutinised.

**Douglas Ross:** I am grateful to the Minister for that response. The Ministry of Defence is one of the largest employers in Moray, and it is set to get even bigger after significant UK Government investment. Given that local personnel at Kinloss barracks and RAF Lossiemouth are already engaged with the Moray growth deal, will the Minister confirm that his Department will now play a significant role in this important deal for Moray?

**Stuart Andrew:** First, I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for the work he is doing on this deal; I know that he takes a keen interest in it, as does the MOD in terms of surplus land being released at Forthside as part of the Stirling deal. He is right that as a local employer we are an important player in that area. I can confirm that the MOD is exploring opportunities for involvement in my hon. Friend's local growth deal.

### Leaving the EU

5. **Kirsty Blackman** (Aberdeen North) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with the Scottish Government on the UK leaving the EU. [908510]

**The Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell):** I regularly meet the Scottish Government in a number of forums to discuss a range of matters related to EU exit. The Joint Ministerial Committee plenary met on 19 December and was attended by the First Ministers for Scotland and Wales, along with the head of the Northern Ireland civil service.

**Kirsty Blackman:** Will the Secretary of State encourage the Prime Minister to extend article 50?

**David Mundell:** The Prime Minister has set out quite clearly that it is not her intention to request an extension of article 50.

**Pete Wishart** (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): Scotland wanted nothing to do with this ugly, self-defeating Brexit, but last night 10 Scottish Tories voted to defy their constituents, with the other three wanting something much worse for Scotland. What should the Scottish people therefore do to ensure that they are suitably democratically rewarded?

**David Mundell:** We are not taking lectures from a man who repeatedly defies the democratic will of the Scottish people by ignoring the outcome of the 2014 independence referendum.

**Jo Swinson** (East Dunbartonshire) (LD): Although we were in different Lobbies last night, I appreciate that the Secretary of State genuinely felt that the Prime Minister's deal was the best way forward, but he can read the runes as to how likely it is that that deal, or any reincarnation of it, will get through the House, so what personal commitment will he give that he will do everything in his power to protect Scotland from the catastrophe of a no-deal exit, including by putting his country above his party and his own position?

**David Mundell:** I have been very clear about the ramifications for Scotland of a no-deal Brexit and why I want to avoid that, which is why I voted for the deal. I am also clear that I stood in the 2017 general election

on a manifesto commitment to deliver an orderly Brexit for Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom, and that is what I intend to do.

**Tommy Sheppard** (Edinburgh East) (SNP): May I begin by associating my colleagues on these Benches with your comments, Mr Speaker, and those of the Secretary of State, regarding Andy Murray? He is indeed a great ambassador for his country, and I believe that in that capacity his best is yet to come.

Last night, this place made history: we defeated the Government's plans by an unprecedented majority. They are plans on which the Secretary of State has staked his reputation and on which his fingerprints are indelibly printed. Given that massive defeat, will he now commit to meaningful engagement with the Scottish Government and consideration of alternative plans, including remaining in the single market and customs union?

**David Mundell:** I make no apology for supporting the Prime Minister's deal; I believe that it was the right deal for Scotland and the United Kingdom. We will of course engage constructively with the First Minister and the Scottish Government, but if we are to do so, they must bring forward proposals other than stopping Brexit and starting another independence referendum.

**Tommy Sheppard:** I was going to suggest that the Secretary of State is ill-equipped to take this process forward in Scotland, but he makes the argument for me. Given his refusal to engage properly in discussion about alternatives, and given the fact that he is so out of step with opinion in Scotland at every level, will he now do the decent thing and resign—step aside so that someone else can take this forward?

**David Mundell:** That is getting a little tired; I thought the hon. Gentleman could think of another soundbite. I am not out of step with opinion in Scotland. People in Scotland do not want another independence referendum, and they recognise that the SNP has weaponised Brexit to try to deliver such a referendum.

### Leaving the EU: Common Fisheries Policy

6. **Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the potential benefits to the Scottish fishing industry of the UK leaving the common fisheries policy. [908511]

**The Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell):** Leaving the common fisheries policy will allow the UK to take back control of our waters, becoming an independent coastal state. We will negotiate a fairer share of fishing opportunities to benefit fishermen in Scotland and across the whole United Kingdom.

**Kevin Foster:** I thank my right hon. Friend for the positive assessment that he has just given the prospects not just for Scotland's fishing industry from leaving the EU's common fisheries policy, but for the whole UK's. Does he agree, though, that those benefits will be lost if we listened to the arguments of those who want to separate our Union but reunite Scotland with the European Union's common fisheries policy?

**David Mundell:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The SNP is a false friend to Scottish fishermen. It wants to keep Scotland in the CFP by staying in the EU, and, failing that, it wants an independent Scotland to rejoin the CFP. Throughout the negotiations, this Government have shown that they have put the interests of Scottish fishermen and those across the UK at the heart of our approach to leaving the EU.

**Martin Whitfield** (East Lothian) (Lab): Would no deal not be a disaster for the fishing industry and its support industries, and should we not say no to no deal now?

**David Mundell:** If that is the hon. Gentleman's view, he should have voted for the Prime Minister's deal last night.

**Mr Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): If the Government's commitment to ending the CFP on 31 December next year is sincere, why do they continue to resist amendments to put that date in the Fisheries Bill?

**David Mundell:** I do not think that the right hon. Gentleman, a former colleague, will find that that is an accurate interpretation of the Government's position. Colleagues such as my hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan (David Duguid) have argued strongly for that case, and we will see what happens when the Bill returns on Report.

### PRIME MINISTER

#### *The Prime Minister was asked—* Engagements

Q1. [908591] **Charlie Elphicke** (Dover) (Con): If she will list her official engagements for Wednesday 16 January.

**The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May):** I am sure that the whole House will join me in condemning the appalling attack in Nairobi and in sending our thoughts and prayers to all those who have lost loved ones. Our high commissioner has confirmed one British fatality. We are providing consular assistance to British nationals affected by the attack. We stand in solidarity with the Government and people of Kenya, and will continue to offer our support to meet the challenge to security and stability that is posed by terrorism in the region.

This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House, I shall have further such meetings later today.

**Charlie Elphicke:** May I join the Prime Minister in her strong condemnation of terror?

You will know, Mr Speaker, as will the Prime Minister, that I first sought election to this House because I believed in more jobs, lower taxes, a stronger economy and more investment in the public services on which we all rely. Does the Prime Minister agree that, since 2010, Conservative Governments have delivered time and again for the British people and that the biggest threat to that is sitting on the Opposition Front Bench, with a leader whose policies would mean fewer jobs, higher taxes, a weaker economy and less investment in our public services?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. What have we seen under the Conservatives in government? We have seen 3.4 million more jobs; that is

more people earning an income, earning a wage, able to provide for their families. We have seen more children in good and outstanding schools and more money in our national health service. What would put that in danger? A Government led by the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn). There would be more borrowing, more taxes, more spending and fewer jobs.

**Jeremy Corbyn** (Islington North) (Lab): May I start by correcting the record? Last night, I suggested that this was the largest Government defeat since the 1920s. I would not wish to be accused of misleading the House, because I have since been informed that it is in fact the largest ever defeat for a Government in the history of our democracy.

Shortly after the Prime Minister made her point of order last night, her spokesperson suggested that the Government had ruled out any form of customs union with the European Union as part of their reaching-out exercise. Will the Prime Minister confirm that that is the case?

**The Prime Minister:** The exercise that I indicated last night is, as I said, about listening to the views of the House and wanting to understand the views of parliamentarians, so that we can identify what could command the support of this House and deliver on the referendum. The Government want first to ensure that we deliver on the result of the referendum—that is leaving the European Union—and we want to do so in a way that ensures we respect the votes of those who voted to leave in that referendum. That means ending free movement, getting a fairer deal for farmers and fishermen, opening up new opportunities to trade with the rest of the world and keeping good ties with our neighbours in Europe.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** My question was about the customs union. The Prime Minister seems to be in denial about that just as much as she is in denial about the decision made by the House last night. I understand that the Business Secretary told business leaders on a conference call last night, “We can’t have no deal for all the reasons that you’ve set out.” Can the Prime Minister now reassure the House, businesses and the country and confirm that it is indeed the Government’s position that we cannot have no deal?

**The Prime Minister:** The point that the Business Secretary was making, and that he has made previously, is that if we do not want to have no deal, we have to ensure that we have a deal. There are actually two ways of avoiding no deal. The first is to agree a deal, and the second would be to revoke article 50. That would mean staying in the European Union and failing to respect the result of the referendum, and that is something that this Government will not do.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** The Prime Minister has not answered on a customs union and has not answered on no deal, and continues to spend £4.2 billion of public money on a no-deal scenario. Can she not understand that yesterday the House rejected her deal? She needs to come up with something different.

But it is not just on Brexit that this Government are failing. Four million working people are living in poverty, and there are half a million more children in poverty compared with 2010. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation confirms:

“In-work poverty has been rising...faster than employment”.

With poverty rising, can the Prime Minister tell us when we can expect it to fall for the time that she remains in office?

**The Prime Minister:** Let me tell the right hon. Gentleman what is happening. We now see 1 million fewer people in absolute poverty; that is a record low. We see 300,000 fewer children in absolute poverty; that is a record low. There is a record low in the number of children living in workless households, and income inequality is lower than at any point under the last Labour Government. That is Conservatives delivering for the people of this country. What would we see from the Labour party? We would see £1,000 billion more in borrowing and taxes—the equivalent of £35,000 for every household in this country. That is Labour failing to deliver for working people, because working people always pay the price of the Labour party.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** In denial about a customs union; in denial about no deal; in denial about the amount of money being spent preparing for no deal; and in denial about last night’s result. Even the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights says—[*Interruption.*] It is very telling indeed that as soon as I mention the report of the UN rapporteur, who said that the Government were in a “state of denial” about poverty in Britain, Tory MPs start jeering. Tell that to people queuing up at food banks.

The Government have failed too on children’s education. Can the Prime Minister tell us what is her greatest failure—is it that education funding has been cut by £7 billion, that per pupil funding has fallen by 8%, that sixth-form funding has been cut by a fifth or that the adult skills budget has been slashed by 45%? Which is it, Prime Minister?

**The Prime Minister:** We have hundreds of free schools, a reformed curriculum and 1.9 million more children in good or outstanding schools, and we are narrowing the attainment gap for disadvantaged children. This is a Government who are delivering the education that our children need for their future.

The right hon. Gentleman talks about us being in denial. The only person in denial in this Chamber is him, because he has consistently failed to set out what his policy on Brexit is. I said to him last week that he might do with a lip reader; when it comes to his Brexit policy, the rest of us need a mind reader.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** The Prime Minister is very well aware that we want there to be a customs union with the EU. She seems to be in denial about that.

One of the problems the Prime Minister has in her denial is a flagrant disregard for facts and statistics. The UK Statistics Authority has written to the Department for Education four times to express its concern about the use of dodgy figures by her Ministers.

When police officers told the then Home Secretary not to make more cuts to the police, that Home Secretary accused them of “crying wolf”. With 21,000 fewer police officers and rising crime, does the Prime Minister accept that the then Home Secretary got it wrong?

**The Prime Minister:** As we look at what is happening particularly with knife crime and serious violence, we recognise the need to take action. That is why we have introduced the Offensive Weapons Bill and why my



right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has introduced the serious violence strategy. We are also making nearly £1 billion more available to police forces over the next year.

Yet again, in all these questions about public services, the right hon. Gentleman only ever talks about the money that is going in. What matters as well with the police is the powers that we give them. When it came to taking more action on knife crime and the criminals involved in it, and we said that somebody caught on the street with a knife for a second time should be sent to prison, what did the right hon. Gentleman do? He voted against it. He does not support our police, and he does not support our security.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** It was a Labour Government who increased the number of police on our streets. It was a Labour Government who brought in safer neighbourhoods. It was a Labour Government that properly funded the police force. It is the Tories who have cut it. Ask anyone on any street around this country whether they feel safer now than they did eight years ago—I think we all know what the answer would be.

It was that Home Secretary who not only attacked the police in that way but created the hostile environment and the Windrush scandal. She promised to tackle burning injustices, but she has made them worse, as Windrush showed. There is more homelessness, more children in poverty, more older people without care, longer waits at A&E, fewer nurses, rising crime, less safe streets and cuts to children's education. This Government have failed our country. They cannot govern and cannot command the support of most people on the most important issue at the moment: Brexit. They failed again and lost the vote last night. Is it not the case that every other previous Prime Minister faced with the scale of defeat last night would have resigned, and the country would be able to choose the Government it wants?

**The Prime Minister:** The right hon. Gentleman, in his peroration, talked about the importance of the issue of Brexit facing this country. Later today, we will have the no-confidence debate. He has been calling for weeks for a general election, yet when he was asked on Sunday whether he would campaign to leave the European Union in a general election, he refused to answer not once, not twice, not three times, but five times. On what he himself describes as the key issue facing this country, he has no answer. The Leader of the Opposition has let antisemitism run riot in his party. He would abandon our allies, weaken our security and wreck our economy, and we will never let that happen.

Q7. [908597] **Mr Robert Goodwill** (Scarborough and Whitby) (Con): The Prime Minister will be aware of the Sirius Minerals project in my constituency, which is already employing about 1,000 people and is set to boost British exports by £2 billion. From her visits to China, where she met the company's customers, she will know how important its polyhalite fertiliser product can be around the world. The company is currently seeking a Treasury guarantee to complete its financing. Does the Prime Minister agree with me that this is precisely the sort of project the Government should be supporting to show our commitment to the northern powerhouse and the industrial strategy?

**The Prime Minister:** I thank my right hon. Friend for raising this, because I was particularly pleased to meet the CEO of Sirius during my trip to China and talk to people there about the work that they are doing. It is, as he says, exactly projects like this, which drive investment and exports in the north, that are what the northern powerhouse is all about. In relation to the particular discussions my right hon. Friend mentioned, I am sure he will understand these are commercially sensitive, so it would be inappropriate for me to comment on the specific discussions. But this, as I say, is exactly the sort of project that the northern powerhouse is all about: driving investment, driving exports—good for the north.

**Ian Blackford** (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): May I associate myself with the remarks of the Prime Minister on the atrocity in Kenya and, of course, our solidarity with the people there?

Yesterday, the Attorney General said that any new deal would be much the same as the one already on the table. We know that the European Union will not renegotiate. If the Prime Minister survives today to bring forward her plan B, will she concede that plan B will basically be a redressing of plan A?

**The Prime Minister:** As I said in one of my answers to the Leader of the Opposition, what we want to do, following the defeat that we had in this House last night, is listen to parliamentarians and find out: what is it that would secure the support of this House? That is the question that we will be asking, but that is against the background of ensuring that we deliver on the referendum result—that we leave the European Union and we recognise what people were voting for when they voted in that referendum: an end to free movement, ensuring that we could have our own trade policy with the rest of the world and be fairer to our farmers and fairer to our fishermen, but maintain that good relationship with our neighbours in the EU.

**Ian Blackford:** I am afraid that simply did not address the question. The EU will not renegotiate. The Prime Minister has no answer. She has failed. What an omnishambles from this Government, suffering a historic and a humiliating defeat—the worst for any UK Government. Westminster is in chaos, but in Scotland we stand united. Scotland voted overwhelmingly to remain, and we will not allow our country to be dragged out of the European Union or brought down by this Tory Government. The Prime Minister knew that this deal was dead since Chequers; she knew it was dead when she moved the meaningful vote; and she knows, as we all know, that last night was the last straw. The Prime Minister must now seek the confidence of the people, not simply the confidence of this House. The only way forward is to extend article 50 and ask the people of Scotland and of the United Kingdom whether they want the Prime Minister's deal or they want to remain in the European Union. The Prime Minister now must legislate for a people's vote.

**The Prime Minister:** As the right hon. Gentleman knows and as I have said before, this House legislated for a people's vote. It legislated for a people's vote that was held in 2016, and that vote determined that the United Kingdom should leave the European Union. He talks about "our country". Our country is the whole

United Kingdom—England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland—and it is for the whole United Kingdom that we will be looking for a solution that secures the support of this House and ensures that this Parliament delivers on the vote of the people.

**Q10.** [908600] **Jeremy Lefroy** (Stafford) (Con): On behalf of all the members of the all-party parliamentary group on Kenya, which I chair, and my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Derbyshire (Mrs Latham), the Prime Minister's trade envoy to Kenya, may I express our sincere condolences and sympathy to the President and people of Kenya and encourage them in their fight against terrorism?

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and her Government have rightly committed very substantial extra money to the NHS, and the plan produced last week is very encouraging, but will she look at the difference between the money given to the clinical commissioning groups that receive the least per head and those that receive the most per head? We do not want funding to come down, but we do want a fairer formula for allocating money to the CCGs that receive the lowest funding.

**The Prime Minister:** I thank my hon. Friend for the remarks he made as chair of the all-party parliamentary group on Kenya. I was pleased when I visited Kenya last August to meet some of those who are working to fight terrorism. They are working to bring stability and security to people in that region, and very important that is, too.

I thank my hon. Friend for highlighting the long-term plan we have set out for the national health service. The resources allocated to CCGs reflect the needs of the population, including levels of deprivation and the age profile of the population. Changes have been made to the allocations for 2019-20. The fair share allocations for Staffordshire CCGs, which I am sure he is particularly interested in, have increased; they will see a higher level of growth in their actual budgets over the next five years. That difference will ensure that, over time, funding across the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent CCGs becomes fairer. The biggest cash boost in the NHS's history is enabling us to do that, and I hope that will address the issue my hon. Friend raised.

**Q2.** [908592] **Peter Kyle** (Hove) (Lab): The Prime Minister's defeat yesterday was historic and titanic. Everything has changed, and she has to change, too. Yesterday, thousands of people descended on Parliament Square to demand their say. Nobody took to the streets to demand a Norway or Canada option. When she came to power, she promised that she would give people more power over their lives. If she is not going to give people the power to have a say over this deal, what was the point of that promise in the first place?

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Gentleman cannot ignore the fact that in the 2016 referendum the people of this country voted to leave the European Union. I believe it is a duty not just of the Government but of Parliament to ensure that we deliver on that. We will be speaking to parliamentarians in my own party, the Democratic Unionist party and across the House about finding a way forward that secures the support of the House, but I say to him again that a vote was taken in 2016 and I believe it is incumbent on this Parliament to deliver on that vote.

**Q12.** [908602] **Trudy Harrison** (Copeland) (Con): My right hon. Friend will remember from her visits to Copeland just how capable our nuclear community is and how proud we are of our nuclear heritage. Will she consider meeting me and a small delegation of Cumbrian nuclear workers to understand how important Moorside is to Copeland, and will she bear in mind the solutions that the Centre of Nuclear Excellence can provide to its challenges?

**The Prime Minister:** I thank my hon. Friend. When I have visited Copeland, I have seen very clearly not only its population's expertise and skills in the nuclear industry but the importance of that industry. The Moorside site will revert to the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority, and we are considering options for its future. The site remains eligible for nuclear new build, and we are committed to seeing new nuclear as part of our future energy mix. It might be helpful if the relevant Minister from the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy met her and that group to explore this issue further.

**Q3.** [908593] **Seema Malhotra** (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): Last night in this House, after the biggest Government defeat in history, the Prime Minister said that the Government would approach meetings with parliamentarians "in a constructive spirit", but it appears that holding cross-party talks means inviting people in to tell her why her deal is best or to see whether they have any ideas about how to get her deal through. Apparently now, No. 10's resistance to a customs union with the European Union after Brexit was a principle, not a red line. Which is it? If she is genuinely seeking to work with Parliament and hear the will of the House, is she prepared to change any of her red lines and work to bring Parliament and the country together on how we move forward?

**The Prime Minister:** As I said in the House last night, I will be talking to parliamentarians in my own party, in the DUP and in other parties across this House, looking to see what can secure the support of this House, but I say to the hon. Lady, as I have said to her right hon. and hon. Friends, that what this House must always have in mind is the importance of delivering on the vote of the people to leave the European Union.

**Q13.** [908603] **Mrs Helen Grant** (Maidstone and The Weald) (Con): Does the Prime Minister agree with me that if we fail to deliver on Brexit, public perception of politicians in this country will be at an all-time low?

**The Prime Minister:** I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. This is so important. I believe that if we fail to deliver on what the British people instructed us to do in the vote in the referendum, the British people's views of this House, of Parliament and of politicians will be at an all-time low, because they will have lost faith in politicians across the whole of this Parliament. We need to deliver Brexit for the British people.

**Q4.** [908594] **Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods** (City of Durham) (Lab): The Prime Minister may have created a Brexit crisis, but other crises are unfolding. Rates of chronic health conditions and obesity in the north-east are the highest of any English region, and people over 65 in Durham can expect only eight years of

healthy living, compared with 14 in Windsor and Maidenhead, so why on earth is the Prime Minister planning to cut Durham's public health budget by a massive 40%? That will not only worsen health outcomes for my constituents but ultimately cost the NHS more and further widen health inequalities.

**The Prime Minister:** Of course, public health funding will be looked at in the spending review. The hon. Lady assumes that the only action taken on prevention of obesity and other conditions is through public health, but that is not the case. If she looks at the NHS long-term plan that has been announced—funded by the biggest cash boost in the NHS's history, given by this Government—what she will see is an emphasis on prevention and on ensuring that people are able to lead healthier independent lives for longer.

**Mr Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe) (Con):** I sat through many hours on every day but one of the recent debate, listening carefully to the extraordinary range of views expressed throughout it by Members in all parts of the House. It seemed to me that the only clear majorities in this House on a cross-party basis are against leaving with no deal; in favour of extending article 50 to give us time to sort out what we now propose to do; and in favour of some form of customs union and sufficient regulatory alignment to keep all our borders between the United Kingdom and the European Union open after we leave. Will the Prime Minister not accept, just as I have had to accept that the majority in this House is committed to the UK leaving the European Union, that she must now modify her red lines, which she created for herself at Lancaster House, and find a cross-party majority, which will be along the lines that I have indicated?

**The Prime Minister:** My right hon. and learned Friend started by saying that there are a considerable number of views across this House. It is precisely because of that that we will be undertaking the discussions with parliamentarians that I said last night would happen. He talks about the possible extension of article 50. Of course, article 50 cannot be extended by the UK; it has to be extended in consultation and agreement with the European Union. The Government's policy is that we are leaving the European Union on 29 March. The EU would extend article 50 only if it was clear that there was a plan that was moving toward an agreed deal. The crucial element of ensuring that we deliver on Brexit is being able to get the agreement of this House to the deal that will deliver on the referendum result, lead to the UK leaving the European Union, and recognise what lay behind people voting to leave.

**Q5. [908595] Grahame Morris (Easington) (Lab):** In my constituency, there are colliery rows standing derelict in the villages of Easington Colliery, Horden and Blackhall. They are characterised by low demand and high void rates. Many are not fit for human habitation. They are neglected by absentee landlords and a magnet for antisocial behaviour and crime. Will the Prime Minister commit to providing the funding required for the housing masterplan developed by Durham County Council to fix these issues? If she cannot do that, will she please get out of the way and call a general election and let us have a Labour Government who will address them?

**The Prime Minister:** I have not seen the housing masterplan that the hon. Gentleman refers to, but of course it is this Government who have put more money into affordable homes and more money into ensuring we are seeing more homes being built, and who have lifted the cap on local councils so that they are also able to build more home and the homes that people want.

**Tracey Crouch (Chatham and Aylesford) (Con):** Next month, I and my three neighbouring colleagues—my hon. Friends the Members for Maidstone and The Weald (Mrs Grant), for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat) and for Faversham and Mid Kent (Helen Whately)—will host our second apprenticeship fair, connecting nearly 40 leading organisations with more than 700 pupils from 22 schools. Does the Prime Minister agree that apprenticeships offer a viable alternative to full-time higher education, while creating a skilled workforce that benefits business and its future employees?

**The Prime Minister:** First, I commend my hon. Friend for the work she is doing in her constituency through the jobs fairs. I absolutely agree with her: it is very important that young people are able to see that there are different routes for them for their futures and different routes into the workplace. Apprenticeships are an important route for some young people. All the apprentices that I meet say that the best thing they have done is take up an apprenticeship, and that was right for them. We want every young person to be able to take the route that is right for them, be it higher education, further education or apprenticeships.

**Q6. [908596] Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South East) (Lab):** In the '60s and '70s, 1.2 million Primodos pills were prescribed to women, including three of my constituents. Each dosage was equivalent to 40 oral contraceptive pills. Thousands of babies were born with deformities. A recent Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency review was widely criticised for being a whitewash. Now Professor Carl Heneghan of Oxford University has published a review of the scientific data that clearly shows that Primodos did cause deformities. Will the Prime Minister ensure that any response to the review does not involve the MHRA, as we have no faith in it?

**The Prime Minister:** This is an important issue that has been raised by a number of Members from across the House. Our priority is always the safety of patients. Ministers are aware of the new study that has come out. We have a commitment to review any new evidence in this area, and we do that, but we do it by consulting independent scientific experts. Baroness Cumberledge is leading the independent medicines and medical devices safety review. That is expected to examine what happened in the case of Primodos and will determine what further action is needed. I assure the hon. Lady that we will listen very carefully to any recommendations that come out of the review, and of course that study will be looked at very carefully to see what has come out of it.

**Dr Phillip Lee (Bracknell) (Con):** Does my right hon. Friend recognise, particularly since last night, that in these complex circumstances, her role as Prime Minister is now to create the political environment in which solutions to the Brexit conundrum can be found and not to continue with a plan expecting a different outcome?



Does she also accept, then, that if she cannot get what she wants, she will need to change her mind to secure public confidence?

**The Prime Minister:** As I have pointed out today and as I said last night, it is precisely because we recognise the need to understand rather better what can command and secure the support of the House that we will be talking to parliamentarians across the House, and that includes my right hon. and hon. Friends, the Democratic Unionist party and parliamentarians across other parties. That is because, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) said, there is quite a variety of views across the House about what is right.

Q8. [908598] **Stewart Malcolm McDonald** (Glasgow South) (SNP): The deal defeated last night is a product of the Prime Minister's own red lines. Which of those red lines is she willing to give up in order to get the compromise she seeks?

**The Prime Minister:** As I said last night, we will be approaching these discussions in a constructive spirit, but underlying that will be the need to ensure we deliver on the referendum result and deliver Brexit.

**Rehman Chishti** (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): I very much welcome the recent statement by the Foreign Office that Britain must do more to support persecuted Christians. In the light of that, will the Government now review their position on the Asia Bibi case and offer her asylum in the UK, so she can choose a safe destination, instead of asking a third country to take her in? That would mean shifting our moral responsibility to another country, which cannot be right.

**The Prime Minister:** I hope I can reassure my hon. Friend by saying that, as I have said previously, our primary concern is the safety and wellbeing of Asia Bibi and her family. Obviously, the UK's high commissioner in Islamabad is keeping me and the Government up to date with developments. We have been in contact with international partners about our shared desire to see a swift and positive resolution in this case, and a number of countries are in discussions about a possible alternative destination for Asia Bibi once the legal process is complete. I will not comment on the details of that, however, because we do not want to compromise Asia Bibi's long-term safety.

On the timing, I think the Foreign Minister of Pakistan has confirmed that Asia Bibi will remain under the protection of the Pakistani Government until the legal process has concluded, and the Prime Minister of Pakistan has supported the Supreme Court and promised to uphold the rule of law. What matters is providing for the safety and wellbeing of Asia Bibi and her family.

Q9. [908599] **Mr Ronnie Campbell** (Blyth Valley) (Lab): The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has said following a recent survey that 4 million in-work workers are living in poverty. Is that not a damning report on nine years of this Tory Government, and will she stop being so hard and fast and call a general election?

**The Prime Minister:** I referred earlier to figures on the number of people in absolute poverty, which have reached record lows under this Government, but the hon. Gentleman talks about people who are in work.

The Government have taken a number of steps to help those people: we have cut taxes for 32 million people, increased the national living wage and frozen fuel duty. Unfortunately, however, in the case of so many of those measures, which we took to give financial help to people who are just about managing—the sort of people he is talking about—the Labour party opposed them.

**Martin Vickers** (Cleethorpes) (Con): In an article I posted on my website in November, I concluded by saying:

“Hopefully we will eventually come to a position that both sides who support the agreement and those, like me, who oppose it can...coalesce. I believe this could happen over coming weeks, though there will be more drama before we reach that point.”

We have all had our fair share of drama, but would my right hon. Friend agree that it is not both sides—meaning remain and leave—who must coalesce around an agreement but the European Union, and may I urge her to continue negotiations with Europe in the hope it will show some flexibility?

**The Prime Minister:** I thank my hon. Friend for making a very obvious point that has not been raised by those who have been talking about the sort of discussions we are to have across Parliament. I want to see what will secure the support of the House, but of course we have to ensure that it can secure the support of the EU. This is a treaty and agreement between two parties, and, as I said last night, once we have those ideas from the House, I will take them to the EU.

Q11. [908601] **Sir David Crausby** (Bolton North East) (Lab): In March 2010, Greater Manchester police had 8,148 police officers and the chief constable wanted 10,000. By June 2018, we had 6,199, and the numbers are still going down. The incidence of crime is rising right across Bolton, and is it any wonder? More importantly, is it acceptable that the police are failing to attend violent attacks and systematic drug-dealing locations?

**The Prime Minister:** As I said earlier, the Government have made more money available to police forces. Nearly £1 billion extra will be available to them next year. But, of course, it is not just about the money that is available to police forces; it is about the power that the police have. That is why we have introduced the Offensive Weapons Bill, and why we continually take action to ensure that the police have the power that they need to keep us safe.

**Nicky Morgan** (Loughborough) (Con): Further to my right hon. Friend's point of order last night and the questions that she has been asked so far during this session, does she agree that we all need to maintain maximum flexibility if we are to build a consensus around Brexit in the House?

**The Prime Minister:** As I said last night, we will approach the discussions that we will have with Members on both sides of the House in a constructive spirit. As I said earlier, however, as we are looking at those discussions to find what will secure the support of the House, we must remember that what we are doing is finding a way to deliver Brexit, and to deliver on the vote of the British people.

Q14. [908604] **Carol Monaghan** (Glasgow North West) (SNP): I do not like to worry the Prime Minister, but it is notable that I asked a question during David Cameron's final Prime Minister's Question Time.

Last night, after the Prime Minister's crushing defeat, she said:

"EU citizens who have made their home here...deserve clarity on these questions as soon as possible."—[*Official Report*, 15 January 2019; Vol. 652, c. 1125.]

The clarity is in the Prime Minister's own hands, so will she now show leadership, prove that she values EU nationals, scrap the settled-status fee and give a guarantee to all EU nationals that their future in the UK is secure?

**The Prime Minister:** The withdrawal agreement that was negotiated with the European Union set out the ways in which EU citizens' rights would be guaranteed here in the United Kingdom and reciprocal rights for UK citizens in the European Union would be guaranteed. The vote last night rejected that package of the withdrawal agreement and the political declaration. We have made clear as a Government that in a no-deal situation we will also guarantee the rights of EU citizens who are living here, and we stand by that.

**Gillian Keegan** (Chichester) (Con): No country has ever left the EU using article 50, so I do not underestimate the challenge, but back in the real world, businesses up and down the country—with the possible exception of Wetherspoon—are extremely disappointed with last night's vote, and short-term investment decisions are still on hold or going against the UK. Does the Prime Minister agree that protecting just-in-time supply chains, on which my constituents' jobs depend, must be at the heart of any solution?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend has raised an important point. One of the things that the deal we put to Parliament last night did was protect those just-in-time supply chain models, and our position on their importance has not changed. As we look ahead to today's vote, we should bear in mind that backing the Government today will enable us to find a way forward on Brexit and on the issues that, as my hon. Friend says, matter at home, to ensure that this country has the Government it needs to take that forward, deliver on the referendum and—as my hon. Friend says—protect not just the jobs of her constituents, but jobs throughout the country.

Q15. [908605] **Ian C. Lucas** (Wrexham) (Lab): Wylfa nuclear power station is a £20 billion UK-Japan trade deal that is of vital importance to north Wales, to north-west England and to UK energy policy as a whole. Did the Prime Minister discuss its difficulties with the Prime Minister of Japan last week, and if not, why not?

**The Prime Minister:** We have been working with Hitachi and with the Government of Japan, and yes, I did raise the issue of the Wylfa site with the Prime Minister of Japan last week. Of course, the company involved will be making a commercial decision in relation to this matter. The Government have been in discussion with it for some time and have been providing support. We do want to see new nuclear as part of our energy

mix in the future, but we must also ensure that the cost of any energy that is provided by nuclear is at a reasonable level for the consumer.

**Kirstene Hair** (Angus) (Con): I welcome the recent news from the Secretary of State for Defence and his ministerial team that 45 Commando will remain at RM Condor in my constituency. Zulu Company, part of the 45 Commando group, recently took part in specialist chemical training, which will ensure it is ready to respond first to any chemical or biological attack such as the one we had in Salisbury last year. Will the Prime Minister join me in congratulating the Royal Marines at 45 Commando and all the men and women who work at the base on their tireless work to keep our country safe?

**The Prime Minister:** I thank my hon. Friend for raising that issue; she has also raised it in a Westminster Hall debate as it is of importance to her, as it is to many other Members around this House. I pay tribute to all the Royal Marines past and present at RM Condor and I am pleased to say that we do plan for 45 Commando to remain based at RM Condor barracks in Angus. We will ensure that they continue to have the required facilities for them to live, work and train in Angus, and I am delighted to join my hon. Friend in congratulating Zulu Company on its hard work in keeping us safe.

**Sir Vince Cable** (Twickenham) (LD): I welcome the Prime Minister's offer of cross-party talks. She will remember, as we are former colleagues, that my party has a record of working with others in the national interest. However, she should not even bother lifting the telephone to Opposition parties unless she is willing to rule out categorically a no-deal Brexit and is willing to enter into a constructive conversation about a people's vote.

**The Prime Minister:** As I said earlier, there are two ways of avoiding a no deal: one is to have a deal, and one is to stay in the European Union. We will not be staying in the European Union, but I am always happy to have constructive discussions with party leaders who want to put the national interest first. Sadly, from everything I have heard, not every party leader wants to do that.

**Dr Sarah Wollaston** (Totnes) (Con): Driving off a cliff never ends well, particularly if it results in a crash and burn Brexit with no deal in just 72 days' time, but there is a way to avoid this: to be realistic by extending article 50 to allow us to put a realistic negotiated Brexit direct to the British people, to ask if it has their consent and also to include an option to remain with the excellent deal we already have.

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend will not be surprised to hear, as I have said this already in today's Prime Minister's questions, that I believe we should deliver on the vote of the referendum in 2016: we should be delivering Brexit. As I indicated earlier to her, she and others have talked about extending article 50, but the European Union would extend it only under circumstances in which it was going to be possible to come to an agreement on a deal. The talks we will be having—the discussions I will be having with parliamentarians across this House—will be aimed at ensuring that we can find a way to secure a deal that will get the support of this House.

## Points of Order

12.47 pm

**Huw Merriman** (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. First, thank you for your clarity with regard to taking photos in this place. It was put to me this morning by my local BBC station that MPs in this place are not quite getting the seriousness that the country is feeling when they behave in such a frivolous manner. I take that one stage further: we set rules and laws in this place and expect people to abide by them, but we cannot seem to do that ourselves—not a great look. May I therefore ask you, Mr Speaker, not so much for a reminder of the rules we already know are in place, but to say what the sanctions will be for those who break them? If there are no sanctions, might we change the position to reflect the fact that the rules are being flouted?

**Mr Speaker:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his point of order and his courtesy in warning me of his intention to raise it. I take seriously these breaches of privacy, and that is what they are—breaches of privacy by one colleague against others—which is why I made my statement earlier today. I do not expect to have to apply, or ask the House to apply, sanctions on colleagues for breaches of this sort, but as a supporter of England's finest football club the hon. Gentleman will know that the referee has several weapons in his arsenal before resorting to yellow or red cards and he can be assured that the Chair keeps a beady eye on offenders.

**Anna Soubry** (Broxtowe) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. A member of my staff was abused this morning as he sought to come to work. There were no police officers outside the Embankment entrance to Portcullis House. It was not just a random piece of abuse; he was called a “spineless” c-u-n-t. I will not use that word in any circumstances. There is no excuse for abusing him or any other member of staff in that way. Some of us have broad shoulders—I am not going to make a fuss; we all know what happened last week, and I am grateful that the police are finally doing something about it—but it cannot be right that those people are standing outside this place. The man who abused my staff member had been spoken to on three occasions this morning by police officers, but they had then left their post to go somewhere else.

Mr Speaker, I am grateful to the police who keep us safe, and you know the sort of conversations that I and many others have had with them. I do not doubt that they want to do a good job, but unless the Metropolitan police at the most senior level now do their job and make sure that our staff have exactly the same rights as any other worker in any other business, trade or profession, we will have a situation where our members of staff will simply no longer work for us. Mr Speaker, what more can we do?

**Mr Speaker:** I was shocked to hear of that incident, and I concur entirely with everything that the right hon. Lady has said to the Chamber today, as I have done on a number of recent occasions. No one should be subjected to vile abuse of the kind that she has described. I hosted a meeting in Speaker's House last week with the Commissioner of the Metropolitan police, and I referred

to the fact of that meeting in the Chamber, I believe last Friday. I have written to the Commissioner, and I have received a very full and encouraging reply from Cressida Dick. I will not read it out to the House, but she, while quite properly explaining how seriously she and her officers take their responsibilities, went on to seek to assure me of an increased police presence and, to some degree, a changed mindset in terms of the importance of proactive measures. Quite why there were no police officers outside Portcullis House at the time I do not at this point know, but I intend to raise the matter, because it is absolutely vital that the aspiration to achieve security is realised, if at all possible, in every particular case. Does the Leader of the House want to come in on that?

**The Leader of the House of Commons (Andrea Leadsom)**  
*indicated dissent.*

**Mr Speaker:** No? Not at this stage.

**Mr Bob Seely** (Isle of Wight) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. May I ask for clarification? Are you intending to alter the Standing Orders of the House in order to change the way in which business is conducted in the upcoming days and weeks, or are you going to allow those Standing Orders to be changed by a vote of the House? Excuse my ignorance on this, Sir. I ask because if the control of business is taken away from the Government, for example on the issue of Brexit, that has significant ramifications for how we do business in this House and for what is likely to happen in the days and weeks ahead.

**Mr Speaker:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, and I can answer him very simply. No, I have no intention of trying to change the Standing Orders of the House. With the very greatest of respect to the hon. Gentleman, whom I have known for a long time and for whose intelligence I have very high regard, that is not a power of the Speaker. The House is in charge of its Standing Orders, but in so far as he—*[Interruption.]* No, I am not debating this with him. He raised the point and I am furnishing him with an answer, upon which he can reflect. The later parts of his point of order were frankly hypothetical, and I cannot be expected to treat of hypothetical questions. He asked a specific point in the first part of his inquiry, and I have given him a specific reply. We will leave it there.

**Ms Angela Eagle** (Wallasey) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Do you agree that the way in which the rules of this House have evolved, and the way in which the current Government have taken to ignoring Opposition motions and not even deigning to vote on them—coupled with the difficult circumstances in which we in the House of Commons now find ourselves in the aftermath of yesterday's crushing defeat of the Brexit deal—demonstrate that our Standing Orders are probably in need of some evolution, even though I understand that you cannot change them? Will you perhaps think about bringing the Procedure Committee into play at some stage, so that we can take back some control from a dysfunctional Government and make certain that the will of this House can be properly put into effect?

**Mr Speaker:** It is not for me to bring the Procedure Committee into play. However, I am in the hands of the House, and the House can take a view on these matters and may well choose to do so. More widely, I think it is



fair to say that quite a number of Members of Parliament on both sides of the House—particularly some very senior and experienced Members—have relayed to me over the last several months their disappointment, concern and in some cases I would go so far as to say distress that what they previously regarded as givens seem no longer to apply. I simply make the point factually that a number of senior Members on the Government Benches have told me that, whatever they think of a particular vote—for example, a vote on an Opposition motion—it should be honoured, because they are putting their commitment to Parliament in front of their commitment to party. So I put that out there. These matters will be aired in this Chamber, and ultimately decided upon in this Chamber, if Members want that to happen. The idea that that can be blocked—I am not saying that that is what is intended—by Executive fiat, for example, is for the birds.

**James Heapey** (Wells) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. It is entirely understandable that you do not want to answer hypotheticals, but for those of us who are trying to understand what might be afoot and to explain it to our constituents, could you confirm whether it is the custom or the rule that rulings on money resolutions are the sole domain of the Chairman of Ways and Means?

**Mr Speaker:** I have made the position clear on money resolutions in the past, and I am not going to entertain hypothetical questions. I have tried to be—[*Interruption.*] Order. I am not debating the issue with the hon. Gentleman. He has made a point of raising points of order on a number of occasions, and if he wants to have a discussion at some stage, he is perfectly welcome to come to see me, but I am not going to detain the House now with endless exchanges on this matter with people who really want to stage a form of Question Time—[*Interruption.*] No, I do not require any gesticulation from him; I am telling him that that is the situation.

## BILLS PRESENTED

### EUROPEAN UNION REFERENDUM (PREPARATION) BILL

*Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Mr Dominic Grieve, supported by Liz Saville Roberts, Joanna Cherry, Tom Brake, Heidi Allen, Stephen Doughty, Justine Greening, Mr Chris Leslie, Anna Soubry, Chuka Umunna, Caroline Lucas and Dr Phillip Lee, presented a Bill to enable preparations for a referendum about the United Kingdom's future relationship with the European Union.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Monday 21 January, and to be printed (Bill 318).*

### EUROPEAN UNION REFERENDUM BILL

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## Low-Level Letter Boxes (Prohibition)

*Motion for leave to bring in a Bill (Standing Order No. 23)*

12.58 pm

**Vicky Ford** (Chelmsford) (Con): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to amend building regulations to require letter boxes in new buildings to be positioned above a certain height; and for connected purposes.

Thank you so much to all the Members of this House who have come here today to support my Bill. The purpose of the Bill is to improve the health and safety of workers, particularly postmen and women, paper boys and girls and other deliverers. When I met representatives of the Communication Workers Union, they told me that the key issue for their members was not Brexit but low-level letterboxes and dangerous dogs. I am not asking homeowners to retrospectively change their existing letterboxes or replace their front doors. When it comes to front doors, a lot of people are very fond of their knockers. This Bill simply wants to stop developers from building swathes of homes each with a letterbox placed near the ground.

I hope that this will be a moment of unity in British politics. I have been overwhelmed by support from Members across the House. We all need to declare a bit of an interest. We politicians have been known to deliver an occasional leaflet ourselves, maybe. Many Members of this House visited their own Royal Mail sorting offices in the run-up to Christmas. I enjoyed visiting the one in Chelmsford.

Our posties have deep knowledge of and care for their local communities. They are resilient and they are having to adapt to the digital age. These days, they deliver fewer letters but many more parcels because so many people are ordering goods online. There are over 95,000 postmen and women working for Royal Mail. They deliver to 30 million addresses. They serve each of our communities six days a week, every week of the year.

I asked our postal workers what I could do for them, and they asked me to help with the issue of low-level letterboxes, particularly because of the strain this puts on deliverers' backs. Back injury is the primary cause of sickness in Royal Mail. Royal Mail has introduced better trolleys and training schemes to improve how staff lift, but despite this, last year it recorded over 16,800 back-related absence spells. The act of having to bend or stoop to deliver mail to low letterboxes is a significant factor, and it cannot be overlooked. The occasional low-level letterbox is not a big issue, but where developers fit row after row of front doors with ankle-high letterboxes, deliverers face repetitive stress.

Low letterboxes are also associated with an increased likelihood of injury from dogs or cats. Each week across the UK there are, on average, 44 dog attacks on postal workers, and every year there are 50 attacks from cats. Low-level letterboxes are much more difficult for deliverers to see, resulting in more hand injuries and more damage to mail, especially packages. Post that has been delivered into a low-level letterbox is also easier for thieves to steal.

In many cases, it is not until the new doors are already in place that the local postal workers know that they have an issue, and then the trade union takes it up.

[*Vicky Ford*]

The CWU repeatedly challenges developers to retrospectively change the letterboxes. This is difficult to do, time-consuming and a waste of money. Some of us know that difficult to do, time-consuming and waste of money issues can be somewhat annoying. The union has been campaigning on this issue for many years. Indeed, back in 2005, 97 Members of Parliament signed an early-day motion asking for change, but it did not get much publicity. Well, we are certainly letting our postal workers have the spotlight today.

This Bill has a huge amount of support. I am especially grateful for the specific support from the hon. Member for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill (Hugh Gaffney) and my hon. Friends the Members for North Cornwall (Scott Mann) and for Banff and Buchan (David Duguid), all of whom have been postal workers themselves. It has been a pleasure to discuss this with the Minister responsible, who has been most encouraging. He is held in huge regard by postal workers for the work he did prior to coming to this place on the issue of dangerous dogs. I understand that the Government may be consulting on changes to building regulations later this year, so I hope the Minister will take the messages from this Bill seriously and make sure that the necessary changes come into force.

Health and safety matters. Sometimes Conservative Members are told that we do not care enough about health and safety or about the conditions of our workers. Indeed, in the past few days I have even heard some Opposition Members say that it was because they were concerned that we did not care enough about health and safety that they would not vote for the Government on the withdrawal agreement last night. But I believe that those concerns are unfounded. Every time I talk to my Conservative colleagues about this, they tell me that they do care about health and safety and do care about the conditions workers face. I hope the fact that so many Conservative Members support this Bill may go some way to assuage the concerns of Opposition colleagues.

Other nations have taken action—Ireland, Portugal and Belgium. There is a European standard, which suggests a minimum height of 70 cm. It is a shame that my hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) is not in his seat as I point out that in old money that is 2 feet 3½ inches. Not all European standards are evil. On this special day, would it not be nice to find one—at least one—that we can all unite around? The National House Building Council has been recommending since 2005 that developers and builders adopt this European standard. It has also suggested that the European standard for the aperture for letterboxes should be followed so that they can fit in small parcels. However, despite these recommendations, the problem still persists. There are some issues for which recommendations are simply not enough and we need regulation.

Back pain is the most common cause of chronic pain. Those of us who have ever suffered from back pain know how debilitating it can be. Every day our postal workers deliver for us: let us now deliver for them.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Ordered,*

That Vicky Ford, Scott Mann, Mrs Pauline Latham, Victoria Prentis, Bob Blackman, Tom Tugendhat, Craig Tracey, Mr Edward Vaizey, Richard Benyon, Tim Loughton, Maria Caulfield and Kelvin Hopkins present the Bill.

Vicky Ford accordingly presented the Bill.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 8 March and to be printed (Bill 320).*

#### **BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE (TODAY)**

*Ordered,*

At this day's sitting the Speaker shall put the Question necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion tabled under section 2(4) of the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011 in the name of Jeremy Corbyn not later than 7.00pm; and Standing Order No. 16 (Proceedings under an Act or on European Union documents) and Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply.—(*Michelle Donelan.*)

## No Confidence in Her Majesty's Government

*[Relevant documents: Fourteenth Report of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, The Role of Parliament in the UK Constitution; Interim Report, The Status and Effect of Confidence Motions; and the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011, HC 1813.]*

1.8 pm

**Jeremy Corbyn** (Islington North) (Lab): I beg to move, That this House has no confidence in Her Majesty's Government.

Last night, the Government were defeated by 230 votes—the largest defeat in the history of our democracy. They are the first Government to be defeated by more than 200 votes. Indeed, the Government themselves could barely muster more than 200 votes. Last week, they lost a vote on the Finance Bill—that is what is called supply. Yesterday, they lost a vote by the biggest margin ever—that is what is regarded as confidence. By any convention of this House—by any precedent—loss of confidence and supply should mean that they do the right thing and resign.

The Prime Minister has consistently claimed that her deal, which has now been decisively rejected, was good for Britain, workers and businesses. If she is so confident of that—if she genuinely believes it—she should have nothing to fear from going to the people and letting them decide.

In this week in 1910, the British electorate went to the polls. They did so because Herbert Asquith's Liberal Government had been unable to get Lloyd George's "People's Budget" through the House of Lords. They were confident in their arguments, and they went to the people and were returned to office. That is still how our democracy works. When we have a Government that cannot govern, it is those conventions that guide us in the absence of a written constitution. If a Government cannot get their legislation through Parliament, they must go to the country for a new mandate, and that must apply when that situation relates to the key issue of the day.

**Chris Philp** (Croydon South) (Con): Is not the Leader of the Opposition engaging in a piece of shameless political opportunism, putting party interests ahead of national interests? Is he not simply trying to disguise the fact that he has no policy on this great issue?

**Jeremy Corbyn:** In 2017, the Prime Minister and her party thought that they could call an election and win it. They thought that they would return with an overall majority, but there was an enormous increase in the Labour vote—the biggest since 1945—during that campaign when people saw what our policies actually were.

When the Prime Minister asked to be given a mandate, she bypassed the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011, which, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry), the shadow Foreign Secretary, pointed out, was designed to give some stability to the Tory-Lib Dem coalition Government to ensure that the Lib Dems could not hold the Conservatives to ransom by constantly threatening to collapse the coalition. The 2011 Act was never intended to prop up a zombie Government, and there can be no doubt that this is a zombie Government.

**Pete Wishart** (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): If the right hon. Gentleman's motion is successful this evening, there may be a general election in a few short weeks. Would the Labour party manifesto state whether it will be a party of Brexit or a party against Brexit? It is a simple question; what is the answer?

**Jeremy Corbyn:** We are a democratic party, and our party will decide what policy we fight the election on. In the meantime, however, we are clear that there has to be a customs union, access to European trade and markets and the protection of rights, and there must be a rejection of a no-deal Brexit.

As I was saying, last week this Government became the first for more than 40 years to lose a vote on a Finance Bill. In a shocking first for this Government—a shocking first—they forced a heavily pregnant Member of this House, my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq), to delay a scheduled caesarean to come to vote, all because of their cynical breaking of trusted pairing arrangements. We need to examine our procedures to ensure that such a thing can never happen again.

**Anna Soubry** (Broxtowe) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Could you please assist the House, because this is an important matter? I say this as a woman. We need to establish once and for all whether the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) was offered a pair. I think all of us and the public need to know.

**Mr Speaker:** The Clerk reminds me that that is not a point of order. My understanding is that there was a pairing opportunity, but the issue was aired in the chamber on Monday and again yesterday. The Leader of the Opposition is absolutely entitled to highlight his concern about the matter, which I know is widely shared, but it should not now be the subject of further points of order. I hope that that satisfies the right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry).

**Jeremy Corbyn:** Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Nothing demonstrates the sheer incompetence of this Government quite like the Brexit negotiations. Yesterday's historic and humiliating defeat was the result of two years of chaos and failure. It is clear that this Government are not capable of winning support for their core plan on the most vital issue facing this country. The Prime Minister has lost control and the Government have lost the ability to govern. Within two years, they have managed to turn a deal from what was supposed to be—I remember this very well—

"one of the easiest in human history"

into a national embarrassment. In that time, we have seen the Prime Minister's demands quickly turn into one humiliating climbdown after another. Brexit Ministers have come, and Brexit ministers have gone, but the shambles has remained unchanged, culminating in an agreement that was described by one former Cabinet Minister as

"the worst of all worlds."

Let me be clear that the deal that the Prime Minister wanted this Parliament to support would have left the UK in a helpless position, facing a choice between seeking and paying for an extended transition period or



[Jeremy Corbyn]

being trapped in the backstop. The Prime Minister may claim the backstop would never come into force—  
[Interruption.]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. There are courtesies in this place. A Member can seek to intervene, but he or she should not do so out of frustration by shrieking an observation across the Floor.

**Mr Mark Francois** (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): I was not shrieking.

**Mr Speaker:** Well, whether we say shriek or yell or bellow or shout, it was very noisy, and it was disorderly. The right hon. Gentleman knows that I hold him in the highest regard and have great affection for him, but he must behave better.

**Mr Francois:** Isn't the Leader of the Opposition supposed to—

**Mr Speaker:** Whether an intervention is taken or not—

**Mr Francois:** All right.

**Mr Speaker:** No, there is no “all right” about it. The person who has the Floor decides whether to take an intervention. That is life. That is the reality. That is the way it has always been.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** Who has confidence in this Government's ability to negotiate a future trade deal with the EU by December 2020 after the shambles that we have all witnessed over the past two years? This Frankenstein deal is now officially dead, and the Prime Minister is trying to blame absolutely everybody else.

**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi** (Slough) (Lab): In modern British history, when faced with a defeat even a fraction of the size of the titanic and calamitous margin that the Prime Minister faced yesterday, Prime Ministers have done the right and honourable thing and have resigned and called a general election. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Prime Minister, in the pursuit of power and the trappings of office, has now forgotten what is right and honourable?

**Jeremy Corbyn:** I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. As I made clear, all the precedents are that when a Government experiences a defeat like last night's, it is time to resign and allow the people to elect a new Parliament to deal with the issues facing the country.

Let me be clear that the blame for this mess lies firmly at the feet of the Prime Minister and her Government, who have time after time made hollow demands and given what turned out to be false promises. They say that they want this Parliament to be sovereign. Yet when their plans have come up against scrutiny, they have done all they can to obstruct and evade. The Prime Minister's original plan was to push through a deal without the appropriate approval of this Parliament, only to be forced into holding a meaningful vote by the courts and by Members of this House, to whom I pay tribute for ensuring that we actually had the meaningful vote last night.

**Mr Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): As I understand it, the Leader of the Opposition will allow his party to decide whether he will deliver Brexit should he become Prime Minister. His party has already decided that if he is not successful in getting a general election, he should support a people's vote. If he does not win the vote tonight, will he then support moves in this House to give us a people's vote?

**Jeremy Corbyn:** I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman is fully aware of the decision made at my party's conference that all options are on the table for the next phase, including the option to which he has referred.

**Catherine West** (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): In this national crisis, will my right hon. Friend confirm whether the Prime Minister has telephoned the Leader of the Opposition to ask for a meeting to discuss the way forward for our country?

**Jeremy Corbyn:** I have not had such a call as yet. I have my phone on. [Interruption.]

I think we should proceed with this debate. The Prime Minister's original plan was to push through a deal without approval, as I pointed out, and she was forced into seeking approval by the courts. Since losing their majority in the 2017 general election, the Government have had numerous opportunities to engage with others and listen to their views, not just here in Westminster, but across the country. Their whole framing of the EU withdrawal Bill was about giving excessive power to the Secretary of State for Brexit at the expense of Parliament. It was a Bill of which Henry VIII would have been very proud.

Yesterday's decisive defeat is the result of the Prime Minister not listening and ignoring businesses, unions and Members of this House. She has wasted two years recklessly ploughing on with her doomed strategy. Even when it was clear that her botched and damaging deal could not remotely command support here or across the country, she decided to waste even more time by pulling the meaningful vote on 11 December on the empty promise, and it was an absolutely empty promise, of obtaining legal assurances on the backstop—another month wasted before the House could come to its decision last night.

Some on the Government Benches have tried to portray the Prime Minister's approach as stoical. What we have seen over the past few months is not stoical; what we have witnessed is the Prime Minister acting in her narrow party interest, rather than in the public interest. Her party is fundamentally split on this issue, and fewer than 200 of her own MPs were prepared to support her last night. This constrains the Prime Minister so much that she simply cannot command a majority in this House on the most important issue facing this country without rupturing her party. It is for that reason that the Government can no longer govern.

Yesterday, the Prime Minister shook her head when I said that she had treated Brexit as a matter only for the Conservative party, yet within half an hour of the vote being announced the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Nick Boles) commented:

“She has conducted the argument as if this was a party political matter rather than a question of profound national importance”. How right he was, and how wrong the Prime Minister was to threaten him before the vote took place.

I know that many people across the country will be frustrated and deeply worried about the insecurity around Brexit, but if this divided Government continue in office, the uncertainty and risks can only grow.

**George Freeman** (Mid Norfolk) (Con): When those cross-party talks start, which of the Scarlet Pimpernels will come? Will it be the Leader of the Opposition who campaigns for remain in London and the south-east, or will it be the Leader of the Opposition who campaigns for Brexit up north? We need to know.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** There has been no offer or communication on all-party talks. All the Prime Minister said was that she might talk to some Members of the House. That is not reaching out. That is not discussing it. That is not recognising the scale of the defeat they suffered last night.

It is not just over Brexit that the Government are failing dismally, letting down the people of this country. There has been the Windrush scandal, with the shameful denial of rights and the detention, and even the deportation, of our own citizens. The Government's flagship welfare policy, universal credit, is causing real and worsening poverty across this country. And just yesterday, under the cover of the Brexit vote, they sneaked out changes that will make some pensioner households thousands of pounds worse off. Those changes build on the scourge of poverty and the measures inflicted on the people of this country, including the bedroom tax, the two-child limit, the abominable rape clause, the outsourced and deeply flawed work capability assessment, the punitive sanctions regime and the deeply repugnant benefits freeze.

People across this country, whether they voted leave or remain, know full well that the system is not working for them. If they are up against it and they voted remain, or if they are up against it and they voted leave, this Government do not speak for them, do not represent them and cannot represent them. Food bank use has increased almost exponentially. More people are sleeping on our streets, and the numbers have shamefully swelled every year. The Conservative party used to call itself the party of home ownership; it is now called the party of homelessness in this country.

Care is being denied to our elderly, with Age UK estimating that 1.2 million older people are not receiving the care they need. Some £7 billion has been cut from adult social care budgets in the past nine years. Our NHS is in crisis, waiting time targets at accident and emergency—*[Interruption.]* I am talking about waiting times at accident and emergency departments and for cancer patients that have not been met since 2015 and that have never been met under the Government of this Prime Minister.

The NHS has endured the longest funding squeeze in its history, leaving it short-staffed to the tune of 100,000 and leaving NHS trusts and providers over £1 billion in deficit. The human consequences are clear. Life expectancy is now going backwards in the poorest parts of our country and is stagnating overall, which is unprecedented—another shameful first for this Government and another reason why this Government should no longer remain in office. That is why this motion of no confidence is so important.

**Anna Soubry:** The Leader of the Opposition is making some powerful arguments—not very well, but he is making them—but could he help us with this? I saw an opinion poll at the weekend. If there is any merit in his arguments, can he explain why the Conservative party is six points ahead in the polls? Could it be because he is the most hopeless Leader of the Opposition we have ever had?

**Jeremy Corbyn:** I thank the right hon. Lady for her intervention, and I look forward to testing opinion at the ballot box in a general election, when we will be able to elect a Labour Government in this country.

**Mr David Lammy** (Tottenham) (Lab): My right hon. Friend is right to put on record the concerns about uncertainty in the country, and he is absolutely right to talk about poverty. Can he confirm that it is the position of the British Labour party to rule out a no-deal Brexit? Can he understand why the party that claims to be the traditional party of business will not do the same?

**Jeremy Corbyn:** I can absolutely confirm that. We have voted against a no-deal Brexit, and apparently the Business Secretary thinks that vote is a good idea. The Prime Minister was unable to answer my question on this during Prime Minister's Question Time. A no-deal Brexit would be very dangerous and very damaging for jobs and industries all across this country.

**Imran Hussain** (Bradford East) (Lab): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**Jeremy Corbyn:** I will give way one more time.

**Imran Hussain:** I thank my right hon. Friend for giving way. He is absolutely right that, under this Government, we see our NHS in crisis and education underfunded. Our communities have been devastated by their austerity agenda. More people are homeless; more people are living in poverty; and more people are using food banks. If the Government disagree, why do they not call a general election? We are ready.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention and for his work representing his constituency. On this side of the House, we are determined to force this Government to accept the reality of the defeat last night and to go to the people so that they can decide whether they want a party in office that promotes inequality, poverty and injustice in Britain, or the Labour alternative, which is bringing people together, however they voted in the referendum.

I know that some Members of this House are sceptical, and members of the public could also be described as sceptical, but I truly believe that a general election would be the best outcome for this country. As the Prime Minister pointed out in her speech yesterday, both the Labour party and the Conservative party stood on manifestos that accepted the result of the referendum. Surely any Government would be strengthened in trying to renegotiate Brexit by being given a fresh mandate from the people to follow their chosen course. I know many people at home will say, "Well, we've had two general elections and a referendum in the last four years." For the people of Scotland, it is two UK-wide elections, one Scottish parliamentary election and two

[Jeremy Corbyn]

referendums in five years So although Brenda from Bristol may gasp “Not another one”, spare a thought for Bernie from Bute. However, the scale of the crisis means we need a Government with a fresh mandate. A general election can bring people together, focusing on all the issues that unite us—the need to solve the crises in our NHS, our children’s schools and the care of our elderly.

We all have a responsibility to call out abuse, which has become too common, whether it is the abuse that Members of this House receive or the abuse that is—[*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. No, Mr David Morris, do not yell from a sedentary position like that. If you seek to intervene, you seek to do so in the usual way—that is the only way to do it. Just because you are angry, it does not justify your behaving in that way. Stop it.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** Thank you. Mr Speaker.

**Mr Francois:** Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Jeremy Corbyn:** No. I am sure we can all unite in condemning racist abuse in any form whatsoever within our society. Too many of our constituents have faced that since the toxic debate in the last referendum and, if I may say so, the Government’s hostile environment policies on the Windrush generation.

Many media pundits and Members of this House say there is currently no majority in the House for a general election—let the Members of this House decide. However, it is clear there is no majority for the Government’s Brexit deal and there is no majority either for no deal. I pay tribute to all Members of this House who, like the Labour Front-Bench team, are committed both to opposing the Prime Minister’s bad deal, which we voted down last night, and to ruling out the catastrophe of no deal. But I do believe that following the defeat of the Government’s plan, a general election is the best outcome for the country, as the Labour party conference agreed last September.

A general election would give new impetus to negotiations, with a new Prime Minister, with a new mandate, and not just to break the deadlock on Brexit, but to bring fresh ideas to the many problems facing our constituents, such as very low pay, insecure work and in-work poverty, which is increasing. They face the problems of trying to survive on universal credit and living in deep poverty; and the scandal of inadequate social care, which might not concern the right hon. Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois) but does concern millions of people around this country.

Then we have the crisis facing local authorities, health services and schools, which are starved of resources; and the housing and homelessness crisis, whereby so many of our fellow citizens have no roof over their heads night after night. [*Interruption.*]

**Mr Francois:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** They are looking to Parliament to deliver for them a better and fairer society—

**Mr Speaker:** Is the right hon. Gentleman just pausing?

**Jeremy Corbyn:** I am pausing because you stood up.

**Mr Speaker:** Quite right, absolutely. That is very reasonable and sensible. Thank you. I call Mark Francois, on a point of order.

**Mr Francois:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Is it not—[*Interruption.*] Well, give me a go! Is it not often the practice in this House that when someone speaking from the Dispatch Box refers to another Member and challenges them, they then normally take an intervention?

**Mr Speaker:** It is commonplace, but it is not, in any sense, obligatory.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** Thank you, Mr Speaker.

If the House backs this motion today, I will welcome the wide-ranging debates we will have about the future of our country and the future of our relationship with the European Union, with all the options on the table. As I said before, a Prime Minister confident of what she describes as “a good deal” and committed, as she claims, to tackling burning injustices should have nothing to fear from such an election. If the House does not back this motion today, it is surely incumbent on all of us to keep all the options on the table, to rule out the disastrous no deal and offer a better solution than the Prime Minister’s deal, which was so roundly defeated yesterday.

This Government cannot govern and cannot command the support of Parliament on the most important issue facing our country. Every previous Prime Minister in this situation would have resigned and called an election. It is the duty of this House to show the lead where the Government have failed and to pass a motion of no confidence so that the people of this country can decide who their MPs are, who their Government are and who will deal with the crucial issues facing the people of this country. I commend my motion to the House.

1.37 pm

**The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May):** Last night, the House rejected the deal the Government have negotiated with the European Union. Today, it is asked a simpler question: should the next step be a general election? I believe that is the worst thing we could do: it would deepen division when we need unity, it would bring chaos when we need certainty, and it would bring delay when we need to move forward. So I believe the House should reject this motion.

At this crucial moment in our nation’s history, a general election is simply not in the national interest. Parliament decided to put the question of our membership of the European Union to the people. Parliament promised to abide by the result. Parliament invoked article 50 to trigger the process. And now Parliament must finish the job. That is what the British people expect of us and, as I find when speaking to my constituents and to voters right across the country, that is what they demand. But a general election would mean the opposite. Far from helping Parliament finish the job and fulfil our promise to the people of the United Kingdom, it would mean extending article 50 and delaying Brexit, for who knows how long.

**Pete Wishart:** The Prime Minister has lost a quarter of her Cabinet and 117 of her Back Benchers want her gone. She has experienced the biggest defeat in



parliamentary history. What shred of credibility have her Government got left? For goodness' sake Prime Minister, won't you just go?

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Gentleman might not have noticed that we are debating a vote of no confidence in the Government, so he has his opportunity to express his opinion in that vote.

**Mr John Baron** (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): As someone who was defeated last night by only 230 votes, may I encourage the Prime Minister to KBO and never tire of reminding the country that our good economic and one-nation record will be put at risk by a very extreme left-wing and high-taxation party?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I shall speak about this later in my speech, but it is over the years since 2010, with Conservatives in government, that we have been able to turn the economy around, ensure that jobs are provided for people and give people a better future.

**James Morris** (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con): I totally agree with the Prime Minister that a general election would solve nothing—it is merely a tactical device used by the Opposition to cause chaos—but does she agree with me that we also need to rule out a second referendum on our membership of the EU, which would be highly divisive and would not resolve the issues we currently face?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right that a general election would cause the sort of delay that I have just been talking about. He is also right in that we had a referendum in 2016, and I believe it is incumbent on this Parliament to deliver on the result of that referendum and to deliver Brexit. As regards those issues, the choices we face as a country will not change after four or five weeks of campaigning for a general election, and there is no indication that an election would solve the dilemma that we now face. Not only that, but there is no guarantee that an election would deliver a parliamentary majority for any single course of action.

**Mr Francois:** I thank the Prime Minister for giving way; unlike some, she is clearly not afraid to debate. It is not exactly a secret that on European policy, she and I have not seen entirely eye to eye—

**Simon Hoare** (North Dorset) (Con): She's taller than you. [*Laughter.*]

**Mr Francois:** So is everybody else!

It is possible that the Prime Minister and I will continue to disagree, but I am Conservative first and last, and I know opportunism when I see it, so when the bells ring the whole European Research Group will walk through the Lobby with her to vote this nonsense down.

**The Prime Minister:** I thank my right hon. Friend for his intervention. I note what he said and I am happy to carry on discussing with him the different views we have had on the European issue. It is absolutely clear that what the right hon. Gentleman the Leader of the

Opposition is trying to do is not going to help to resolve the issue of ensuring that we deliver on Brexit for the British people.

**Seema Malhotra** (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): In 2017, the Prime Minister went to the country and asked for a mandate; she lost her majority. Last night, she asked the House to back her deal; she saw the biggest Government defeat in a vote in the history of this House. She said last night that she wanted to open up dialogue with the whole House, yet she has refused to open up that dialogue with Labour's Front Benchers. Does she agree that it looks like a strategy more to divide and conquer than to bring this House and the country together and work out how we move forward?

**The Prime Minister:** I said last night that we would be having discussions across the House. There are many different opinions in the House on the issue of how to deliver Brexit; indeed, there are some views in the House on how not to deliver Brexit. I believe that we should deliver Brexit for the people. I made it clear that, should the Leader of the Opposition table a motion of no confidence, the first priority would be to debate that motion. I am confident that the Government will retain the confidence of the House. When that happens, I shall set out the further steps that we will take on discussions with Members from across the House.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**The Prime Minister:** If Members will just be a little patient, I have taken a number of interventions, so I will make a little progress. I will be generous in taking interventions; I think Members know from the number of hours that I have spent in the House answering questions that I am not afraid to answer questions from Members.

**Stephen Doughty** (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Prime Minister give way?

**The Prime Minister:** If the hon. Gentleman had listened to what I said—it does help sometimes.

We do not even know what position the Labour party would take on Brexit in an election. It is barely 18 months since this country—

**David Morris** (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): On that point, will the Prime Minister give way?

**The Prime Minister:** If my hon. Friend would just allow me one moment.

It is barely 18 months since this country last went to the polls, in an election in which well over 80% of voters—almost 27 million people—backed parties whose manifestos promised to deliver Brexit. That is what the Government intend to do and that is what is in the national interest, not the disruption, delay and expense of a fourth national poll in less than four years.

**David Morris:** Does the Prime Minister agree that if the Leader of the Opposition himself wrote on a note exactly what he wanted, passed it to the Prime Minister and she adopted it, he would still vote against it?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right, because of course the position that the Leader of the Opposition took was that however good a deal for the United Kingdom the Government brought back, he would vote against it, and however bad a deal the EU offered, he would vote for it. He has no real national interest in getting the right answer for our country.

**Stephen Doughty:** My right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition is absolutely right to call for a general election today, because it is not only the Government's record on Brexit that is at stake tonight. Let me ask the Prime Minister a direct question: is she really saying that her record on policing and crime is one that she is willing to stand on? We have seen more than 20,000 police officers cut since 2010; we see rising crime and rising knife crime; and we see money being diverted, instead of paying for police, to paying for a no-deal Brexit that nobody in this House wants to see happen.

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Gentleman talks about paying for police; of course, we made more money available to police forces, and what did the Labour party do? Labour voted against that. *[Interruption.]* Yes, that is what Labour did—voted against it.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**The Prime Minister:** I will make a little more progress, then take some more interventions.

Last night, the House spoke clearly, and I heard the message that it sent. I heard the concerns of my colleagues and those from across the House, and I understand them. As I told the House last night and have just repeated, if the Government secure the confidence of this House, my first priority will be to hold meetings with my colleagues, with our confidence and supply partners the Democratic Unionist party and with senior parliamentarians from across the House, but our principles are clear: a deal that delivers a smooth and orderly exit, protecting our Union, giving us control of our borders, laws and money and allowing us to operate an independent trade policy. These are what deliver on the will of the British people.

**Stewart Malcolm McDonald** (Glasgow South) (SNP): I tried this with the Prime Minister earlier during Question Time, and I am going to give her one more chance: which of the red lines that she set, which caused her defeat last night, is she willing to compromise on to get the agreement through?

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Gentleman will not be surprised to hear that I will give him the same answer as I have just given in my comments. I point out to him that the key thing that this House and this Parliament need to do is to deliver Brexit for the British people. That is what we need to do. We need to deliver a Brexit that respects and reflects the vote that was taken in the 2016 referendum.

**Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** I am trying to be helpful to the Prime Minister, believe it or not, but this is pure robotic fantasy. It is her deal that has to change, and her deal is a product of the red lines, so when she has that meeting with my right hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford), which of the red lines is she willing to give up on?

**The Prime Minister:** I repeat that we will approach the discussions in a constructive spirit. We want to hear from the House the detail of what it wants to see, such that we can secure the House's support for a deal.

**Mr Bob Seely** (Isle of Wight) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for giving way, unlike the Leader of the Opposition. Does she share my concerns that too many people in this House are trying to scupper the mandate given to us by the British people? For centuries, this House has taken arbitrary power from kings, queens, peers and grandees and put that power in this House for the public good, but it appears that we are now becoming an arbitrary power that is removing the mandate that we gave to the British people. Will my right hon. Friend fight to deliver on that mandate and to protect and preserve our democracy?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend puts his point very powerfully indeed. This Parliament voted to ask the British people and to say to them, "It is your decision." It was not to say, "Tell us what you think and we might decide afterwards whether we like it." It was, "It is your decision, and we will act on that decision."

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**The Prime Minister:** I will just make a little more progress.

That is what we want to do: deliver on the will of the British people. As I have said, I will approach the meetings in a constructive spirit, focusing on ideas that are negotiable and have sufficient support in this House. The aim is to identify what would be required to secure the backing of the House.

**Peter Kyle** (Hove) (Lab): On that point—

**The Prime Minister:** I will make a little more progress. I have already been generous with interventions.

If those talks bear fruit, as I said earlier in Prime Minister's questions, then be in no doubt that I will go back to Brussels and communicate them clearly to the European Union, and that is what Members asked for. The leader of the SNP MPs said that we should have talks with all the leaders of the Opposition parties and work together in all our interests. The Chairman of the Brexit Committee said that if the deal was defeated, "I would like to think that she would take a bold step—that she would reach out across the House to look for a consensus." That is exactly what I propose to do. It would be a little strange for the Opposition to vote against that approach later today and in favour of a general election, as that would make that process of reaching out across Parliament impossible.

**Ms Angela Eagle** (Wallasey) (Lab) *rose*—

**The Prime Minister:** I will give way to the hon. Lady, as she has risen several times.

**Ms Angela Eagle:** I thank the Prime Minister for her generosity in giving way. With all due respect to her she has come to the House today, after suffering a very, very large defeat indeed, with the same lines and she is making the same assertions as she was making before the vote—it is as if the vote never happened. Her Downing Street spokesperson said that any discussions would have to start and proceed from the red lines that

she herself established. Does she not realise, in all honesty, that the time has come for her to show some flexibility on those red lines and get us into a genuine discussion rather than just repeating the lines that we have heard for the past five months ad nauseam?

**The Prime Minister:** What I am doing is setting out what the British people voted for in the referendum in 2016, and it is our duty as a Parliament to deliver on that.

**Mr Dhesi** *rose*—

**The Prime Minister:** Again, I will just make a little progress.

I know that to serve in government is a unique privilege. The people of this country put their trust in you and, in return, you have the opportunity to make this country a better place for them.

**Maggie Throup** (Erewash) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

**The Prime Minister:** In a moment.

When I became Prime Minister that is what I pledged to do: yes, to deliver Brexit, but also to govern on the side of working people, right across the country, for whom life is harder than it should be and to build on the progress that has been made since 2010.

**Yvette Cooper** (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): I thank the Prime Minister for giving way. The problem is that she seems to be talking as if she lost by 30 votes yesterday and not 230. Her refusal even to consider changing any of her red lines, when the EU, the Irish Government and others made it clear that the deal that she got was dependent on those red lines, is making this impossible. May I ask her to clarify this: is she saying that she will rule out, in any circumstances, a customs union?

**The Prime Minister:** What I want to see is what the British people voted for—[*Interruption.*] No, this is very important. They voted for an end to free movement; they voted for an independent trade policy; and they voted to end the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice. It is incumbent on this Parliament to ensure that we deliver on that.

**Mr Kenneth Clarke** (Rushcliffe) (Con) *rose*—

**Kevin Hollinrake** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con) *rose*—

**The Prime Minister:** I give way.

**Mr Clarke** *rose*—

**The Prime Minister:** If the Father of the House would allow me, I did say to my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) that I would take him first.

**Kevin Hollinrake:** I thank the Prime Minister for giving way. She is being criticised for setting and sticking to red lines, but do not those red lines simply represent the promises that were made before the referendum?

**The Prime Minister:** That is the point that I have been making and repeating. When people voted to leave, they voted for certain things. They voted to ensure that we

could have that independent trade policy and that we would end free movement, for example, and it is our duty to ensure that we deliver on those things.

**Mr Kenneth Clarke:** I have asked many people throughout this why they voted on one side or the other in the referendum, and I have got a very wide range of replies. I have to say, though, that no one has ever told me that they voted to leave in order that we could leave the customs union, or that they wanted us to erect trade barriers between ourselves and the rest of the Europe. As the Prime Minister is as committed to this as I am, I entirely support her aim of keeping open borders between ourselves and the rest of Europe. Is it not the case that there is nowhere in the world where two developed countries in any populated area are able to have an open border unless they have some form of customs union?

**The Prime Minister:** My right hon. and learned Friend refers to the fact that, obviously, there were various reasons why people voted to leave the European Union, but when they were doing so they did vote to ensure that we continue to have a good trading relationship with our nearest neighbours in the European Union and also to improve our trading relationships with others around the world. That is what we were searching for and that is what was in the political declaration for the future. That package was not voted through this House last night. I now will talk to parliamentarians across the House to determine where we can secure the support of the House.

Although delivering Brexit is an important and key element of government, it is also important that we build on the progress made since 2010 and lead this country towards the brighter, fairer, more prosperous future that it deserves.

**Mr Dhesi** *rose*—

**Mr Paul Sweeney** (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op) *rose*—

**Wera Hobhouse** (Bath) (LD) *rose*—

**The Prime Minister:** I will make some progress before I take any further interventions.

I believe that this Government have a record to be proud of—a record that demonstrates that our policies and principles are more than words. In 2010, we inherited the gravest of economic situations: a recession in which almost three quarters of a million jobs were lost; a budget deficit of £1 borrowed for every £4 spent; and a welfare system that did not reward work. But in the nine years since, thanks to the hard work and sacrifice of the British people, we have turned this country around. Our economy is growing; the deficit is down by four fifths; the national debt has begun its first sustained fall for a generation; and the financial burden left for our children and grandchildren is shrinking by the day. That is a record to be proud of.

**Mr Dhesi:** I thank the Prime Minister for allowing me to intervene. Under her leadership, this Government have become the first in British history to be found in contempt of Parliament and the first in British history to lose by more than 200 votes on a primary policy matter. Homelessness has spiralled out of control; the use of food banks has risen exponentially, and much



[Mr Dhesi]

more besides. Surely it is now time to act with humility and to do the right and honourable thing: resign and call a general election.

**The Prime Minister:** May I say again that the whole point of this debate today is to determine whether this House has confidence in the Government or thinks that there should be a general election?

I say that our record is one that we should be proud of, but I know that that is not enough. A strong economy alone is no good, unless we use it to build a fairer society: one where, whoever you are, wherever you live, and at every stage of your life, you know that the Government are on your side; where growing up you will get the best possible education, not because your parents can afford to pay for it but because that is what every local school provides; where your parents have a secure job that pays a decent wage and where they get to keep more of the money they earn each month; where, when you finish school, you know that you can go to university, whether or not your parents went, or you can have an apprenticeship; where, when you want to buy your first home, enough houses are being built so that you can afford to get a foot on the housing ladder; where, when you want to get married, it does not matter whether you fall in love with someone of the same sex or opposite; where, when you have children of your own, you will be able to rely on our world-class NHS; where both parents can share their leave to look after their baby and where, when they are ready to go back to work, the Government will help with the costs of childcare; and where, when you have worked hard all your life, you will get a good pension and security and dignity in your old age. That is what this Government are delivering.

**Wera Hobhouse:** I thank the Prime Minister for giving way. I acknowledge that she wants to paint a good picture of her Government, but is it not true that, precisely because so many people were unhappy, they also voted for Brexit? Is it not the case that we need to clarify with the British people what exactly they voted for? We need to put a precise deal in front of them, and not just make a general assumption about why people voted for Brexit. People also voted for Brexit because they were genuinely unhappy with the state of this country, so is it not the case that we now need to put a precise Brexit deal in front of the people so that everyone can say that, actually, Brexit will make a difference?

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Lady might recall that I made exactly that point when I became Prime Minister—that there were various reasons that people voted for Brexit, but that some people wanted a change in the way in which politics delivered for them. They felt that politicians were not listening to them, which is precisely why it is so important that we listen to and deliver on the result of the referendum for the people of this country—and this Government are delivering in a whole range of ways.

**Nigel Huddleston** (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): I appreciate the positive, confident and optimistic picture of the future of the UK painted by the Prime Minister. What a contrast with the Leader of the Opposition, who takes every opportunity to talk Britain down.

How on earth can somebody claim that they aspire to be Prime Minister if they have such utter lack of confidence in Britain and the British people?

**The Prime Minister:** Absolutely. Anybody who wants to be Prime Minister should believe in this country and in the talents of our people; that is so important.

**Rebecca Pow** (Taunton Deane) (Con): I know that there is so little time to get in all the achievements—*[Laughter.]* Colleagues may laugh, but it is this Government who are taking the environment more seriously than any other Government. We are putting sustainability first, and that is more important even than Brexit, because if we did not have a healthy environment—our record on this is second to none, including measures on microbeads, ancient woodland protection, the clean air strategy and more—we would be lost.

**The Prime Minister:** I thank my hon. Friend, who has set out an area on which this Government have been taking important action. I commend the work that she has done and the work of my right hon. Friend the Environment Secretary in this area. We are leading the way on the environment in a number of ways.

**Mr Philip Dunne** (Ludlow) (Con): I am very grateful to the Prime Minister; she is giving way considerably more than the Leader of the Opposition did. She has just mentioned the stewardship of the NHS under her leadership. Would she like to remind the Leader of the Opposition that it is this Government who have just pledged, through the NHS long-term plan, 50% per annum more funding than he pledged at the last general election?

**The Prime Minister:** That is absolutely right. The biggest cash boost to the NHS in its history and a long-term plan that ensures its sustainability for the future—that is being delivered not by a Labour party, but by the Conservatives in government.

**Several hon. Members rose—**

**The Prime Minister:** If right hon. and hon. Members will forgive me, I am conscious that the time is getting on.

**Mr Ben Bradshaw** (Exeter) (Lab) *indicated assent.*

**The Prime Minister:** The right hon. Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw) is encouraging me not to take so many interventions and to get on with my speech.

We are building a country that works for everyone, but there is much more to do, including: investing in our industrial strategy so that we are creating the jobs of the future in all parts of our country, not just London and the south-east; delivering our long-term plan for the NHS, to which my right hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr Dunne) has just referred, so that our most precious institution is equipped for the future; tackling the lingering injustices that for too long have blighted the lives of too many people, including women being paid less than men, mental health not being treated with the same seriousness and resource as physical health, a criminal justice system that has poorer outcomes if you are black than if you are white, and an education

system that has left white working-class boys as less likely to go to university than anyone else. These are issues that we need to tackle, and the mission of this Government will not stop.

This is a Government building a country that is more prosperous, a country that is fairer and a country that works for everyone. With the confidence of this House, we will go on delivering for Britain, driven by a passionate belief in doing what is right for our country and right for our people, acting not in self-interest but in the national interest. That is the simple mission that has underpinned our approach to the Brexit negotiations.

As we enter the next stage of that process, I have made it clear that I want to engage with colleagues across the House. The question now is whether the Labour leadership will rise to the occasion, but I fear the answer is no. As the Labour leader himself has indicated, Brexit is the biggest issue that the House and the country have faced for generations. It demands responsible leadership and pragmatic statesmanship from senior politicians. The Leader of the Opposition, as yet, has shown neither. His failure to set out a clear and consistent alternative solution to the Brexit question is the third reason that this House should comprehensively reject this motion.

The shadow Brexit Secretary has described Labour's position on Brexit as one of "constructive ambiguity". I think that the shadow Trade Secretary called it something slightly more succinct but definitely not parliamentary, and I therefore cannot repeat it. I call it not being straight with the British people. For more than two years, the Leader of the Opposition has been either unable or unwilling to share anything other than vague aspirations, empty slogans and ideas with no grounding in reality. When the President of the European Commission said that Labour's Brexit ambitions would be impossible for the European Commission to agree to, the right hon. Gentleman simply shrugged and said, "That's his view. I have a different view."

Last night, just for a moment, I thought the Leader of the Opposition might surprise us all, because he told this House that it was not enough to vote against the withdrawal agreement and that

"we also have to be for something."—[*Official Report*, 15 January 2019; Vol. 652, c. 1109.]

Surely that was the moment. That was the point at which, after months of demanding that I stand aside and make way for him, he was going to reveal his alternative. We waited, but nothing came.

The Leader of the Opposition still faces both ways on whether Labour would keep freedom of movement, and he will not even be drawn on the most basic point of all. In PMQs, I referred to the fact that on Sunday, when challenged on whether he would campaign to leave the European Union if there were a general election, he refused to answer that question five times, and he has refused to answer that question in response to Members of this House today. The Government have no doubts about our position. Under this Government, the United Kingdom will leave the European Union and we will respect the decision of the people.

**Chris Philp:** The Prime Minister is quite right to point out the yawning chasm at the heart of Labour's policy, but the problem is that she also said that we need

to come up with a constructive alternative. Speaking to colleagues around the House, it strikes me powerfully that there is one element of the currently proposed deal that, if changed, would make it much more likely to pass: the backstop. Would the Prime Minister therefore consider contacting European Commission officials in the coming days and over the weekend to ask them to make legally binding changes to that backstop, which would mean that the deal would then have a very good chance of passing this House?

**The Prime Minister:** The purpose of the various discussions that we are going to have is to identify the issues that will secure the support of this House, and I will take those issues to the European Parliament.

**Peter Kyle:** Will the Prime Minister give way?

**The Prime Minister:** I will give way to the hon. Gentleman, and then I am going to make progress so that others can speak in this debate.

**Peter Kyle:** I am extremely grateful to the Prime Minister for giving way; she has been generous. She has talked about engagement with this House and yesterday she referred to this House as the "fulcrum of our democracy." May I gently point out that she is the Prime Minister who went to the Supreme Court to stop her having engagement with this House and that the vote that we had yesterday was on the back of an amendment that she voted against? She talks about engagement with this House, but we have experienced nothing but hostility from the Prime Minister. Going forward, will she put her words into action? If not, she does not deserve to have the job in the first place.

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Gentleman has been present on many occasions when I have come to listen to and answer questions from the House. In fact, from October through to December, that amounted to a whole 24 hours spent answering questions in this House.

Vital though Brexit is, there is much more to being the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. That is, after all, the job to which the Leader of the Opposition aspires.

**Anna Soubry:** Will the Prime Minister give way?

**The Prime Minister:** If my right hon. Friend will bear with me, I will make some progress, as I understand that a significant number of Members have put in to speak.

By putting forward this motion, the Leader of the Opposition is asking this House to accept that he could be the next Prime Minister. How would he have faced some of the big challenges that I have faced as Prime Minister over the last two and a half years? When Russia launched a chemical attack on the streets of Salisbury, I worked with our allies to degrade Russian intelligence capabilities and hold those responsible to account. His contribution was to suggest that we ask Russia to double-check the findings of our own scientists. When the Syrian regime used chemical weapons to murder innocent men, women and children in Douma, I stood with our allies to uphold the international consensus that the use of chemical weapons should not be tolerated. He wanted to give an effective veto on action to President Putin and the Russian Government—the very Government who were supporting the Syrian regime.

[The Prime Minister]

The leader of the party of Attlee called for the dismantling of NATO. The leader of the party of Bevan says that Britain should unilaterally disarm herself and cross our fingers that others follow suit. The leader of the party that helped to deliver the Belfast agreement invited IRA terrorists into this Parliament just weeks after their colleagues had murdered a Member of this House. His leadership of the Labour party has been a betrayal of everything that party has stood for, a betrayal of the vast majority of his MPs and a betrayal of millions of decent and patriotic Labour voters. I look across the House and see Back-Bench Members who have spent years serving their country in office in a Labour Government, but I fear that today, it is simply not the party that many of its own MPs joined.

If we want to see what the Leader of the Opposition would do to our country, we can do no better than look at what he has done to his party. Before he became Labour leader, nobody could have imagined that a party that had fought so hard against discrimination could become the banner under which racists and bigots whose world view is dominated by a hatred of Jews could gather, but that is exactly what has happened under his leadership. British Jewish families who have lived here for generations are asking themselves where they should go if he ever becomes Prime Minister; that is what has happened under his leadership. A Jewish Labour MP had to hire a bodyguard to attend her own party conference, under the leadership of the right hon. Gentleman. What he has done to his party is a national tragedy. What he would do to our country would be a national calamity.

**Anna Soubry:** I am grateful to the Prime Minister for being so generous and engaging in a debate. As ever, she could teach a few people lessons on that. The hon. Member for Hove (Peter Kyle) made a very important point. While the Prime Minister has been very generous in coming to this place and answering questions, the complaint is that we have been excluded in a meaningful way at the outset from helping to determine the principles upon which a Brexit deal should be negotiated.

In seeking to be true to our oath and promises to our constituents and voting for things against our own Government, many of us have been threatened with deselection or received threats against our safety and even death threats. I know how seriously the Prime Minister takes that, and I thank her for her kindness in the note she sent me last week. Will she now make it clear to those listening to this that it would be wrong for anybody—this applies also to Opposition Members, given the wise observations she has just made about the state of the Labour party—to be intimidated or bullied in any way simply for coming here and being true to what they believe in and what they believe is in the national interest?

**The Prime Minister:** What my right hon. Friend experienced last week was appalling. I understand that she has experienced other incidents more recently. I absolutely agree; everybody in this House holds their opinions and views with passion and commitment, and everybody in this House should be able to express those views with passion and commitment and not feel that they will be subject to intimidation, harassment

or bullying. That is very important, and I am sure that that sentiment commands approval across the whole House. Once again, I am sorry for the experiences my right hon. Friend has gone through.

**Liam Byrne** (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab): Will the Prime Minister give way?

**The Prime Minister:** I will give way to the right hon. Gentleman, and then I will conclude.

**Liam Byrne:** I am grateful to the Prime Minister for giving way. She must recognise that she has built a cage of red lines, which produced a deal that was overwhelmingly rejected by this House. We rejected the deal because we rejected the cage. This afternoon, she has yielded nothing about how any one of those red lines will change. If she is not prepared to change, how on earth can we in this House continue to place a shred of confidence in her?

**The Prime Minister:** The point I made last night and have repeatedly made today is that I will be talking to people across this House—to my own colleagues, to the DUP and to other parties, as there are different groups of people in this House who have different views on this issue—to find what will secure the confidence and support of this House for the way in which we deliver Brexit.

It was serendipitous that I allowed the right hon. Gentleman to intervene just at the point at which I was going to say that if the Leader of the Opposition wins his vote tonight, what he would attempt to do is damage our country and wreck our economy. Of course, it was the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne) who left that note saying, “There’s no money left” after the last Labour Government.

**Liam Byrne:** I was naive to honour a Treasury tradition that went back to Churchill with a text that is pretty much the same, but I was proud to be part of a team that stopped a recession becoming a depression. This is the Government who—[*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Stop trying to shout other Members down. Calm yourselves.

**Liam Byrne:** The Prime Minister was a member of the party that backed Labour’s spending plans up to late 2009, and she has presided over a Government who have doubled the size of the national debt.

**The Prime Minister:** We did see what was happening in terms of the financial crisis and its impact, but the Labour party in government had failed to take the steps to ensure that the country was in a position to deal with those issues.

What would we see if Labour won the vote tonight? It would wreck our economy, spread division and undermine our national security. As I said earlier, on the biggest question of our times, the Leader of the Opposition provides no answers, no way forward and nothing but evasion, contradiction and political games. This House cannot and must not allow it.

**Clive Efford** (Eltham) (Lab): Will the Prime Minister give way?

**The Prime Minister:** I am about to conclude, so I will not take any more interventions.



We are living through a historic moment in our nation's history. Following a referendum that divided our nation in half, we dearly need to bring our country back together. Last night's vote showed that we have a long way to go, but I do not believe that a general election is the path to doing that, and I do not believe that a Government led by the Leader of the Opposition is the path to doing that either. We must find the answer among ourselves in this House, and, with the confidence of the House, this Government will lead that process.

This is the Government who have already delivered record employment, put more money in the pockets of ordinary working people and given the NHS the biggest cash boost it has ever received from any Government of any colour. This is the Government who are fighting the burning injustices of poverty, inequality and discrimination, which for too long have blighted the lives of too many of our people. This is the Government who are building a country that works for everyone.

As we leave the European Union, we must raise our sights to the kind of country we want to be—a nation that can respond to a call from its people for change; a nation that can build a better future for every one of its people; and a nation that knows that moderation and pragmatism are not dirty words, but how we work together to improve people's lives. That is our mission. That is what we are doing, and, with the backing of the House, it is what we will continue to do. I am proud of what we have achieved so far, and I am determined that the work will go on. In that, I know that we have the confidence of the country. We now ask for the confidence of this House. Reject this motion.

2.19 pm

**Ian Blackford** (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): It is a pleasure to follow the Prime Minister. Of course, I wish her no ill will, and if she does choose to resign today, may I wish her all the best for her future career?

In many respects, we should not be having this debate. If we reflect on what happened last night, we see a Government who brought their Brexit deal before Parliament and lost by a majority of 230—something quite unprecedented—with the Prime Minister's own Back Benchers and the Opposition, in a united manner, voting against this Government. If we go back just a short few weeks to December, there was of course a motion of confidence within the Conservative party and in that situation a majority of Government Back Benchers voted against the Prime Minister. The right hon. Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois) said earlier in an intervention that the members of the ERG would be going through the Lobby to support the Government tonight. That says it all. It is the ERG that has captured the Prime Minister.

The reality of where we stand today is that, when the Prime Minister went to the United Kingdom in an election in 2017, in anticipation of getting a majority, the Conservatives got a bloody nose and she came back as a minority Prime Minister. *[Interruption.]* Well, you can only—

**The Prime Minister** *rose*—

**Ian Blackford:** I will give way in a moment. *[Interruption.]* I say to those on the Government Benches, if they would just settle down a little, that they would love to be

in the position that the Scottish National party is in because we have a majority of seats from the people of Scotland.

**The Prime Minister:** I thought perhaps the right hon. Gentleman could just inform the House: how many seats in Westminster—how many Westminster MPs—did the SNP have before the 2017 election and how many did it have after the 2017 election?

**Ian Blackford:** I am grateful to the Prime Minister for that intervention. I say to her that there are 59 seats in Scotland, the Scottish National party hold 35 of them—a majority of seats—and we have won every election to the Scottish Parliament since 2007. The Prime Minister could only dream of being a situation where she has a majority.

Let us come back to the fundamentals of this. We have a Prime Minister who is captured by her right-wing Brexiteers. The issue is, when you have a minority, you have to be able to work across party. We have a situation where the Prime Minister is beholden to the DUP, but the DUP will support her only in very certain circumstances.

This is not just about the defeat of the Government on Brexit last night. They are a Government who are stuck and cannot get their legislative programme through. They have no majority support in this House. They are a Government who are past their time. If the Government had any humility or self-respect, they would reflect on the scale of that defeat last night. We should not be having this motion of no confidence. The Government should recognise that they have no moral authority. The Government, quite simply, should go.

**Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg** (North East Somerset) (Con): I think the right hon. Gentleman's speech is a little eccentric because he seems to think that the ERG and the DUP control the Prime Minister. Why, then, did 120 of us vote against the Prime Minister yesterday? If we are in such control, we are clearly not doing it very well.

**Ian Blackford:** Let me explain. The hon. Gentleman, in supporting a motion of no confidence against the Prime Minister, as he did, clearly expressed that he does not have confidence in the Prime Minister. What the ERG is seeking to do is to make sure that the Government deliver what it wants, which is a hard Brexit—a no-deal Brexit perhaps—against the interests of the majority of the people in the United Kingdom.

Here is the reality. Having listened very carefully to what the Prime Minister has said today, there is no change to the Government's position. The red lines remain in place. I fear that what is really going on is that we have a Government who are seeking to run down the clock, safe in the knowledge that the withdrawal Act has gone through, and seeking to drive Parliament to the margins and to make sure that we do crash out of the European Union, with no deal as a serious prospect. All of us should recognise the risks of no deal that no sane person in this House would support. The Government should unilaterally take off the table that risk to all of us and all our constituents.

**Imran Hussain:** The right hon. Gentleman must agree that the Prime Minister is a record setter—record levels of poverty, record levels of homelessness and now a

[*Imran Hussain*]

record defeat: no Government have been defeated by such a majority before. Perhaps not in our lifetime, but does he think that majority will ever be beaten?

**Ian Blackford:** I would say to my hon. Friend, because he is my hon. Friend, that we see a record level of lack of humility from this Government. He is absolutely right. We have had 10 years of austerity from this Government and people are hurting. We can see that through the poverty figures and the increase in poverty that is forecast. The harsh reality, as we know from the Government's own analysis, is that the economy of the United Kingdom would be weaker in any version of Brexit than it would be if we stayed in the European Union. That is the fundamental point.

I say respectfully to the Prime Minister that I understand the issue of respecting the vote in 2016, but when the Government know that the economic circumstances of their citizens are going to be negatively affected, we have a responsibility to say to the people, on the basis of the information that we now have, "We have a duty to go back to you," because nobody—nobody—irrespective of how they voted in that referendum, voted to make themselves poorer. I say with respect to the Prime Minister that it is shameful that we are not being honest with the people of this country. We need to waken up.

Let us take the announcement from Jaguar Land Rover. I know there are many reasons why Jaguar Land Rover is restructuring—we know it is to do with diesel cars and with China—but, at the same time, Jaguar Land Rover has made it absolutely crystal clear that Brexit is a fundamental issue driving that restructuring. No Government should be in the situation where they want to put unemployment on the table, with unemployment a price worth paying. That is what happened under Thatcher and this Government at their peril will take risks with the economy and the livelihoods of the people in the United Kingdom.

**Liz Saville Roberts** (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): Has not the time come for the country to see that the Tory party—not by its words, but by its actions—is now enacting a policy of moving us towards a no-deal Brexit?

**Ian Blackford:** I am grateful to my dear and honourable Friend for that point because I have to say to this House and to the people of the United Kingdom, that I am worried—I am really worried—about what we are doing. The risk of no deal is unthinkable.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Ian Blackford:** With respect, I know many people want to speak and I have to make progress. I will take interventions later.

We have to be honest with people about what these risks are. I can say to this House that we in Scotland want no part of it. If the Government and the Prime Minister want to drive the bus over the cliff, we will not be in the passenger seat with this Government.

We often hear about the travails of the European Union—the nasty European Union—but I can tell the House, as someone who lives in the islands of Scotland, that the European Union has been fantastic for our region.

When I contrast the behaviour of the European Union with this Government, I can see why people in the highlands are right to be angry. The European Union agreed to give convergence uplift funds to our farmers and crofters on the basis of the low level of financial support that was in place. A total of £160 million should be handed over to Scottish crofters. Where is it? It has not been handed over. Where has the Secretary of State for Scotland been in defending the interests of Scottish farmers and Scottish crofters? Scottish farmers and crofters will pay a heavy price for Brexit, and the institution that has been standing up and wanting to support them is not this House or this Government, but the European Union. I know where I will put my—

**Jamie Stone** (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I first thank the right hon. Gentleman for letting his party give me a seat in this place, but that is not for today. What he says is quite correct, and he touches on a question I put to the Prime Minister yesterday. So many infrastructure projects in my constituency would not have happened had it not been for European money. Those projects were crucial in halting the terrible drain of our brightest and best who left the highlands and never returned home. That issue remains hugely important to me.

**Ian Blackford:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I say to him that the people of Caithness and Sutherland gave him a seat in this place. We all serve with the good will and ongoing support of our constituents, which no one should ever take for granted.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Ian Blackford:** I want to make progress; I apologise.

I have talked about Brexit. Let me move on to the record of this Government. The Prime Minister talked about delivering a fairer society. Oh my goodness. Those of us who live in the highlands, which was a pilot area for universal credit, have seen the damage it has done to many people in many of our communities. I look at my hon. Friends the Members for Airdrie and Shotts (Neil Gray), for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) and for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry). Day after day, week after week, they have had to stand up and highlight the issues with universal credit, the issues with the rape clause and the issues with the two-child policy. This Government simply have not listened to the damage that has been done. They are obsessed with imposing a cruel and hostile environment for immigrants, their families and their children, and they continue to deny the rights of 1950s women.

When I first came into the House, I was the SNP pensions spokesperson. I lost count of the number of debates I called and spoke in, highlighting the injustice faced by millions of women—women who had worked all their lives in anticipation that there was a contract between them and the state that they would get their state pension. In some cases, women were given as little as 14 months' notice that their pensionable age was going to increase by as much as six years. That shows the heartlessness and the cruelty of this Government, who left many of them in poverty by ripping up the contract—that is what it was—between those individuals and the state. I have appealed to the Prime Minister on many occasions to right that wrong. This Government could easily have put their hand into the Treasury coffers; the national insurance fund sits at a surplus.

**Mhairi Black** (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (SNP): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is appalling that this Government have slipped out, among all the Brexit news, the news that they are making further changes to pensions? Pensioners with a partner below the pensionable age will have to claim universal credit instead of pension credit.

**Ian Blackford:** My hon. Friend is correct to highlight that this Government have been sneaking out those kinds of announcements. She is a doughty fighter for pensioners, as she is for young people, and we will stand up in this House for those who are affected in that way.

**Kevin Hollinrake** *rose—*

**Ian Blackford:** I will give way one more time.

**Kevin Hollinrake:** The right hon. Gentleman said earlier that he is worried about economic growth. I share those concerns, but is he also worried that Scottish economic growth is slowing? The Scottish economy is now growing at half the rate of the rest of the UK. What is his party doing about that north of the border?

**Ian Blackford:** Oh good grief. I have to say that the hon. Gentleman is mistaken. Over the course of the last year, growth in Scotland has overtaken that of the United Kingdom. But the majority of the controls of the Scottish economy do not sit with the Scottish Government; they sit with the Government here in London. We would dearly love to have full control of our destiny in Scotland. One of the reasons we desire independence is that our economic interests simply have not been looked after by Westminster.

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Ian Blackford:** I will give way in a second, but let me just say this. When I look at Scotland in the rear-view mirror over the past 100 years, I see that our population has barely grown. Generations of young people have had to leave Scotland because of a lack of economic opportunity. The Scottish Government are not responsible for that; Westminster is. I am delighted that a report published in the past few days by Highlands and Islands Enterprise shows that, for the first time, the trend has turned around and young people are staying to live in the highlands. That is because of the investment the Scottish Government are making in young people, despite the challenges of the austerity we face from this Conservative Government.

**Martin Docherty-Hughes** (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): I hope that the motion tabled by the Leader of the Opposition is successful this evening. I was reminded that today is the anniversary of one of the first Home Rule Bills for Ireland, which was agreed by this House in 1913 but defeated in the other place. Yet again—I say this with due deference—the Democratic Unionist party is in control of the Government. Can my right hon. Friend assure me that if the motion succeeds this evening, the Scottish National party will have no truck with any Government funding the Democratic Unionist party and its type of politics?

**Ian Blackford:** There is a very simple answer to that: yes, of course.

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Ian Blackford:** I have been generous in taking interventions. I need to move on, because I am only on page 2 of my notes. I am sure hon. Members want me to make some progress.

The Prime Minister and the Conservative Government have let us all down. Westminster has proved once again that it can only let Scotland down. The Scottish National party has no confidence in the UK Government. Scotland voted to remain. Let me say that again: Scotland voted to remain. I often hear the Prime Minister and others talking about the national interest. I ask her to reflect on the fact that our nation of Scotland is in a family of nations. We were told in 2014 that if we stayed in the United Kingdom our rights as European citizens would be respected, but this Government have completely ignored the wishes of the Scottish people and want to drag us out of the European Union against our will. They want to take away the rights we have as EU citizens.

It can be no surprise that the contempt shown to Scotland by the Tories over the past couple of years has strengthened and reinforced the case for Scotland to be an independent country. Every reasonable attempt by the Scottish Government to compromise and protect Scotland's interests has been spurned. The powers of the Scottish Parliament have been eroded. This place has taken back control. *[Interruption.]* I hear scoffing from the Tory Benches, but SNP membership went up by 10,000 the day after the withdrawal Act went through. The people of Scotland know that the Secretary of State for Scotland sat and did nothing as Scotland's powers over fishing, farming, agriculture and the environment were taken back, against the wishes of the Scottish Government.

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Ian Blackford:** I give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald). *[Interruption.]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The House is over-excited. Although the right hon. Gentleman is well able to look after himself, he must be heard. Sometimes there is a concerted and excessively noisy apparent attempt to interrupt, and that should not happen.

**Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** They are a curious bunch, Mr Speaker. I ask my right hon. Friend and Members across the House to reflect on the fact that, sure, in 2014 the Scottish people voted to stay in the UK, but two years later they voted to stay in the EU. Those two things are fundamentally incompatible because of the Prime Minister's desire to drag us out, so at some point one will have to give. She might be able to delay that, but independence is inevitable, is it not?

**Ian Blackford:** It's coming yet for a' that. *[Interruption.]* I hear Tory Members from a sedentary position talking about whether we can demand a referendum. I say to them that the sovereignty of the people of Scotland must be respected. However they dress it up, when the Scottish National party went to the people of Scotland in 2016, we won the election and a mandate such that, if there were a material change of circumstances, we could seek to have a referendum on independence. There is a majority for that in the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh. In July, this House debated a motion on the claim of



[*Ian Blackford*]

right that recognised the sovereignty of the Scottish people. This House accepted that motion. If and when the Scottish Government come to Westminster and ask for a section 30 agreement, this Government should respect the democracy and the sovereignty of the Scottish people and allow it.

Scotland will never forget or forgive the utter contempt shown for our nation by this Prime Minister and this Government. The right hon. Lady and her Government cannot escape the reality that they have caused political collapse in this country. Hamstrung, this Government are completely frozen in their own failure. We have reached a dangerous impasse. With the clock ticking down, we need to remove this shambolic Conservative Government, extend article 50 and, yes, give the people of the United Kingdom a say.

**Hannah Bardell** (Livingston) (SNP): As ever, my right hon. Friend is giving a stunning account of the current situation. Does he agree that the Prime Minister has painted herself into this corner? She will have to give on at least some of her red lines, and it is deeply regrettable that she has waited until the eleventh hour to reach out across the House. History will judge her on her deeds, not her words.

**Ian Blackford**: I absolutely agree. I reflect on the fact that we in Scotland have a Parliament elected by proportional representation. We are used to minority government and having to reach consensus. Indeed, the motion on Brexit that was passed by the Scottish Parliament was supported by the Scottish National party, by the Labour party, by the Liberal Democrats and by the Greens. I say to the Prime Minister: that is how you do it. The Prime Minister has simply misunderstood the challenges of reaching a consensus across Parliament. She is working with her own Brexit extremists and failing to work to build a consensus across this Parliament. If the Prime Minister survives today, she must act now to extend article 50 and legislate for a people's vote.

I must now turn to the Labour party. The Scottish National party was the first to table a motion of no confidence, supported by others—the Liberal Democrats, Plaid Cymru and the Green party—and we asked for it to be debated before Christmas. We knew yesterday that the Government were giving active consideration to allowing a debate and a vote today on that motion. The Labour party has been shamed into tabling the motion before the House now—a motion that we should have discussed before Christmas. I welcome today's debate, but on the basis of what happens today, I make this appeal to our friends and colleagues in the Labour party: we have to work together to hold this Government to account, and if we are to do that, we have to recognise the harm that Brexit will do to all our constituents. It is time for the Leader of the Opposition to recognise that there is no such thing as a "jobs first" Brexit.

If we want to protect the interests of our citizens, there has to be a people's vote. We do not have time to delay. The Labour party has to join us in that campaign today. I say to the Leader of the Opposition that all the young people who voted Labour in England in 2017 will pay the price if he does not give that leadership.

Get off that fence and come and join us. Take that opportunity today, and tell us once and for all that Labour will back a people's vote.

**Douglas Ross** (Moray) (Con): I am honoured by the right hon. Gentleman giving way to me, and I am grateful to him. He mentioned the shame of the Labour party. Will he reflect on the shame of the Scottish National party in Edinburgh on a day when college lecturers in Scotland are striking and teachers in Scotland are considering industrial action, when waiting lists are going up and our educational standards are going down? That is the record of the SNP Government in Scotland. Is he ashamed of that as well?

**Ian Blackford**: The hon. Gentleman used to sit in the Scottish Parliament. I suggest that if he wants to debate devolved matters, he tries to get back his seat there. [*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker**: Order. You always have a very amiable disposition, Mr Kerr, but you are becoming a mildly exuberant denizen of the House—dare I say it, in your conduct even a tad eccentric, to deploy the word used by the hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg)? Now, calm, Zen, restraint. Try to cultivate the air of the elder statesman.

**Ian Blackford**: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am proud of the record of investment in public services by my Government in Scotland. The situation we face is that of austerity from Westminster. We have taken the hard decisions to ameliorate Tory austerity, but also to invest in our public services. It is the Tories in the Scottish Parliament who want to cut taxes and harden austerity, which will damage the interests of the people of Scotland.

The people of Scotland wish to remain in the European Union. We want a country of opportunity, a nation free from poverty, a country where immigrants are welcome and refugees are given refuge. We want a Scotland without austerity, a Scotland where pensioners are paid their fair share and workers have fair and equal pay—a real living wage. We want a Scotland where all children are treated equally, where our health service is protected and valued—a nation that will be healthier, wealthier and happier.

The choice is clear. The United Kingdom is on a path to self-destruction. Without a change of course, Brexit will result in our economy being smaller, weaker and poorer. The Bank of England's Mark Carney said that Brexit had already cost each family £600. That is what has already happened. We know that a hard Brexit will cost each household in Scotland £1,600, pushing struggling families to the brink and, already, poor families into destitution. Without single market and customs union membership, the future relationship can only be a free-trade agreement, introducing barriers to Scottish companies' ability to trade. That will damage jobs, investment, productivity and earnings, hitting the most disadvantaged in society hardest. As we know, people who choose to live and work in this country, on these islands, are net contributors to our economy. If net migration is reduced by a significant number, we will be poorer economically and fiscally. That would be catastrophic, not just for workers but for our economy.

After a decade of Tory austerity, our economy has already suffered enough. The SNP will not stand by and allow the UK Government to ride roughshod over Scotland's future. This Government must go, and they must go today. I have said it before, and our First Minister of Scotland has reiterated it today, that the only way for Scotland to protect its interests and for our nation to thrive is once and forever to be rid of this place, and instead be an independent nation in the European Union.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. On account of the level of demand, a five-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches will now apply.

2.48 pm

**Sir Christopher Chope** (Christchurch) (Con): When my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was winding up the debate yesterday evening, she said that our country could ultimately make a success of no deal—although she of course was emphasising that she did not believe that that was the best outcome. That was before the vote. The outcome of the vote a few minutes later is one to which the Prime Minister certainly must respond.

The feeling in this House—432 Members, of whom I was one—is that the Prime Minister's deal, however good she thinks it is, is a bad deal, and I have heard nothing from the Prime Minister that implies that she accepts the verdict given by the House last night that her deal is a bad deal. The Prime Minister was right to anticipate such a scenario. In her Lancaster House speech two years ago, she feared that the European Union would only offer us a bad deal—a punishment deal, as she put it. She therefore emphasised that no deal would be better than a bad deal, and she emphasised all the benefits that come from no deal—including our ability to trade freely across the world and our ability to be able to enter into a new economic model—and from being masters of our own destiny as an independent nation. Those were the benefits of no deal that she set out. Obviously she, like everyone else, wanted to get a good deal. As we have not got a good deal, I plead with my right hon. Friend to ensure that she does not close the option of no deal and, indeed, intensifies preparations for no deal. That is the best way of concentrating the minds of those in the European Union that we are serious about an alternative.

If someone goes into a negotiation and says, "The only alternatives are to accept the deal or stay in the European Union," what will happen? The European Union is holding us to ransom. We need to be saying that we are confident, we believe in ourselves and we can make a great success of no deal. Unfortunately, that has not been the negotiating stance of the Prime Minister and her advisers, and we are suffering as a consequence.

Last Saturday, I had a public meeting in my constituency attended by more than 200 people. A lot of anxiety was expressed about whether the Brexit we have been promised will be delivered. It was great to hear the Prime Minister reasserting her commitment to deliver Brexit, but if she does not deliver that with the deal that was rejected last night, how will she deliver it if she rejects the no-deal alternative? My constituents were worried that they could see the referendum commitment to leaving the

European Union somehow being undermined by the Prime Minister and the Government. That in turn was undermining their trust.

**George Freeman:** My hon. Friend is making a compelling case that we should go back to Europe and renegotiate. He knows that we are at the end of the process and time is running out. He also knows, and I think regrets, that we are not ready for no deal. Is he not actually making a case to extend article 50 to get the right deal that he will support?

**Sir Christopher Chope:** No, I am not. Two years ago, we were told by the Prime Minister that nothing was agreed until everything was agreed and that everything was going to be agreed within two years. We now know that effectively nothing has been agreed, certainly as far as the future relationship is concerned. Just trying to buy more time will not solve the problem; we need to leave the European Union on 29 March and then we can have negotiations following on from that where we will be standing on a level playing field and able to stand up for our own interests. We will have called the European Union's bluff. It is trying to undermine our ability to be able to do what we want.

If someone is unsuccessful in a conflict, we expect the victor to impose conditions on the vanquished. What is happening here is that the European Union is seeking to impose conditions on us because we have the temerity to want to leave the European Union. That is wholly unacceptable and the Government's negotiating position has been supine throughout.

**James Cartlidge** (South Suffolk) (Con): In terms of imposing conditions, if we go to no deal, we will go immediately to default WTO terms, including tariffs on lamb exporters, for example, of 40%, and we will not have a Trade Bill—it will not pass at the moment—to enable us even to do anything about it. Does my hon. Friend not see that there are serious risks in going down that route?

**Sir Christopher Chope:** No, I will not engage in trying to respond to all the scaremongering. My hon. Friend is good at the scaremongering. Let us recall the fact that our Prime Minister has said that no deal is better than a bad deal. The House of Commons has said that this is a bad deal, so why do we not have no deal and get on with it, thereby delivering for the people the result they wanted in the referendum? Certainly, my constituents are looking eagerly towards the prospect of having no deal on 29 March.

**Jamie Stone** *rose*—

**Sir Christopher Chope:** No, I am not going to give way anymore. At a sitting of the Exiting the European Union Committee, I asked the Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Chris Heaton-Harris), what would happen on the Irish border on 30 March. It was conceded that on that date there would not be any difference from the current arrangements. That is an example of the scaremongering that is going on about no deal.

I regret that the Government did not prepare more actively and further in advance for the no-deal option, but we must not let them benefit from their incompetence by saying that we do not think we are ready for no deal. We should be ready for no deal on 29 March. That is

[Sir Christopher Chope]

why we need to accelerate the preparations for it. If I asked my constituents whether they had confidence in the Government, their reply would be, “Not a lot, but a heck of lot more than in the Labour Opposition.” They will have even more confidence in the Government if they are confident that the Government are not ruling out no deal and are stepping up preparations for no deal and if they can confirm unequivocally again that we will be leaving the single market and the customs union and that we will not have to have people coming into our country without any control over our borders.

2.56 pm

**Mr George Howarth** (Knowsley) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope), who just demonstrated why the Prime Minister’s offer to reach out to every section of the House and every section of opinion on Brexit will not work. There is nothing that the Prime Minister could do, other than a hard Brexit, that the hon. Gentleman would accept. That encapsulates part of the problem that the Prime Minister has to deal with.

During the Prime Minister’s statement to the House on Monday, I said that the statement she had made did not alter the real problems she had: first, she has no majority; secondly, because she has no majority, she has no authority; and thirdly, because she has no authority, her Government are effectively of no use to the country as a whole. I did not quite use those words, but that was what it amounted to.

I have listened carefully to the Prime Minister in the intervening periods, and she has offered nothing that anyone can work with. Had she been in the mode she was in following last night’s vote two years or even 18 months ago, reaching out across the Chamber to different parties and different strands of opinion, it might have produced something different that would have been acceptable to the vast majority of people. Like many others, I voted for article 50 in the hope that we would come up with a Brexit that would meet the expectations and hopes of my constituents. The problem is that the Prime Minister’s deal did not do that. That is why we are now in this position.

There has been a lot of comment about historical precedents in Parliament and how long it has been since a Government were defeated by such a margin. I decided in a conversation I had last night that I would look for other historical precedents that did not relate to Parliament, but to treaties, deals or bilateral agreements. I came across the treaty of Tordesillas of 1494. Even the hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) would probably struggle with that one. It was a treaty, effectively, between Spain and Portugal that tried to carve up the rest of Europe and decide who got which colonies. And guess what? The rest of Europe did not agree with it, and it eventually became defunct and was never implemented. I think the Prime Minister’s deal rather resembles that treaty.

The Prime Minister fought the last general election on the slogan that Britain needed a strong and stable Government. We have not had a strong and stable Government since the election, but, after last night’s events, it certainly is not strong, and, given all the

speculation about what is going to happen over the next few weeks, it certainly is not stable. That is why this motion of no confidence is timely and necessary.

I want to take issue with something the Prime Minister said in her speech. I am sure she meant it sincerely, but it does not represent the reality of life on the ground and in my constituency. Justifying why the Government wanted to go on, she said she was fighting against poverty and inequality. It simply is not true. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition went through a long list of problems with policy and the delivery of public services to demonstrate why that was not true, and I will not repeat those. In my constituency—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I am extremely grateful to the right hon. Gentleman and I apologise for interrupting him. The Opposition are very considerably disadvantaged by the malfunction of the time-keeping facility. [Interruption.] Yes, I am well aware of that. [Interruption.] Order. There is no need for hon. Members to stand. It is very unsatisfactory. Unfortunately, as I said to the House—yesterday, I think—those who put it right cannot do so while the House is sitting, but it is disadvantageous. I can appeal to the Whips to try to keep Members informed, and in deference to the seniority of the right hon. Gentleman, and in the expectation that he is approaching his peroration, I will happily allow him a further sentence.

**Mr Howarth:** A further sentence?

**Mr Speaker:** I appreciate it is difficult, but Members do know the minute situation when they stand. They might not know the second situation, but they do know the minute situation.

**Mr Howarth:** Mr Speaker, you know I always try to satisfy the demands you place on me, and I will do so now.

The Prime Minister said the Government were fighting poverty and inequality. She might try telling that to the over 8,000 people in my constituency who had to resort to food banks last year. Some 3,000 of the parcels distributed were for children. Does that sound like a Government fighting poverty and inequality? I think not. The Government have run out of ideas and run out of time.

**Mr Speaker:** I appreciate the right hon. Gentleman’s co-operation.

3.3 pm

**Neil Parish** (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): It is a great pleasure to speak in this debate.

I have full confidence in the Government and shall vote against the motion tonight. I have recently been surveying and canvassing in Axminster, Seaton, Tiverton, Cullompton and many of my other towns, and I am amazed at the true support for the Prime Minister out there on the street. It is quite amazing. They recognise that she has taken on an almost impossible job—to actually fulfil the referendum result. There was a people’s vote, and it took place in 2016. It was the largest vote in a generation, and there was a clear majority to leave the EU, and that is precisely what we must do.



Let us analyse this wonderful vote last night and how we got to this massive 230 majority. On one side, we have people on the Labour Benches who have not come clean about wanting to stop Brexit altogether. I must pay tribute to the Liberal Democrats and the Scottish nationalists. I disagree with them fundamentally, but the one thing they have done is come out in the open and say they are in favour of remaining in the EU. To those who want to deliver Brexit, however, I must say it is the Prime Minister who can do it.

On the one side, then, we had Opposition Members voting to thwart Brexit. On my own side, we had people who wanted to make sure it was the toughest Brexit ever. Those two lots of people have absolutely nothing in common.

**Mike Amesbury** (Weaver Vale) (Lab) *rose*—

**Neil Parish:** I will give way in a minute.

When the Leader of the Opposition stood up at the end and said, “We now need to stay in the customs union,” immediately there were huge groans from my own side, because that is precisely what they did not want.

The Prime Minister has to get this deal through. I very much support the Democratic Unionists over the border in Northern Ireland. We must make sure that the whole UK is treated the same, and so there is work to be done, but would a hard Brexit help the Northern Ireland-Ireland situation? Would it help food processing and agriculture? It certainly would not, because of the huge potential tariffs and problems at the border. I know very well that on the island of Ireland there is a huge mix of processing, from the pigs in the north to the lambs in the south, and with the milk going all the way around the island of Ireland. Let us be sensible and have Brexit, not a people’s vote. I give way to the hon. Member for Weaver Vale (Mike Amesbury).

**Mike Amesbury** *indicated dissent.*

**Neil Parish:** The hon. Gentleman is okay, although he asked to intervene.

**Dame Cheryl Gillan** (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Neil Parish:** I will.

**Dame Cheryl Gillan:** It is an honour to give my hon. Friend the opportunity to reflect on the next part of his speech by intervening on him. Does he agree, in the light of the parliamentary arithmetic last night and the vote today, that it would be infinitely better for this country to have the continued leadership of a Prime Minister who has the experience of negotiating so far, because it is only somebody with that experience and knowledge of the detail who can reach out successfully across the House to find a solution to this intractable problem?

**Neil Parish:** My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. We have a Prime Minister with the experience. We also have a Prime Minister who has stuck to her guns. In fact, she is hugely criticised for having done so. We have a Leader of the Opposition, however, who cannot work

out if he is in favour of another referendum, who is not quite sure how he would vote if there was one, and who does not know, if there were to be a general election, whether the Labour party would take Britain out of the EU or keep it in. Is this a leader who could negotiate with the EU? Certainly not. It could never happen.

We need to deliver. When I talk to people in my constituency, as everyone across the House does, whatever their party, most say, “What on earth are you getting so worked up about?”, “Why haven’t you done it?” and, “For goodness’ sake, get on and do it!” Why is the Prime Minister wrong and the House right? I voted and campaigned to remain, but I accept the result of the referendum. This House is not representative in any shape or form of the opinion of the people of this country. People might have changed a little. We might have a second referendum, and the result might be 48% to leave and 52% to stay. What would that cure? Absolutely nothing. Let us have a third referendum or a fourth! We have had a referendum, and we need to deliver on that.

I disagree entirely with the Opposition on bringing forward this motion, but I also say, in all sincerity, to my own side: we are the party of government. We were elected to govern this country and so we have to make a decision. We cannot sit contemplating our navels forever instead of making a decision. The idea seems to be just to drive us and drive us to secure the hardest Brexit possible, and it will just about destroy British agriculture. I know that the Brexit Ministers and others are just waiting to pour cheap food into this country: they will want cheap food to be delivered under Brexit, and that will hugely affect our farmers.

For goodness’ sake, let us come together. Let us all, as a party, govern the country properly. Let us get a deal, and get out of the European Union.

3.10 pm

**Sir Vince Cable** (Twickenham) (LD): We have adequate justification for this no-confidence motion in the form of the numbers yesterday night. However, I want to address not the numbers, which speak for themselves, but the arrogance that lies behind them. We are in this position because when the referendum was conducted and concluded, this was treated as entirely a matter for the Conservative party, and the 48%—now, naturally, a majority—who voted the other way were totally disregarded. Unfortunately, the Prime Minister’s response today featured the same arrogance and unwillingness to listen that has brought us to this point.

We have a very badly divided country, but we need to ask why it is divided. Who divided it? The people were promised—not by the Prime Minister herself, but by her colleagues who, for the most part, have departed from the responsibility of government—things that cannot now be delivered. There are a lot of very angry and frustrated people out there, and whether we have Brexit or no Brexit, whether we have a referendum or no referendum, they will remain very angry.

My view, which I think many colleagues share, is that the mature and British way of dealing with this is to go back and reason with those people, to put the Government’s case and to accept the verdict that they are willing to pass on what the Government have negotiated, possibly with variations. However, the no-confidence motion

[*Sir Vince Cable*]

gives us another route, and, I think, a welcome one. We could have a general election that would help to resolve this issue. If the Leader of the Opposition were willing to say clearly, “I lead my party on the basis that we will have a people’s vote, and/or that Brexit will stop,” that would provide a clear dividing line which we could debate as a country, rather than engaging in a completely spurious debate about whether we should have a semi-permanent customs union or a permanent one.

My concern in respect of no confidence, however, is not simply about the handling of the Brexit negotiation. The simple truth is that the country has ground to a halt. Government is not functioning. As I have reminded the House, I was part of a Government that did work. It may have done unpopular things, but it worked. Decisions were made, and they are now not being made. Hundreds of civil servants have been taken away from the work that they should be doing to make Brexit preparations. Crises are simmering in the background in housing, the funding of local government, social care, the prisons and much else, and they are not being dealt with. The big mistakes that the Government have made on universal credit and the apprenticeship levy are not being rectified. No effective government is taking place.

However, the problem is not just that there is no government; we are seeing a horrendous waste of public money. I spent five years with my former colleague the present Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the right hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove)—who is sitting opposite me—scrimping to make savings of £1 million. The same people are now spending £4 billion on an exercise that has no purpose. Half the members of the Cabinet are saying publicly that no deal will not happen, and we will not use this money. It is a complete and utter waste. I spent five years in government, and I do not think that a single Minister was censured with a ministerial directive. Within the last few weeks, civil servants have started refusing to authorise Government spending because of the recklessness involved in it. We have had confirmation from the Department for Transport, and I believe that there are other cases.

We are seeing reckless financing, and we are seeing damage to the economy. When I left government, we had been through a very difficult time, but ours was the most rapidly growing country in the G7. It is now the slowest. Even the Government now acknowledge that Brexit, however it is done, will damage the economy. So what must happen now? I think that two things must happen.

First, we must have absolute clarity about stopping no deal. Half the Cabinet are going around telling businesses and others that it will not happen, and they are right to do so, but the Prime Minister herself must say that it is a ludicrous, damaging proposition. As for the glib idea that it would somehow be possible to have World Trade Organisation rules, I wrote an article yesterday in my favourite Liberal newspaper, *The Daily Telegraph*, explaining why it is so absolutely absurd.

No deal must be stopped, and we must then move on to the fundamental question of how we can secure the endorsement of the public for how we move forward.

3.15 pm

**Justine Greening** (Putney) (Con): I will support the Government today. This is absolutely no time for a self-serving general election called by the Labour party. What the British public now need the House to do is focus our efforts on finding a route to follow on Brexit.

The challenge of Brexit is not about whether it is Labour or Conservative; the challenge is precisely that Brexit is above party politics, and that is one of the principal reasons why the House has faced so many difficulties in trying to find a route on which people can coalesce. The British electorate have grown steadily more and more tired of some of the dysfunctional party politics that they see in our country, which too often prioritises short-term, press-release politics playing to its core base, irrespective of whether that reflects the position of the British public. Politicians should be able to work across parties if necessary to make the long-term decisions and deliver on the ground for the future generations of the British people.

I may have had my criticisms of my own Government and their strategy on Brexit. I think it was wrong to disenfranchise the 48%, and tactically inept then to disenfranchise the 52% by not delivering the Brexit for which they clearly felt that they were voting. However, all that we have seen from the Opposition is, as one of their own said yesterday, dither and delay. I think that many people, when they look back on this time in our history, will feel that both Front-Bench teams failed to rise to the challenge of delivering Brexit and a route forward.

The reality that we must all understand is that party politics will not solve Brexit. Every single minute that we spend in the Chamber today debating whether or not we should have a party-political general election is a minute lost, when we could have been talking about what kind of consensus there is in the House for some sort of route forward on Brexit—and all the time the clock is ticking down. The big question that we must all ask, and answer, is “How do we, as a Parliament, chart a route?” What I would say to Ministers, and to the Prime Minister in particular, is that this is not her Brexit process. The process on Brexit belongs to all of us. It belongs to our communities, and we must now work together to find a path forward.

That has two clear implications. First, it is now imperative for the Prime Minister not just to talk to the House and to parties, but to listen to what MPs are saying. Secondly, however, she needs to go beyond that and allow the House to vote on the different and clear options that lie ahead, just as we were able to have a meaningful vote last night on her deal. That, ultimately, is how we find out whether there is a consensus on anything.

Many Members clearly feel that delivering on Brexit now means that, if necessary, we should depart with no deal. We should have a proper vote on that to test the will of the House. Others feel that a different version of a soft Brexit—they may call it Norway, Common Market or 2.0—is now the route on which we could find consensus. The House should be allowed to vote on that. Talks will not ultimately clarify the position, but they will risk wasting time that we simply do not have.

I believe that in the end, if it turns out that there is gridlock in this place and that, very much like the British public, we find it hard to coalesce on a single

route for which we can vote, we have to go back to people and ask them—not through a party-political election that will not fundamentally deliver—the question to which we need an answer: which of these three routes forward do they want? Do they want the Prime Minister's deal? The House might have got it wrong and the people want that deal, in which case they should be able to vote it through. Do they want a hard Brexit—getting on with it, leaving on WTO terms? If that is what they want, they should be able to have that. Or do they think the existing deal is the best one we have got? We do not know. This House will not find a route forward, and therefore we should have the confidence to allow the people their say.

3.20 pm

**Ms Angela Eagle** (Wallasey) (Lab): I rise to support this motion of no confidence because at this critical time in our history I believe we have a Government who are incapable of governing, let alone doing so in the national interest. Never have I witnessed in all my 27 years in Parliament a Government as inadequate and incompetent as this one. I have never witnessed a Prime Minister so inept that she has squandered all personal authority and goodwill, yet like a broken record she continues to insist on her right to carry on regardless.

This is a Government becalmed in a sea of their own troubles and neglecting the country: presiding over increasing levels of poverty, homelessness and inequality, and ducking crucial reforms on social care, leaving millions relying on charity to eat. The deep splits in the Conservative party consume all of its energies, and Brexit is like a black hole that devours all light, out of which literally nothing can emerge.

This is a Government who have failed badly even on their own terms. They have failed catastrophically on Brexit. They have failed to unite a country that their obsession with the EU divided in the first place. They have failed to deliver on the Prime Minister's personal promise to deal with "burning injustices", instead providing us with a parade of incompetent Ministers, unparalleled in any Administration since the second world war.

**Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): My hon. Friend makes a telling point. While the Government dither over Brexit, meanwhile back home we face the range of issues she has just talked about: food banks, unemployment and problems with the health service, education and so forth. One of the reasons why we want a general election is to deal with those things.

**Ms Eagle:** I agree with my hon. Friend. This Government are paralysed, dealing with their own obsessions, not with the real need and crucial policy issues in the country.

Yesterday's defeat on the draft withdrawal agreement was a catastrophic loss of the Prime Minister's own personal plan to engineer a hard Brexit in the UK, and it was entirely deserved. The Prime Minister has been humiliated by losing the vote on a plan she devised after little or no consultation with her own Cabinet. She finds herself in this position because of a series of colossal misjudgments that were entirely her own and for which she must now take personal responsibility.

**Chris Elmore** (Ogmore) (Lab): My hon. Friend is, as always, making an informed and detailed speech. Does she agree that it is only because of David Cameron's botched legacy of the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011 that the Government are able to ignore the will of this House? In any other circumstances, after losing on the figures of last night's vote, the Government would and should fall.

**Ms Eagle:** I entirely agree, and some of the imbalances caused by that Government in the way our unwritten constitution works need to be addressed.

The Prime Minister decided to kowtow to her own Brextremists rather than reach out. She tried to exclude Parliament from the process completely. She triggered article 50 without a plan and then called a general election, which shattered her own majority—but of course she is doing her best to avoid a general election now.

The UK is now angrier, more divided and more fearful for the future than I have ever known it, and democracy itself is being questioned. Instead of trying to bring the country back together by reaching out, the Prime Minister has set herself up as the embodiment of leave voters, ignoring those who voted to remain. Yesterday, she even dangerously claimed that she is now the champion of "the people" against Parliament. She has failed to unite the country because her only interest is in uniting the Conservative party, and that has proved to be impossible.

This is a Government who do not seem to understand that demanding that people unite around their own partisan viewpoint can never heal divisions. They are not capable of reaching out, listening, compromising and responding to genuine fears, and as such they are not fit for purpose.

On taking office, the Prime Minister promised to tackle "burning injustices" that made life difficult for those she called "just about managing." She failed to acknowledge that much of the suffering in our country has been caused by the previous Governments in which she was a senior member. This Government refuse to acknowledge that years of cuts in public expenditure targeted most heavily on the poorest have resulted in much of the suffering and burning injustice she promised to end. The Government have issued countless press releases and have held a series of never-ending consultations on everything from social care, restaurant tips and rogue landlords to domestic violence, but nothing has changed.

Instead the country has been presented with a parade of incompetent Ministers who were simply not up to the job: a Home Secretary forced to resign over the Windrush scandal and the "hostile environment", which saw UK citizens treated like criminals and deported back to countries they had left as small children; and a Transport Secretary handing out shipping contracts to a company with no ships and no access to commercial ports, and who presides over the chaos of the railway timetable disasters and blames everyone but himself—a man who cannot even organise a fake lorry jam on the M20. There have also been three Brexit Secretaries in two years, each of them undermined by the Prime Minister, and then there is perhaps the Prime Minister's crowning achievement: appointing the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) as Foreign Secretary—and she wonders why the UK is now a global laughing stock.



[Ms Angela Eagle]

This Government are paralysed by their own obsessions. They have proved incapable of addressing a country crying out for change. It is time for them to go.

3.26 pm

**Mr Sam Gyimah** (East Surrey) (Con): My right hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Justine Greening) hit the nail on the head when she said in her speech that, at a time of constitutional and political crisis in this country, every minute we spend on politics as usual and business as usual is a disaster for this country.

On the issue of Brexit, the Opposition have been completely absent from the field. It seems to me that the Leader of the Opposition has been gambling on chaos, believing that that will present him with the perfect opportunity to get into government and focus on his single-minded aim to introduce a Marxist “utopia” for this country. So on the issue of Brexit, Labour is not a Government-in-waiting; it is an Opposition in hiding.

Brexit is not the only issue, as the Opposition have said today, that we need to be debating. There are certain things that no Prime Minister of this country, irrespective of the political party they represent, should ever do. One of those things is to interfere with the territorial integrity of this country. No Prime Minister has the right to do that. Another thing is that no Prime Minister should side with our enemies or be an enemy of our institutions.

Perhaps we are wondering what the Leader of the Opposition would be like as Prime Minister—and that is important, because anyone who votes for no confidence in the Government is suggesting that he should be the Prime Minister of this country. We need only look at what happened to Labour Members with a dissenting voice. They were threatened by a mob, yet the Leader of the Opposition pretends that that had nothing to do with him. Many of us on this side of the House disagree with the Prime Minister—I am one of them—and we say so in the TV studios every now and again, but at least we can have the confidence that we will never need police protection for disagreeing with her on a matter of principle. That is what has happened in the Opposition.

**Rehman Chishti** (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that the first duty of the state is to protect its citizens. Given the Leader of the Opposition's previous comments about not having an Army, and his position on Trident, let us imagine him running this country. Does my hon. Friend agree that our country's security would be completely destroyed?

**Mr Gyimah:** I will come on to security in a second.

It is not just Labour Members who feel threatened by the mob. Journalists have needed protection at the Labour party conference, and it was one of Labour's own MPs who called their party institutionally racist. Also, 40% of British Jews would consider leaving this country. Why? Because the Leader of the Opposition has spent a lifetime hanging around with the likes of Hamas and Hezbollah.

**Naz Shah** (Bradford West) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr Gyimah:** I need to carry on.

No Prime Minister should be an enemy of our democracy or of our institutions. I was surprised to hear the shadow Justice Secretary say that we needed to ensure that our judiciary represented society. What could go wrong when politicians start trying to make our independent judiciary representative of our society?

The next point is security. During the 2017 general election, when I spoke to people on the doorstep and mentioned things like the IRA, some people said to me, “That was 30 years ago,” or “I don't know the difference between the IRA and the IMF.” Recently, however, we had a test case when Russian agents murdered an innocent person on British soil. In response, 147 Russian intelligence officers were expelled. Smaller countries such as Moldova, Estonia and Hungary also expelled Russian agents from their countries in support of us. To this day, we do not know whether the Leader of the Opposition supported that action. In fact, he said that we should send samples to the lead suspect in that murder case so that they could tell us whether or not they did it. That is very serious, because it sends a green light to every gangster that if this motion of no confidence goes through and the Leader of the Opposition becomes Prime Minister of our country, they will have a free pass. Putin and Assad will have a free pass—[*Interruption.*] Also, it suggests to the western alliance to which we are committed—[*Interruption.*] We are members of NATO—

**Naz Shah:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr Speaker:** Order. At the moment, the hon. Gentleman is not giving way.

**Mr Gyimah:** We are members of NATO, and we believe that an attack on one is an attack on all. We are committed to defending our allies. So what would happen if we had a Prime Minister who was not committed to NATO? The entire western alliance, and everything it is based on, would be completely undermined. I will vote with the Government today on the principle that there are certain things that no Prime Minister should ever do and that we cannot trust the Leader of the Opposition not to do them. That is why we should all vote to support this Government.

3.32 pm

**Nigel Dodds** (Belfast North) (DUP): Since yesterday evening, I have been struck by how many hon. Members have been assiduous in their entreaties that my hon. Friends and I should be present to speak in this debate and to vote in the Lobby in support of the Government, to prevent a general election. Indeed, some of those entreaties have even come from the Government side of the House. [*Laughter.*] Never mind the people in the country not wanting a general election; in terms of indicative votes, I think if people here had a real choice and a secret ballot, there would be an overwhelming majority against a general election.

Be that as it may, we have arrived at this debate in the aftermath of the proposition of the Prime Minister—and it really was her proposition—on the withdrawal agreement being defeated by a record majority. Last night's verdict was emphatic, and it requires lessons to be learned if the Prime Minister is to secure meaningful changes to

the withdrawal agreement. I trust that those lessons will be learned. Our view has been entirely consistent, in that we want a deal with the European Union to achieve an orderly exit from the European Union in March, but the backstop has been fatal to the proposed withdrawal agreement. That needs to be dealt with.

Following the general election, we entered into the confidence and supply agreement with the Conservative party, in the national interest, to pursue the agreed objectives as set out in that agreement. The support that we have secured for Northern Ireland in relation to the extra investment for the health service, education and infrastructure—regardless of constituency and regardless of political affiliation—has been widely welcomed by all fair-minded people in the Province.

On Brexit, we agreed to support the Government where they acted on the basis of our “shared priorities”—that is what the confidence and supply agreement states in terms. For us, one of our shared priorities, of course, is the preservation of the integrity of the United Kingdom and ensuring that we leave the European Union as one country, not leaving part of it behind under single market regulation while the rest is not subject to such rules made in Brussels. So we supported the Prime Minister when she said that she would secure a deal that would deliver on the verdict of the referendum—take back control of our money, our laws and our borders—and ensure that we left as one United Kingdom. We have delivered on our side of that agreement, ensuring that the Government have had the necessary supply, and ensuring a majority for the Government on the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill and other important legislation.

But on the issue of the Brexit backstop, as this House well knows, we do have a big difference with the Prime Minister, and so do the majority of Conservative Members who are not on the Government payroll, who oppose the Prime Minister’s deal as well. It is because the draft withdrawal agreement breaches the shared priorities for Brexit we signed up to that we have not been prepared to support it.

Now we have this no-confidence motion before us. We believe it is in the national interest to support the Government at this time so that the aims and objectives of the confidence and supply agreement we entered into can be achieved. Much work remains to be done on those matters.

As I said, I do not think that people in this country would rejoice tonight at the prospect of a general election were it to be called. I am not convinced that a general election would significantly change the composition of the House—and of course it would not change, whatever the outcome, the choices that lie before us all. The timing of this motion, as we well know, has got much more to do with the internal dynamics of the Labour party than a genuine presentation of an alternative programme for government.

We will support the Government on this motion this evening so that the Prime Minister has more time and has the space to focus now on acting in the national interest on Brexit. It is important that the Prime Minister now does listen and does deliver the Brexit that ensures that the whole United Kingdom leaves the European Union together.

3.37 pm

**George Freeman** (Mid Norfolk) (Con): It is a privilege to follow the right hon. Member for Belfast North (Nigel Dodds).

We gather this afternoon to debate the Leader of the Opposition’s motion that he should be Prime Minister. That, I think, will unite the Conservative party more than any other motion, and indeed unite the nation—long overdue after the divisions of Brexit.

If you will forgive me, Mr Speaker, I want to ask, channelling my inner “Monty Python”, “What have the Conservatives ever done for us?” Let us ask, “What has this great party ever done for us?” [*Interruption.*] Hon. Members are right: our record may not pass scrutiny when one thinks about the mess we inherited from the Opposition. We have stabilised the public finances, cut the Labour deficit by 80%, led a jobs-led recovery, creating over 1 million jobs; we inherited unemployment of 2.5 million—[*Interruption.*] The Opposition are barracking because they do not like to hear it, or hear it broadcast to the nation, but the nation should hear it. We have created over 1 million jobs in an extraordinary jobs-led recovery applauded by the International Monetary Fund.

**Naz Shah** *rose*—

**George Freeman:** I will give way when I have finished this point.

We have introduced a national living minimum wage, helping over 2.4 million workers. One would think that Opposition Members would cheer that, but no—they are not cheering because they want this election for a different reason. I will continue the list. We have introduced over 3 million apprenticeships, giving a whole generation of non-academic youngsters access to the workplace. We have introduced welfare reforms. While I do not think that we have got those totally right, the Opposition have taken every opportunity not to introduce sensible and positive reforms and work with us, but to vote against every single welfare reform on principle, flying in the face of the public’s wish for a welfare system that is there for those who need it but is not taken advantage of. Not only that, but we have introduced tax cuts for the lowest paid—not the highest paid, on whose earnings we rely to fund public services, but the lowest paid. Some 32 million of our lowest-paid workers have benefited from Conservative and Liberal Democrat-led tax cuts under the coalition Government.

I have not finished, Mr Speaker, because not only have we put in the money to the NHS that Labour promised at the last election, but we have put in more. With £20 billion of funding, the NHS is always safe under Conservative leadership. We have introduced a massive commitment on mental health, for which I pay personal tribute to the Prime Minister. This party, not the Opposition, made it clear that parity between mental and physical health must be achieved.

We have introduced a pioneering industrial strategy that has been welcomed by Peter Mandelson—once a distinguished member of the Labour party’s Front Bench—and I am proud to have played my part in it. We have also committed to spend 2% of GDP on defence and have launched two new aircraft carriers and a new fleet of fighters. That is not enough, but defence is safe in this country. Even on housing, where we have not

[George Freeman]

achieved all that we should, we have built 1.3 million homes, 400,000 of which are affordable—more than the Labour party, which is complaining now, ever did in its 13 years in power. We have also led a renaissance in education, with over 1.9 million children now in schools judged by Ofsted as good or outstanding—1.9 million more than under Labour. Labour wants a vote of no confidence in this Government, but that is a record of which no one should be ashamed.

**Richard Graham** (Gloucester) (Con): My hon. Friend is making a good case for why this should be a vote of no confidence in Her Majesty's occasionally loyal Opposition, but does he agree that it should also be a vote of no confidence in the EU's negotiators, who have continually failed to provide the legally binding annexe on the backstop that would make all the difference to the deal?

**George Freeman:** My hon. Friend is probably right, but I do not want to be distracted from focusing on the issue at hand.

Meanwhile, the Leader of the Opposition—our putative future Prime Minister—has broken promise after promise. On tuition fees, he promised a younger generation that he was going to reverse them and then reversed the promise. On debt, he wants £1,000 billion extra in borrowing and spending, taking us right back to square one after we tidied up the mess that we inherited. Mayor Khan has presided over a knife-crime epidemic in London. He talks about it but does not deal with it. The shadow Home Secretary, Diane Abbott, cannot add up, let alone defend the police when they try to clamp down on crime. The truth is that the Labour Front-Bench team are exploiting the Brexit divisions—[*Interruption.*] I hear the heckling from Labour Members. They do not like what I am saying, but they are going to have to hear it if they want a vote of no confidence. I will not dwell on the appalling unleashing of bigotry and intolerance on the Labour Front Bench that has turned a once-great party into a disgrace.

On Brexit, the truth is that Jeremy Corbyn, the Leader of the Opposition, is the Scarlet Pimpernel of Brexit. In the north, they seek him here, the champion of Brexit for the northern Labour seats. In the south, they seek him there, the champion of remain. [Interruption.] The truth is that the Labour Front-Bench team, who are heckling me now, have more positions on Brexit than the “Kama Sutra”. Will the real Jeremy Corbyn please stand up? In the pantomime politics—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. This tendency of Members on both sides of the House to refer to other Members by name is quite wrong. Stop it.

**George Freeman:** Will the real right hon. Member for Islington North please stand up? To channel my inner Leader of the Opposition, I was speaking this morning to Mark from Castleford on talkRADIO, who said to me that we do not need an election, because we do not have an Opposition, that Labour do not have a policy, so there is no choice, and that we need Parliament to get on and implement Brexit.

By contrast to the cowardice of the Labour Front-Bench team, I want to highlight the bravery of many Labour Back Benchers, particularly the Members who had the

guts last night to stand up for their constituents and vote for a moderate, sensible Brexit. The hon. Members for Dudley North (Ian Austin) and for Bassetlaw (John Mann) and the right hon. Members for Rother Valley (Sir Kevin Barron) and for Birkenhead (Frank Field), along with the hon. Members for North Down (Lady Hermon) and for Eastbourne (Stephen Lloyd), knew that if we break our promise to the British people, this place's credibility will be damaged.

Parliament must sort the situation out. I welcome the Prime Minister's conversion to cross-party discussions, and I hope that the real right hon. Member for Islington North enters the room.

3.44 pm

**Helen Jones** (Warrington North) (Lab): I rise to support the motion not simply because the Government have made a mess of Brexit, although they have, but because of the damage that they have inflicted on people in constituencies such as mine and to the fabric of our society. Both those things are linked in the character of the Prime Minister, who is so narrow in outlook that she could not reach out across this House to get a Brexit deal that we could all support. Instead, she chose to draw red lines to appease the extremists on her own Back Benches. She talks of the national interest but, in fact, she acts in her own interest of retaining power. Just as she cannot see further than that, she is unable to appreciate the circumstances in which many of our fellow citizens live.

There are people in constituencies such as mine who go out to work every day of their life and are still having to go to food banks to feed their children, because they earn so little or because they are on zero-hours contracts. We see others, too, every week in our surgeries. Elderly people who have worked all their life cannot get the social care they deserve in their old age. A lady came to see me recently who cares for a sick husband, who has now taken on the care of her two grandchildren, both incredibly damaged in their early lives, and who is now denied the adaptations she needs for her home as there is no money left because local government funding has been cut so much. Another lady I have seen is a victim of domestic violence, and she has been asked to take on her two children because it was feared that her former partner was now abusing them. She did, but she is now trapped in a one-bedroom flat because of the scarcity of affordable social housing.

These are not the shirkers and the shysters of Tory imagination; these are people who are doing the right thing and going out to work every day to earn their poverty. That has come about not by incompetence—I could probably forgive the Government for being incompetent—but as a result of the deliberate policy of cutting back the services on which so many people in our society depend. The Government boast of spending record amounts on schools, but that is because there are more pupils. In fact, they have cut spending on pupils by 8%, and by 25% in sixth forms. And who suffers? Those who depend on state education.

Who suffers from the lack of affordable housing? Children who are trapped in unsuitable accommodation and who can neither study to improve their prospects nor even grow up healthy. The Government accuse the Labour party of putting a burden on people's future, but the burden is due to what the Government are



causing now—the lack of opportunities. There is a lack of opportunity to get a decent education, to grow up properly and to make the best of life. That is due to the Government's constant attack on public services.

The Government loaded nurses with the burden of debt when they abolished bursaries. They chose to wage war on junior doctors. They sacked thousands of police officers, prison officers and police community support officers. This was a deliberate policy, and it is not just individuals whom the Government target but whole regions of this country.

Only a Government who do not care about the north could wash their hands of the chaos that is Northern rail. Only a Government who do not care about the north could maintain a system of local government finance that imposes the biggest cuts on the poorest local authorities, mostly in the north. Then they tell them to raise the precepts without knowing that in the north-west 42% of properties are in band A and in Surrey 75% of properties are in band D or above. Local authorities in the north cannot raise the same amount of money on the same rise in council tax. Spending has been totally divorced from need.

I have no confidence in this Government not just because they are incompetent but because they have no confidence and no faith in the people of this country.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Before I call the hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Mrs Grant), who has been advised that she will be the first to be subject to a four-minute limit, I have first to announce the results of the deferred Divisions.

On the question relating to energy conservation, the Ayes were 330 and the Noes were 240. Of those Members representing constituencies in England and Wales, the Ayes were 302 and the Noes were 233, so the Ayes have it.

On the question relating to UK participation in the EU Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation, the Ayes were 577 and the Noes were 20, so the Ayes have it.

*[The Division lists are published at the end of today's debates.]*

3.49 pm

**Mrs Helen Grant** (Maidstone and The Weald) (Con): I am very confident that a great future awaits the UK after we have left the EU. We are the fifth largest economy; our judicial system is revered the world over; our time zone allows us to trade with Asia in the morning and the Americas in the afternoon; we have the greatest diplomatic service in the world; and, crucially, nations across the globe want to do business with us, thanks to many of the achievements of this Government since 2010.

To seize those opportunities as we leave the EU, this House and our country need to come together. That will require determination, effort, spirit and compromise—from us all. We need to treat each other with more respect and work harder to understand the different points of view.

**Neil Gray** (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): I will be supporting this no-confidence motion for a number of reasons. I could go into any of those, be it universal credit or any

other area. One key reason why the Prime Minister has let our constituents down is that this was her plan for Brexit, with her red lines, and she has failed to get it through. Does the hon. Lady not believe that the Prime Minister has to take some responsibility, accept some blame and stop blaming everybody else?

**Mrs Grant:** That point has been covered on a multitude of occasions, today and in previous debates. I am not going to eat into my time by addressing it, because I have some important and different points to make.

A well-known expression is, "If you're shouting, you're losing." At the moment, many of us, on both sides of this House, seem to be shouting. Like many colleagues, I have witnessed, on a daily basis, taunts and lurid language as I have gone about my business near the parliamentary estate. Sadly, this has been with an ever-present apprehension of a brick being lobbed or someone being punched. As a former domestic violence lawyer, I know too well that when tensions reach fever pitch, as they are right now, it is so easy for a situation that starts with some shouting and jeering to escalate into physical abuse and worse. All this needs to stop.

It is our duty and responsibility, as parliamentarians, to find a solution that ends this Brexit deadlock and delivers for the British people. They need that and deserve it. The answer is not a vote of no confidence in this Government. No one could have worked harder and more patriotically than our Prime Minister to deliver this Brexit. The answer is not a second referendum, with all that division and uncertainty. The answer is certainly not a general election. We were also recently elected and re-elected in 2017. Our job is to take difficult decisions and find answers. That is what we are here to do. Our constituents rightly expect us to deliver. It is for this House to find a solution that works. We must come together. We must stop playing party political games, be willing to compromise and put the interests of our constituents and country first. I will be supporting the Government today.

3.53 pm

**Mr Ben Bradshaw** (Exeter) (Lab): I am delighted that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition has tabled and secured this motion. I shall of course be voting for it and I hope it wins, because my constituents and the country desperately need a Labour Government. I was proud and privileged to serve in the last Labour Government, and I know what a transformative power for the better a Labour Government can be. We also desperately need a Labour Government to steer this country through and out of the current Brexit crisis. So I hope we win tonight's vote and get a chance to change the Government, but we need to be honest with ourselves and the public. If we do secure and win an election, we will still be facing the worst crisis in our peacetime history, because of the mess the Tories have made of Brexit.

A general election in the current circumstances would, whether we like it or not, be a Brexit election. We would need to be absolutely clear about what our position was and what we would do in government. I have heard some suggestions that we should promise to deliver a better Brexit; given the overwhelming views of Labour members and voters, I am not convinced that that would be a winning strategy. I would hope that we

[*Mr Ben Bradshaw*]

would listen to our members and voters, and to the country, which is tiring of this Brexit shambles, and either campaign on a policy of staying in Europe or, failing that, promise to try to renegotiate a better deal before putting that back to the people in another referendum.

Let us be frank, though: the likelihood is that we will not win tonight's confidence vote. In those circumstances, it is vital that we all put the national interest first and find some way out of the current crisis. More no-confidence motions, which some have suggested, are not the answer, and the shadow Chancellor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell), was right absolutely to rule that option out on the radio this morning. There is no time for any more can-kicking at this moment of national crisis. We need decisions and we need leadership.

The Government—if they are still the Government after tonight's vote—have the main responsibility here. They do not seem to have learned anything from last night's catastrophic defeat. They are still sticking to their red lines and still failing to reach out to the official Opposition. It is absolutely extraordinary that after the Prime Minister's assurances last night she has not bothered to pick up the phone to the Leader of the Opposition. It is a disgrace. The Leader of the House also indulged in yet more fiction this morning when she claimed on the radio that the Opposition did not have a policy. We do. She might not like it, but we do, and if the Government are serious, they need to talk to the Opposition about it.

**Angus Brendan MacNeil** (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): The right hon. Gentleman absolutely hits the nail on the head in respect of the Prime Minister. In her response to the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald) at Prime Minister's questions today, she could not even think of a compromise on her red lines. That shows that she really is not in the right mode; she is still in the mode she was in yesterday afternoon, before she was thumped in last night's vote.

**Mr Bradshaw:** The Prime Minister is in a total state of denial. We are not going to get anywhere unless that changes.

I am extremely doubtful that we have the time or the votes in this House for a renegotiation of the withdrawal agreement along Norway lines, or for any other Brexit alternative, but if people think we do, let us put that to the test in votes next week. If, when all the other options are tested, none can command a majority and Parliament remains gridlocked, the only option left will be to give the decision back to the people, as the shadow Chancellor also said on the radio this morning.

**Mr Seely:** Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr Bradshaw:** No, I am not giving way.

Giving the decision back to the people also has the advantage of being official Labour party policy, agreed unanimously at our conference. There would be bewilderment and dismay among Labour Members, voters and the wider public, who are looking to us for leadership, if, at this critical time, we failed to provide it.

Let me say one final thing to those in my own party who still fear or oppose another referendum: a public vote to get out of this Brexit mess is also the surest-fire way to secure the general election that we on the Opposition Benches desire, because when the public reject the Government's botched Brexit deal, as they will, no Government dependent on the votes of the hard-line Brexiteers and the DUP will survive.

3.57 pm

**Johnny Mercer** (Plymouth, Moor View) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak in this debate.

Yesterday was clearly a tough day—a tough day for the Prime Minister and for Government Members—but today is not. By calling a vote of no confidence and looking for a general election, the Leader of the Opposition has proved that his view is what I have always considered it to be: that politics is just a game, and that all that matters is this posturing and the endless clipping of TV clips of him shouting at the Prime Minister. The reality is that people just want to get on with Brexit and get it done. There is no appetite for a general election. There is a huge challenge now. If people continue to think that Brexit is a Conservative problem—that only the Conservatives can deal with Brexit—they fundamentally misunderstand why people voted to leave the European Union. A challenge has been presented to the political class that we must find a way to answer, but to which absolutely no answers are coming from the Leader of the Opposition.

**Neil Gray:** The hon. Gentleman talks about politics being a game, but all this is more about self-interest. Eighteen months ago, calling a general election was apparently in the national interest, but Government Members now have no interest at all in doing so. Why is that?

**Johnny Mercer:** The hon. Gentleman knows my views on a lot of what has gone on, including on the calling of that general election, but this is about today—this is a different moment. We are 18 months down the line. Let us be honest about what would happen in a general election. We would not have the normal election between centre left and centre right parties. The Opposition Front-Bench team advocates a hard-left programme that has singularly destroyed almost every single country in which it has been practised. It uses what can only be described as sincerely held dishonesty to claim that it will look after some of the most impoverished people in this country, when in fact it is those impoverished people who will pay the biggest price from a Government who are represented by Labour Members.

**Alex Chalk** (Cheltenham) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that there is no social mobility in bankruptcy and that it is only if we have a prosperous economy that is generating opportunity that we can deliver that kind of social mobility?

**Johnny Mercer:** My hon. Friend hits the nail on the head. It is rank hypocrisy that comes out of Opposition Members when they talk about social justice and equalising life chances—that fantastic phenomenon that, no matter where a person is born in this country, whether it be Manchester, Plymouth, London or Chelsea, and no matter whether they are gay, black, white or whatever, the circumstances of their birth are irrelevant because

their opportunities are the same. That fundamental principle is in no way advanced whatsoever by the hard-left policies of massive government, massive tax, the taking over of private companies and the sucking out of money from the pockets of people who go out and work hard in this country every single day.

**David Morris:** Does my hon. Friend agree that every Labour Government in history have left the country in bankruptcy?

**Johnny Mercer:** I totally agree with my hon. Friend. We have just had to sit through a bizarre rant from a Member of the Opposition, who is now no longer in their place, who has this idea that people like me turn up in this place to impoverish people in the north and the south-west of this country. It is a repulsive suggestion that plays to the fantasy within which most Opposition Members live. It is a complete and utter load of rubbish.

**Naz Shah** *rose—*

**Johnny Mercer:** I will not give way again; I have given away enough already.

I really think that we should stick to the facts. The Prime Minister mentioned that there were 1 million fewer people in absolute poverty, 300,000 fewer children in absolute poverty and 2 million children in this country going to good or outstanding schools. These policies have genuinely affected the lowest paid in this country whom Opposition Members pretend to care about. If we look at income tax thresholds, those people are now keeping more of their money than they have ever kept before and the minimum wage has consistently gone up as a result of our policies.

I do not want to get on to the welfare state today, but it is one issue that made me join the Conservative party. I come from a fairly agnostic political space, which, I am afraid, is where the majority of this country comes from. Members may think that everybody is fascinated with politics, but I can assure them that they are not. The majority are agnostic. We had a welfare state that sapped the ambition from millions and millions of young people in this country by making them better off when they were out of work and on benefits than when they were in work. At least we on the Conservative Benches had the courage to try to correct that injustice in this country. That simply will not happen under Labour, which has been bribing people for votes for as long as I can remember. [Hon. Members: Shame!] Believe me, I feel no shame. [*Interruption.*] Opposition Members can shout at me as much as they want, but I feel no shame when they call that out.

We must do better though; everybody gets that. We must work together better and come together under one banner. We need a different approach. Nobody should misunderstand that. I say to the Prime Minister that she cannot keep doing the same thing and expect different results. She must change course, and we must meet the challenge. Politics is changing. We can ride on the front of that wave, crafting something that we can work with, producing policies that then change the lives of those people whom we come to work for, or we can laugh and sneer at it and be changed by events. We must change

with politics. It is an exciting time. We should see Brexit for the opportunity that it is, not the hospital pass that some would make us think it is. It is an opportunity. Let us seize that opportunity and change the country.

4.4 pm

**Liam Byrne** (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab): I am grateful for the chance to speak in this debate.

The essence of our argument was laid out with force, passion and eloquence by the Leader of the Opposition. The Prime Minister is this afternoon charged with the greatest political failure in modern times. On the most important question that this country faces, she has secured the biggest defeat that Parliament has ever delivered. That alone should be grounds for her to go. How on earth does she think she is going to command a majority in this House when she cannot command a majority on the biggest question of the day?

The truth is—the Leader of the Opposition made this point eloquently earlier—that the Prime Minister's failure of leadership stretches well beyond the failure of her policy on Brexit. It is often said that we campaign in poetry but we govern in prose. For me, the best definition of our poetry was set out back in 1945, when we offered that plan to reconstruct a war-weary nation and win the peace.

At that time we said, "What we need in this country is industry in service of the nation." Do we have that today? The Chancellor himself is the first to berate the terrible rates of productivity growth in our industry, which are worse today than they were in the late 1970s when we used to call it "British disease".

We said that everyone in this country should have the right, through the sweat of their brow, to earn a decent life. Yet half the people in work in the west midlands are in poverty. There are now people going to food banks who never thought they would be in this position.

Above all, we said to the people of this country that they should be able to live and raise a family free from fear of want. Well, on the doorstep of this Parliament people are dying homeless, including one of the 5,000 people who have died homeless over the last five years. Many people in this House know that I recently lost my father to a lifelong struggle with alcohol after he lost the woman he loved to cancer, a few years older than me. I know at first hand how a twist of fate can knock you down, but for millions of people in this country, a twist of fate knocks them on to the streets, on to the pavements and into the soup kitchens where I work in Birmingham on a Sunday night. That is not the sign of a civilised and decent country, and it is something of which this Government should be ashamed.

When the Prime Minister took her seals of office, she had the temerity to stand on the steps of Downing Street and say to an anxious nation that she was going to tackle the burning injustices of this country. She said that she was going to tackle the burning flames, yet those flames now rage higher than I have ever seen in my lifetime. She now leads a Government of shreds and patches, and the Opposition say that this country deserves better and that she should do the decent thing and resign.



4.7 pm

**Anna Soubry** (Broxtowe) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne). I do not agree with his conclusion in any sense because I think it would be grossly wrong for us to have a general election, but I do agree with him when he talks about some of the very real problems that exist in our country and that we have an absolute duty, as a Government, to start to address properly, ruthlessly in many respects and thoroughly. I am delighted that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions is already beginning that work. She is already looking at universal credit to ensure that we are delivering a system that is absolutely fair—not just for the taxpayer, but for the person who comes to rely on universal credit.

I also agree with the right hon. Gentleman that it cannot be right that we live in a country where people in work are relying on food banks. That is wrong. That is not the sort of country that we should have in 2019. Equally, we have a system whereby people in need are given food vouchers and not often cash, which they also might need. Again, that cannot be right, but it is good and right that changes are beginning to be made.

There is another problem. The Government are undoubtedly set on the right course, but they are often being diverted because of Brexit, which has swamped almost everything that we want to do and that I know we can do. There is a real democratic deficit opening up in our country. I agree with what my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer) said about the state of British politics and the extremism that is undoubtedly taking over. Anybody who tries to suggest that the Labour party has not been taken over by the far left is frankly living in fantasy land. Anybody who has any doubt about that only needs to look at the comments made on social media by Momentum and all the rest of it. The whole tone of British politics has been grossly diminished.

We all know—let us be honest—that many Labour Back Benchers are in fear of being deselected and fear the far left all the time. More importantly, this country should fear the far left, who have taken over the Front Bench of the Labour party. Goodness help us if they ever get into government, because they would undoubtedly cause the most appalling damage, especially to our economy.

**Angus Brendan MacNeil:** Will the right hon. Lady give way?

**Anna Soubry:** Of course I will take the extra minute.

**Angus Brendan MacNeil:** The right hon. Lady talked at the beginning of her speech about fairness. I would suggest that the problem is not so much fairness as resources. There are plenty of resources in this country; it is the distribution of resources that is the problem. That is why the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne) is in the soup kitchens of Birmingham on a Sunday night—because of the inadequate fairness of distribution of resources in the UK. That is why people reached to Brexit. That is why people are looking to weird places in the far left.

**Anna Soubry:** I do not agree with that analysis at all. The problem is that if we do not get the economy of our country sorted out and we do not have a strong economy,

we do not have the money to pay for the services that we need. We know that we need to tackle the greater problems, such as the fact that there is almost a crisis in social care, but there are no magic money trees. The great danger—I would say this, given my views on Brexit—is if we do not get Brexit right, and we know what the consequences of Brexit will be, whichever way we cut it, because the Treasury analysis has told us: it will make our country's fortunes less prosperous, and it will not be good for the economy of this country.

I want to return to the problem about democracy, because I am concerned. Everybody has almost given up on the Labour party, but my party also has to get it right. The Prime Minister has done her best; I do not doubt that for one moment. However, she had many opportunities—Members on both sides of the House have talked about this, and I did earlier today—at the outset to reach out, especially to the 48%, and ensure that she formed a consensus at the beginning, working across the parties.

There was undoubtedly a time when we could have got a consensus and a majority in this place, but unfortunately the Prime Minister pandered to a part of my party that has been there for a very long time, banging on about Europe. In my opinion, they do not represent the moderate, one nation, pragmatic Conservative party that I joined. Unfortunately, she has pandered to that side of my party, with great harm to our party, because if we ever lose that centrist, sensible, moderate, pragmatic, one nation conservatism, we will not succeed in winning again, especially among young people. I hope the Prime Minister changes her tone. The problem is her deal. If she wants to get Brexit sorted and deliver it, she has to change her deal, rub out her red lines and work with everybody.

4.13 pm

**Laura Smith** (Crewe and Nantwich) (Lab): I think it is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry), although I completely disagree with the lines she peddled about my party.

We all came to this place knowing that each of us has been given a mandate to represent the communities that elected us. No one party won the general election in 2017, but the Prime Minister was clearly able to command a functioning majority in the House of Commons, and we have all had to acknowledge that reality. I did not expect much from a Prime Minister who had promised a dementia tax, more grammar schools and an end to the ban on foxhunting, but I did have some hope that there were at least one or two policy areas where we might be able to park our party politics and begin to address the issues that matter most to the communities we represent.

For example, I know there are Conservative Members who share my concerns about funding for our schools. The Prime Minister included funding for our schools as a priority in her foreword to the Conservative party manifesto in 2017, which also committed to a real-terms increase in funding for our schools. Yet this Government have replaced one unfair schools funding formula with another, leaving schools in Crewe and Nantwich among the lowest-funded in the country. Cuts have meant that headteachers are using the pupil premium to keep their budgets afloat and parents are being asked by cash-strapped schools to pay for teaching resources.

I welcomed the commitment to tackle unfair executive pay and, to quote the Prime Minister, to build a “Britain in which work pays”.

Yet while CEOs have managed to scoop themselves an average 11% hike in their pay this year, ordinary working people’s real wages remain lower than where they were in 2010, and millions of working families are set to be worse off under the Government’s deeply flawed universal credit system.

During the 2017 election, I was pleased to hear the Prime Minister promise to fix what she admitted was a broken care system and to bring forward a social care Green Paper. In July of that year, the Government said that

“we cannot wait any longer—we need to get on with this”.—[*Official Report, House of Lords, 6 July 2017; Vol. 783, c. 987.*]

By the time we got to November, they told us that it would be here by the following summer. By the time we got to the summer, they told us to expect it in the autumn, and then, before the end of the year. We are a long way from 2017, when it was first promised, and there is still no sign of a Green Paper. In the meantime, care providers in Crewe and Nantwich have been placed in special measures, care workers have been all but ignored and the elderly and most vulnerable in our communities have been neglected by this Government, while they have pulled themselves apart over Brexit.

This Government have not just failed people in the way they have handled the Brexit negotiations. They have failed on the economy; they have failed on our public services; and they have been riding roughshod over Parliament, repeatedly ignoring the expressed view of this House. I am sure there are Conservative Members who will be deeply disappointed with this Government’s record. They get the casework and they see what effect this Government’s policies have on their constituents, and they should not vote against this motion out of self-preservation.

This is not simply about the Government pursuing policies that I disagree with or failing to meet my expectations; this is about a Government who are not even coming close to delivering on their own promises. What is more, we have seen more than once that the Prime Minister cannot command a majority in the House, and we have got to break this Brexit deadlock. This Government have failed our communities and left a trail of broken promises in their wake. I think it is time we gave those we represent a chance to turn their back on these failed policies, just as this Government have turned their back on their future.

4.17 pm

**Stephen Kerr** (Stirling) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Laura Smith). I rise to make a short contribution simply to state that I have full confidence in this Conservative and Unionist Government.

I also have full confidence in my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. She personifies duty. She is a patriot and a servant of our country and its people. She is a woman of integrity. She continues to serve the national interest with all diligence and is leading a Government who are dedicated to serving our national interest. We should be under no illusions. She was given the toughest job ever handed to a peacetime Prime Minister:

she has been asked to circle an impossible square. However, I have every confidence that, under her leadership, we will honour the instruction of the British people and leave the European Union in an orderly and managed way.

We must not lose sight of the real achievements of the past nine years of Conservative-led Government. The mess that Labour Members left—they always leave a mess behind them—is being cleared up. The deficit is down by four fifths. The public finances are being restored. The hard work of the British people is paying off. One thousand new jobs have been created every single day of this Government. Employment is at record levels and unemployment at a record low, and there is real growth in household earnings. We are delivering on our promise to make the United Kingdom the best country in the world in which to set up and scale up a business. We have the right approach.

**Naz Shah:** Will the hon. Gentleman confirm—it escapes me—whether the Conservative party manifesto also said, “We will increase food banks, increase child poverty and cut education funding in real terms.”?

**Stephen Kerr:** Absolutely not. We have the right approach to industrial strategy, the right approach to clean energy strategy and the right approach to new and evolving technologies. This Government are tackling the grand challenges of our times. We are on the side of our people and our planet. We are rolling out the most important reform of welfare services ever undertaken; we are investing in our NHS for the future; and we are resolved never to compromise on the defence of the realm against the background of an evolving threat to our freedom. We have a proud record of delivering practical help to the poorest people on the planet. In my constituency, this Government have delivered on a £90 million city deal, providing a bright economic future for everyone in our city and district.

Beyond that, we have a Prime Minister who believes in the Union. That is core to who I am and what I stand for. Her belief is heartfelt. Other people may have the words, but she has the conviction, and her Government are committed to strengthening the Union. I remind colleagues—we must never forget this—that the nationalists and socialists on the Opposition Benches are waiting in the wings, and we have a duty to our country never to allow them anywhere near the seat of government.

4.21 pm

**Vernon Coaker** (Gedling) (Lab): I wish the hon. Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer) were still in his place, because we would have the kind of clash of opinion we want in this House. He suggests that when Opposition Members talk about child poverty, say it is an absolute horror to walk past homeless people on the street as we walk into Parliament and point out that this Government drive people to food banks as public policy—the Government see food banks not as charities run by good people as volunteers but as a matter of public policy—they advocate a hard-left programme. I will tell him something: if that is a hard-left programme, I will stand on it in my constituency and across the country. We are not frightened of saying that; we are not frightened of saying we believe this country deserves better; and we are not frightened of saying we can do better.

[*Vernon Coaker*]

I want to come on to Brexit, but let me first say this. I accept that Government Members are not uncaring about homelessness—I would not suggest that for one moment—but it is an indictment of the Government that school pupils cannot get the special needs support they want and that people in hospitals cannot get the care they want. Those things do not land from the moon. They do not just happen. They are a consequence of the policies people in this House voted for.

**Alex Chalk** *rose*—

**Mr Seely** *rose*—

**Vernon Coaker:** I will not give way, because loads of people want to speak and I want to be fair to them.

It is only because of those policies that those things happen. People across the country realise that. I will stand on what my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition says is important for this country—I am perfectly happy to do that—but I will also list the voting record of every single Conservative Member and tell the people of this country what they voted for. We see the consequences of those policies every single day.

Let me just say this with respect to the Prime Minister. We are debating a motion of no confidence, which is not likely to be passed. It is a constitutional and political dilemma for this country that we as a House are going to say we have confidence in a Prime Minister we have no confidence in. This is a complete and utter constitutional fiasco. The majority yesterday was 230, yet the Prime Minister clings on. She says she is the person to deliver a Brexit. I think there is a parliamentary majority for a sensible way forward, but we do not have a Prime Minister who can deliver that parliamentary majority. That is the problem she has: she is in hock to a part of her party that prevents her from building consensus across Parliament.

I wonder what the result of the vote tonight would be if the motion before us was one of no confidence in the Prime Minister's ability to deliver the Brexit this country needs or to take this country forward. For many, such a motion, rather than one of general no confidence in the Government, would pose a real dilemma. The Prime Minister needs to reach out. She needs to build consensus, starting with Labour Front Benchers and other parties in Parliament. In that way, she might be able to bring the country together and take us forward in a united way.

4.25 pm

**Richard Drax** (South Dorset) (Con): I am a former soldier. During my military career, we were given an aim and an execution to carry out that aim. The Government were given an aim by the people of this country—to leave the EU. The execution of that aim has, sadly, gone wrong for many reasons. I will not stand here today and overly criticise my Government, although I will make one point. I wish some Members on the Treasury Bench would stop accusing the likes of me of perhaps ruining Brexit. That is not my aim. I voted against the Government last night because the deal is not in the national interest and would not deliver Brexit. It would keep us half in, half out, with no one in the room to stand up for our country. There were many other reasons, including the backstop.

In my humble opinion, the problem we have is that there is a disconnect. Today, I have heard many hon. Members on both sides of the House give perfectly reasonable speeches responding to the vote last night, which was a huge defeat for the Government, but what I have also heard is that, in most cases, there is no consensus in this House on following through on what the people of this country told us to do. We were told to leave the EU, and in the vote last night—a catastrophic defeat—117 of my colleagues voted against the Government. The rest of those who voted against the Government—the majority of them—did so for a number reasons. Some do not want Brexit at all; some want a second referendum; some want a general election.

**Mrs Anne Main** (St Albans) (Con): Does my hon. Friend share my concern about asking for a second referendum? Why should anyone trust referendums or any electoral process if, when we are given a mandate to do something, we do not follow it through?

**Richard Drax:** I agree, and in my short speech on Monday I made exactly that point. How can any of us go to our constituency with our political manifesto and tell people, “This is what we are going to do,” when quite clearly we do not do what we say we are going to do? Who in this country will believe us?

This debate is not about personal views. The personal views of Members are hugely diverse and different, and I respect that. There are 650 of us, and I suspect that every right hon. or hon. Member has a view on something, but the people of this country, to whom we gave a vote, told us to execute leaving the EU.

What to do next? I have great sympathy for my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. She has been handed a can of worms—an extremely difficult issue which I suspect no one in this House could manage either better or worse. However, may I suggest that she gets back on her feet and deals more firmly with the EU? I believe that if we, as the United Kingdom, had stood like a rock to say, “We want a deal—of course we do. We want to be your friends and your allies, but we want to be in charge of our destiny,” the EU would by now have said, “We hear you. You are one of our major trading partners. Of course we want to deal with you and remain friends with you, because you are friends of ours and will continue to be so.”

I advise Ministers to go back to the EU as fast as they can—people say there is no time, but the EU has a wonderful way of moving quickly if it needs to. The Prime Minister must say to the EU, “I have heard the voice of the House—the home of democracy. I cannot get this deal through. We need far more flexibility than you have been prepared to offer. For example, remove the backstop.” I think that then she could come back and get the agreement of the House. Then, we could get on with Brexit, which is antagonising millions of people across the country.

**Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): How does my hon. Friend interpret what the Prime Minister said last night about reaching out to the other side of the House? If we are to take both sides of the House with us and bearing in mind that a majority of right hon. and hon. Members in this House are for remain and not for leave, does that not mean that the Prime Minister will end up with an even softer Brexit than the one she has proposed?



**Richard Drax:** Nothing would delight me more than if every single MP in the House said, “Let’s get behind the Prime Minister. Let’s deal with Brexit. Let’s get out of the EU while remaining a good trading partner with them. Let’s get on with our lives.” I am absolutely convinced that this country will do well and prosper and flourish as an independent country, as we were for many hundreds of years before we joined the EU. When we leave, we will flourish. Of that, I have absolutely no doubt. I inform my right hon. Friend that I had a message from the Chief Whip this morning. I asked him to confirm that the date of 29 March is still very much Government policy, and I have it here in black and white that it is.

No one wants a no-deal Brexit. I have been accused of being an extremist and of this and that. I have been accused of wanting to crash out and all this cliff-edge nonsense. I do not want to do that, but we have to have a stick to wield at the EU if we are to negotiate properly. If ultimately it cannot give us a deal, then we leave on WTO terms, which most of the world trades on peacefully and effectively. It will be bumpy—leaving the place after 44 years will be—but we will manage because we are a great country. We will survive, flourish and do well. [HON. MEMBERS: “Survive?”] Not survive. “Flourish” is the word I used. According to the doomsters, we are all doomed. I am saying that we will not be doomed; we will flourish. I say to those on the Front Bench, let us get on with it and deliver Brexit.

4.32 pm

**Wes Streeting** (Ilford North) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for South Dorset (Richard Drax), because his speech shows the level of so many Members’ detachment from the absolute reality of the complexity of the Brexit negotiations and what the Prime Minister is trying to achieve. They are divorced from the reality of the negotiations, from the consequences for the people we represent and from the conditions in which people are already living in this country. They say, “We will survive. There will still be food on the table. There will still be Mars bars and packets of crisps,” but that was not the promise made to people during the referendum. The people were promised something better. Just as the rats have deserted the sinking ship of the Cabinet, so the promises went with them. My constituents who voted leave are now being offered something far less optimistic than the rosy, pie in the sky promises made during the referendum.

The debate is not about the referendum; it is about whether we have confidence in Her Majesty’s Government. It is striking that so few Members are coming along to defend the Government and that so few have bothered to talk about the Government’s record. There was one speech during the debate on the withdrawal agreement that captured perfectly why so many people voted to leave. It was made by the hon. Member for Bournemouth West (Conor Burns), who said:

“I think Brexit was a great cry from the heart and soul of the British people. Too many people in this country feel that the country and the economy are not working for them, and that the affairs of our nation are organised around a London elite. They look at the bankers being paid bonuses for the banks that their taxes helped to rescue. They look at our embassies in the Gulf that are holding flat parties to sell off-plan exclusive London properties, when they worry about how they will ever get on to the housing ladder. They worry that they may be the first generation who are not

better off than their parents, and they want to see a system back that spreads wealth and opportunity.”—[*Official Report*, 14 January 2019; Vol. 652, c. 922-923.]

What the hon. Gentleman neglected to say, and what so many people who sit on the Government Benches will not acknowledge is that every single one of those problems was made in Britain.

It is this place that is responsible for the gross inequality of the country, and it is the party opposite that has prosecuted the policies that have led to half a million more children living in poverty than when we left Government nine years ago. It is the party opposite that has left 4 million working people living in poverty. It is the party opposite that has pursued punitive benefits policies resulting in people sleeping rough not just on the streets of our constituencies, but on the doorsteps and entrances to this Palace, literally dying under our feet. Despite that, it takes not a shred of responsibility and makes not a single offer of hope.

**Luke Graham** (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): During the remain campaign, the hon. Gentleman and I were on the same side of the debate. I am sure he remembers the Leader of the Opposition not turning up to events, not willing to contribute to the overall UK remain campaign and not playing his part to keep the UK in the EU. What will he do differently this time to get his leader to participate in this debate?

**Wes Streeting:** This is not the afternoon for the hon. Gentleman to lecture me about holding my leadership to account. This is an afternoon for him and every other Conservative Member to hold their rotten Government to account for the policies that are making his constituents and mine poorer. We have heard a lot about the Leader of the Opposition this afternoon. If they think he is as terrible as they have said, maybe they can explain why, the Prime Minister having confidently called a general election with the promise of a huge sweeping majority, so many Conservative Members lost their seats. I will tell them why. It is because, when it comes to tackling the chronic housing crisis, the crisis in our schools, the crisis in the NHS and the crisis that hits people in their pockets, the Leader of the Opposition is more in touch with people in this country than the Prime Minister and the Tories will ever be. That is the truth.

**Mr Seely:** If that is the case, will the right hon. Gentleman explain why so many on his side—173 MPs, I think—refused to back his leadership?

**Mr Speaker:** The hon. Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting) has just been elevated to the Privy Council. I trust his note of appreciation to the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr Seely) will be in the internal post today.

**Wes Streeting:** It has been a long time coming, Mr Speaker.

I say with some humility to the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr Seely) that this really is not the afternoon for Conservative Members to talk about motions of no confidence. Not only did more than half their Back Benchers declare no confidence in the Prime Minister and her leadership, but this afternoon is about confidence in the Government. He should be defending the Government’s record.

[*Wes Streeting*]

This debate is not just about gross inequality and what is happening to the very poorest in our society. Nine years ago, we were told we had to tighten our belts, that things would be hard and that difficult choices would have to be made, and the majority of people believed and accepted that and voted in the way they thought best. Nine years on, it is the experience of people who use and rely on our public services that things are demonstrably worse than they were nine years ago. Our schools are less well funded than they were when Labour left office, with per pupil funding down by 8% and teachers walking out of the profession in droves.

Some 2.5 million more people are waiting longer than four hours in accident and emergency departments and the number of people waiting more than two months for cancer treatments has doubled. Furthermore—and unbelievably, from a Conservative Government—people in my constituency are describing a state of lawlessness because the Government have cut the Metropolitan police to the bone: more than £1 billion of funding cuts; the loss of 21,000 police officers, almost 7,000 police community support officers and 15,000 police staff; officer numbers at their lowest levels for 30 years; and the highest rises in crime in a decade.

It is no wonder that this afternoon Conservative Members do not want to stand up and defend the record of this Government. It is not a record they can defend. It is now right—in fact, it is past time—to acknowledge that the Government have lost control of Parliament and their ability to govern and have lost the confidence of the British people. It is time for Conservative Members to do the right thing and declare, as we will, no confidence in Her Majesty's Government.

4.38 pm

**Steve Double** (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Ilford North (*Wes Streeting*).

It is well documented that I have had my differences with the Prime Minister in recent weeks and months, and it was with regret that I found I could not support her deal in the Lobby last night and had to vote against it, but I can assure the House that I will be voting against this motion of no confidence this evening, because I want this Conservative Government to remain in office.

The Prime Minister has many qualities, and those qualities have come to the fore in recent times. People across the country admire her resilience, fortitude and determination, and I join them in saying that those are indeed great qualities, which she has demonstrated. Let me also say, with respect, that if she now directs those qualities towards the European Commission, her stock in this nation will rise dramatically. The people of this country want to see our Prime Minister stand up to those in the EU and tell them what it needs from the negotiations, and I encourage her to do that.

There is no doubt that the Prime Minister has been given an incredibly challenging job, but that job has been made all the harder by the behaviour of some Members who have sought to undermine her negotiating position time and again. Those who have called for a second referendum have completely undermined her position by making the EU believe that we could have a

second vote to overturn the decision, thus making the deal unattractive in the hope that we would reject it, while those who have discounted no deal have undermined her position by taking it off the table. Anyone involved in negotiations will say that no deal must remain a position in any successful negotiation.

I find it very interesting that Labour Front Benchers have said that they would rule out no deal, on the basis that it would be damaging to the country. I do not think no deal would be that damaging to the country—it would be a challenge—and businesses in my community tell me time and again that what they really fear is not a no-deal Brexit but a Labour Government. They are far more afraid of that. Let me say this to those Labour Front Benchers: if you have discounted no deal on the basis that it would be damaging to businesses, will you now please discount a Labour Government on the same criterion? Businesses up and down the country want us to stay in government to prevent Labour from taking office.

It is fair to say that we are not where we want to be in these negotiations. However, I absolutely back the Prime Minister in her position, which is to say that we will continue to seek a consensus across the House to establish a basis on which we can renegotiate with the EU and come up with a deal that we can deliver for this country. So I will back the Government tonight. We need to deliver Brexit; we need to deliver the Brexit that we promised the country in our manifesto; and then we need to move on to a domestic agenda so that we can start to deliver the changes that the country needs and is crying out for.

4.42 pm

**Liz Saville Roberts** (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay (*Steve Double*), although I must admit that I share none of his convictions about either the qualities of the Prime Minister or the virtues of no deal.

I thought that something had happened last night, but the pantomime points scoring is continuing in this place. Last night, I voted against the Brexit deal, and in doing so, I voted for the Prime Minister to change course. I voted for averting the damaging consequences of her deal. It is now time to move on to a real solution to this Brexit mess. Parliament cannot come to an agreement on the way forward, so it is time for the people to decide on our European future. However, one thing stands in the way. Labour has, at long last, satisfied one element of its conference policy and it has tabled a motion of no confidence. I will of course support the motion, but if it fails to gain the support of the House tonight, the Labour party must move on and satisfy the next element of its conference motion by adopting a people's vote, as its membership demanded.

Let me be clear: as well as taking no deal off the table, we need to take no progress off the table. Plaid Cymru will reconsider its support if the Leader of the Opposition decides instead to embark on an infinitely failing, hopeless series of motions of no confidence, tabled on a rolling basis, when there is evidence that there is no hope of success and those motions have no chance of making a critical difference. All that that would achieve would be further parliamentary paralysis. I do not think that, in all honesty, anyone in this place wants to see that, and certainly no one outside wants to see it.

With all this in mind, those of us who oppose the British Government's policy need to explain how to avoid a no-deal Brexit when there is seemingly no clear majority under the normal binary voting systems that are the convention in the House of Commons. Several hon. Members have offered credible solutions to break the impasse, including my hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr (Jonathan Edwards). He has put forward a novel idea to ensure that the House of Commons is able to reach a conclusion on a proposal. The answer could lie in the use of an alternative voting system. My party would always have a preference for a people's vote, and I believe in this method of voting and, with Labour's support, I believe it would be the most preferred option of Members of Parliament across the House of Commons.

**Dr Caroline Johnson** (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): If the result in that referendum were again to leave, would the hon. Lady be willing to respect the result the second time and, if the result were to remain, would she be happy with those on the leave side calling for a best of three?

**Liz Saville Roberts:** What I am proposing here is a means for this place to find its way out of the present impasse. At present, we might be talking about indicative votes, but there may well be other ways. We find ourselves in an unprecedented situation: the procedures we have used in this place in the past appear unlikely to take us out of the impasse. I am begging this place to look at creative means to enable us to move ahead. My party will be moving ahead to propose, with part of that system that we may use, a people's vote as the way ahead. We in this place have been fairly criticised outside for not proposing ways forward. I beg all of us to seek ways forward.

I will not take any more time as I am very much aware, as a member of a small party who usually has very little time to speak, how valuable the time we have is. I conclude by saying that the House of Commons has effectively taken control of Brexit policy. It defeated—we should remember this; this is not just about a tit-for-tat on both sides—the British Government's deeply deficient deal last night. We must now find a way to ensure we can come together for a conclusive decision in favour of a people's vote.

4.47 pm

**Mr Marcus Jones** (Nuneaton) (Con): I rise to support the Government and to speak against this motion. In doing that, I will talk about the record of this Government and the issue that has triggered today's vote: yesterday's Brexit vote.

To put our record in context, everything the Conservatives have done in government since 2010 has had to be framed in the context of the recession, the massive deficit and mess left behind by the Labour party. Despite the mess left behind—the 6% drop in GDP, the 800,000 more people unemployed—under this Conservative party, 3.4 million jobs have been created, we have record employment and record unemployment, we have provided 15 hours of free childcare for disadvantaged two-year-olds and 30 hours of free childcare for working parents, and the national living wage. We have cut income tax so that people can now earn double nearly what they could under the Labour party before paying income tax. We

have not increased fuel duty for eight years and many more of our children are coming out of primary school with a far higher standard of reading and writing than previously. We have more doctors and nurses in our hospitals. We have fewer infections and people dying because of those in our hospitals, and we are putting £20 billion into the NHS and have a 10-year plan for the NHS, under which we are putting significantly more money into mental health provision. In my constituency, the Labour party tried to close A&E and maternity, so Labour does not have the record it states or thinks it has.

Have we got everything right? No, we have not got everything right in government. There is still a lot more to do. We need to make sure we build on the money and extra resources that we are now putting into the police force. We need to make sure we honour the commitment to halve and end rough sleeping. We need to make sure we keep refining universal credit to get it right, because having a system that gets people into work is the right thing to do. The alternative is more debt, more borrowing and a leadership team that does not believe in this country and thinks more about other countries than its own.

We are here because of the Brexit debate, and Opposition Members have talked about nothing but red lines today. Whether we like what the Prime Minister put on the table yesterday or not, the red lines that she put down were based solely on the referendum in which the British public voted and on manifestos that about 85% of the public voted for. Despite problems across the House and people driving their own agendas, she has tried her best to get a deal that the House can agree with. Clearly, it does not do so, but I say to Opposition Members that this House voted to have a referendum and the public voted for Brexit. We must deliver on that.

People do not want a general election. They want us to get on with the job and come out of the European Union, and they want us to come together as a House to do that in a sensible way. They do not want a general election, as they do not believe that the Leader of the Opposition is a Prime Minister in waiting. They do not believe that he could be a Prime Minister. I am against this motion and I will be proud to go through the Lobby and vote to back this Government tonight.

4.51 pm

**Laura Pidcock** (North West Durham) (Lab): If ever there were an advert for why we need a general election and why we have no confidence in this Government, it has been the speeches from Conservative Members today. They are so divorced from reality. Watching this crisis unfold, I have often been struck by how this process is being viewed by the people we represent. People in North West Durham and beyond voted to leave or to remain for a number of reasons. They had feelings of being left behind by the establishment and of seeing their security dwindling and their communities being abandoned. They were worried that their rights were going to be eroded and that their businesses might close. Some wanted to take back control; some wanted to be part of something bigger. Those are all complex, individual reasons, but very few of my constituents have been satisfied by the way in which this Government have represented them in the negotiations with the EU. Instead, we are tangled up in the tensions between



[*Laura Pidcock*]

two factions of the Conservative party—the hard right and the centre right—and in the arbitrary red lines of the Government. We are in a shameful state, but it goes further than that.

The Government cannot now govern, and not just on our withdrawal from the EU. That is not a slogan; it genuinely reflects the position that we are in. Where are we at, as a country? In the north-east and in North West Durham—in fact, in all our communities—people are suffering. Their pay does not cover their bills, and the shambolic universal credit system makes them poorer, stigmatised and stressed. After eight years of austerity, this country is on its knees. An increasing number of people are homeless, many are destitute and some—as has been mentioned in a number of fantastic contributions—are even dying as a result of the system.

Do teachers in this country have confidence in this Government? Do nurses, doctors, firefighters, prison officers, those in private businesses waiting for a deal, those waiting for brown envelopes from the DWP to tell them whether they have been sanctioned, those deemed fit for work while ill, those who are homeless, or the 1950s women have confidence in this Government? I think not. The reality is out there and, you know what, I hope it pricks the conscience of the 100-plus Conservative MPs who decided that the Prime Minister was not fit to lead them just a few weeks ago, and of the similar number who agreed with us that the Brexit deal was a farce. Will they now stand up for all those people who are suffering?

The speeches from Conservative Members have been desperate; they are desperate to denigrate the Labour party because they are scared by the powerful arguments of the Leader of the Opposition. When those Members go through the Lobby tonight to say that they have confidence in this Government, they will be voting for more chaos and more austerity. They might as well be stepping over all those children going to school without food in their belly, stepping over the pensioners without the ability to heat their home and stepping over the homeless people on our streets. This will mean that they could not care less about those people. This country, our communities and working people deserve so much better. We deserve a different direction, and fast. We need a general election to get this lot out now.

4.54 pm

**Chris Philp** (Croydon South) (Con): In moving this motion of no confidence earlier today, the Leader of the Opposition claimed that it was about delivering Brexit—but this Parliament, elected in 2017, was elected to perform that task. Both main parties, Labour and Conservative alike, stood on a manifesto of respecting the referendum result, and between the two of us we got 82% of the vote. It is our responsibility now, together, each and every one of us, to find a way of making Brexit work for our country. Claiming that the only way to do that is by holding yet another general election is an abdication of the individual responsibility that each and every one of us took upon our shoulders by standing as candidates in the 2017 general election.

But the particular mendacity of the Leader of the Opposition in moving this motion and claiming that he would be given a mandate if he won a general election is

that he has absolutely no policy on Brexit at all. Given that he has no policy, he could not possibly have any mandate to do anything, were he to win a general election in the first place. He goes about the north of the country saying that he is in favour of Brexit. He gives remain-leaning constituencies in London and the south the impression that he is in favour of remaining. In a general election campaign, he would collapse under the weight of his own contradictions. He was asked time and again, last night and over the weekend, and by the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) earlier, to articulate his policy on Brexit, and he could not do so. He could not do so because he has no policy. It is up to all of us to pull together and work out a way of delivering Brexit sensibly.

**Mr Seely:** I think the Leader of the Opposition has 13 policies on Brexit, not none.

**Chris Philp:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for clarifying the multiplicity of policies that the Leader of the Opposition adopts at different times when he finds it convenient to do so.

I would say to the Government, though, that they should listen after the vote last night. Clearly, the margin of defeat was not a small one. If one thing needs to be changed to give this proposal a chance of passing, it is obviously the backstop. My advice to the Government is that we need to speak to the European Union about introducing legally binding changes to the backstop to render the withdrawal agreement acceptable to this House. I ask the Government to speak to the European Union on that topic in the coming days.

We have also heard a great deal from Labour Members about the Government's record more generally—particularly from the hon. Members for Ilford North (Wes Streeting) and for North West Durham (Laura Pidcock). I am proud to defend this Government's record over the last nine years. I heard education mentioned. It was of course my right hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove), who I see in his place, who, as Education Secretary, introduced reforms that mean that now more children than ever before are attending good and outstanding schools. That is not my judgment or the Government's judgment—it is the judgment of Ofsted. It is the quality of the education that our children receive that really matters.

**Tracy Brabin** (Batley and Spen) (Lab/Co-op) *rose*—

**Chris Philp:** I will give way again in a moment.

I heard the NHS mentioned as well—of course, a vital institution that we all cherish. Contrary to the dire warnings issued at various general elections about how the NHS is unsafe in Conservative hands, we heard announced just a few weeks ago the biggest ever increase in funding for the NHS—£23 billion a year in real terms. We are seeing that in Croydon already, with a brand new accident and emergency department just opened at Croydon University Hospital. I visited it only last Friday; it is twice the size of the old one. It is a fantastic facility funded by the Department of Health and by this Government.

With regard to poverty and inequality, Labour Members will be aware that absolute poverty has gone down and that income inequality has never been lower. They will

be aware that the way we combat poverty is by creating employment, and employment is at a record level as well. I am proud that it is a Conservative Government who have, since 2010, increased the minimum wage by 38%—significantly higher than the rate of inflation. That goes to show that this Government are on the side of working people on low incomes. I will be proud to support them in the Division Lobby this evening.

4.59 pm

**John Woodcock** (Barrow and Furness) (Ind): It is a pleasure to follow what I will say was a textbook speech from the hon. Member for Croydon South (Chris Philp). I agreed with a great deal of what the Leader of the Opposition said in his opening speech and certainly with many of the passionate contributions from my hon. Friends. The past eight years of Conservative or Conservative-led Government have put great strain on our communities. The very fabric that holds our public services and the voluntary sector together has been stretched, because of wrong decisions made by Governments over recent years, which have had an intolerable impact on many people's lives. We have to get justice for the WASPI women; we must put schools and hospitals on a better footing; and, my goodness, we have to sort out our train system, because what is happening in my constituency has been at the worst end of what Northern rail has been inflicting on passengers.

We are now in a dire situation following yesterday's monumental defeat, and this country is facing a national emergency. However, what makes this an almost uniquely serious situation is that this motion of no confidence cannot be taken in a vacuum, because it would lead to a general election that would give the public a choice between a Government that are struggling to govern and a Leader of the Opposition and shadow Chancellor who—I have not changed my view—are simply not fit to hold high office. The public deserve so much better than this choice in this broken political system. They deserve leadership that will right the terrible injustices that have been inflicted on our communities and take them out of this Brexit mess, and they deserve a Government that they can trust to keep them secure.

Aside from the Leader of the Opposition's past positions, of which there has been much discussion today, let me focus on the nuclear deterrent, which is central to my constituency. I have spent many years as an Opposition MP working with my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) and the shadow Defence Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Nia Griffith), to keep the Labour party's policy sensible on the face of it. However, do my colleagues really think that, with the spending crisis that any future Labour Government will inherit, we would spend many billions of pounds to maintain a submarine system that the Leader of the Opposition will have rendered useless on day one by saying that he would never use it? That is not a serious proposition.

With a heavy heart, I must tell the House that I cannot support the no-confidence motion tonight—*[Interruption.]* Some of my hon. Friends mutter, "Disgrace," and I hear others tutting, but many of them are probably privately saying, "Thank God that you have the freedom not to support the motion," because they are wrestling with their consciences. They desperately want a Labour Government, but they know that their

party's leader is as unfit to lead the country as he was when they voted against him in the no-confidence motion three years ago.

**Mr Marcus Jones:** I can understand the hon. Gentleman's dilemma. What would be the effect on his area if we were to abandon the nuclear programme that this country has pursued for decades?

**John Woodcock:** Barrow-in-Furness is a shipyard town, and the programme is woven into our history. More than 9,000 people in my constituency are directly employed by it, and many more depend upon it. The Leader of the Opposition represents a chance that they cannot afford to take. The Prime Minister must reach out more than she has done in the Chamber today. She must unshackle herself from the hard-line Brexiteers who have led her down the wrong path.

I will commit to trying every day to give my constituents the chance of better leadership for this country. While we are in this impasse, I will do my best to deliver for them. I have been pleased to work with the Government to unlock the marina project, which is vital to the future of the local economy, and on the submarine programme, which is bringing great prosperity to the area. Much more is needed, but I will carry on with that work.

5.4 pm

**Victoria Prentis** (Banbury) (Con): It is an enormous honour to follow a speech as brave as the one by the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (John Woodcock). I have mentally ripped up what I was going to say and will, I hope, say something in response. I have enormous respect for him and always have done.

Members on both sides of the House, as a whole, work extremely hard to represent their constituencies as they see fit. Since I got here, I have been very impressed by the hard work and dedication of Labour Members. I have enjoyed the cross-party working in which I have been involved, particularly in the justice sphere, where the Select Committee on Justice has made real change to people's lives, and on early pregnancy loss and baby loss. We have worked across parties to make a real difference, and I hope my remarks will be taken in that context.

I am not going to speak up for the deal, and I am not going to speak up for the Prime Minister, though I do strongly support both; unusually for me, I will talk about personalities, as the hon. Gentleman did.

The Leader of the Opposition has been an anti-war and anti-nuclear campaigner all his life, as far as I know. He would prefer to live in a republic. He supports Hamas, the IRA and various other unfashionable organisations around the world. He has voted against his Whip more often than any other Labour Member. He has been monitored by MI5 for 30 years and by special branch for 20 years because they are worried that he will undermine parliamentary democracy. He describes Karl Marx as "a great economist." The Prime Minister, who is never one to attack someone personally, mentioned his remarks following the Skripal attack.

What we need to focus on is the Leader of the Opposition's position on Europe. He opposed joining the European Community in 1975. He opposed Maastricht and Lisbon. He wants to be free of EU rules on state aid and industry.

[Victoria Prentis]

The right hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell), who supports the Leader of the Opposition in this place, is the chap who threw the little red book on the Table during my first Budget as an MP. He is the gentleman who thinks my right hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Ms McVey) should be lynched, and he wanted to assassinate Mrs Thatcher. He says that he would back a second referendum only if the option to remain were not present.

This is not acceptable. We need clarity from the Opposition at this important point for the nation. We need to know what their policy is. I was a civil servant and I find it very easy to work across parties, but, like the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness, not with a party with this leadership. I joined the civil service in 1997, and one of the reasons I became a Conservative MP is that I saw that the quality of decision making improved in 2010 under the coalition Government, but that does not mean there is not good on the Opposition Benches, and we need to harness it. However, in agreement with the hon. Gentleman, I do not think anybody can have confidence in the current Labour leadership.

For those reasons alone, and for all the many good reasons mentioned by my right hon. and hon. Friends, I have complete confidence in this Government.

5.8 pm

**Mhairi Black** (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (SNP): As we appear to be in a political twilight zone, I feel the need to say a few home truths. I have never had confidence in this Government. Whether on Brexit, social security, immigration or pensions, I have no confidence in them, and I cannot believe anyone does.

I have no confidence in the Prime Minister, because she knew what the outcome of the vote on her deal would be, so much so that she delayed the vote, and then she came back and acted like it was a surprise that her deal failed. All that happened is she wasted a month, and she did so in the full knowledge that time is running out.

Regrettably, I have to say the same about the Leader of the Opposition, and I do say this sincerely. I cannot get my head around how the right hon. Gentleman has delayed calling for a vote of no confidence. He delayed it in the initial farce, and he failed to support the motion of no confidence from the Scottish National party and other parties. I find myself left asking the same question: what good did it do? All that happened is that this lot have had another month in power. I find myself questioning his logic of, "I am waiting for the perfect moment, the opportune moment." I think we will find at the end of this debate that that moment has passed.

I sincerely hope that the Leader of the Opposition will eventually come clean about whether he thinks this should be taken back to the people or not, because this deadlock evasiveness cannot last—it cannot continue. People deserve better. To be honest, we all deserve a better Opposition. The only thing I have any confidence in is the people of Scotland: the wealth of talent, intellect and compassion that we have to offer the world. I have no doubt that people in Scotland will be watching this entire farce back home and reaching the conclusion that the only thing they can have confidence in is the ability of our country to look after ourselves a

damn sight better than this place ever has. If the Government and the Prime Minister truly mean that she wants to reach out and have cross-party support, a good start would be listening to the will of the second largest nation in this United Kingdom and giving us the respect that we are due.

5.11 pm

**David Duguid** (Banff and Buchan) (Con): I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire South (Mhairi Black); it is great to see her in her place. Mr Speaker, you were absolutely right earlier to point out the exuberance on these Benches during the speech made by the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford). I am sure you will understand the passion and frustration we sometimes feel when we hear SNP Members talking about "the voice of Scotland" and "Scottish voices". I am proud to be part of a 1,200% increase in Scottish seats represented on the Government Benches.

Let Members be in no doubt that I shall be voting tonight to support the Prime Minister and her Government, and I welcome the opportunity to do so. It is clear that a third general election in the space of less than four years would not be in the national interest, especially at such a crucial time for the future of our country. The truth is that an election would not solve anything: it would not give us certainty; it would not change the EU and its negotiating positions; and it would not change the choices before us. It would only be a recipe for delay and division. People across the country can see what is going on here: politicians on the Opposition Benches opposite are seeking to exploit the issues of historic importance currently facing this country, for party political advantage. They will have none of it; I will have none of it; and this House should have none of it.

When I vote tonight, I will be voting as a Unionist, to support a Government who have been resolutely committed to protecting our precious Union. This Prime Minister and this Government have stood up for the interests of the majority of Scots, who voted to keep the United Kingdom together in 2014 and who still do not want another independence referendum. By the way, a majority of Scots—a similar percentage, of about 56%—voted for parties committed to Brexit in the 2017 general election. Over the past 19 months, this Government have consistently stood up to the grandstanding and grievance-mongering of the SNP, which does not speak for the whole of Scotland, as it would have us believe. Throughout this process, the Prime Minister has also worked tirelessly to ensure that Northern Ireland remains a stable part of the United Kingdom. I was glad to hear the right hon. Member for Belfast North (Nigel Dodds) express his support for the Government on this motion.

The contrast between the heartfelt and committed Unionism of this Government and the hopeless pandering of the Labour party could not be clearer. We all know about the Leader of the Opposition's thoughts on Northern Ireland, but Scottish Unionists are increasingly coming to recognise that they can no longer trust Labour to stand up for Scotland's place in the United Kingdom. As recently as September, the Leader of the Opposition equivocated on the possibility of doing a deal with the SNP and allowing Nicola Sturgeon to impose Indyref 2 on the Scottish people. I remind my English, Welsh and



Northern Irish colleagues that this is not a specifically Scottish issue; it is all the United Kingdom that the SNP wishes to break apart.

Time and again, here and in Holyrood, Scottish Labour has sided with the SNP's attempts to use Brexit to undermine the Union. Only this Government—a Conservative Government led by this Prime Minister—have a track record to be trusted on protecting our Union. That, foremost in my mind among eight and a half years of Conservative achievements in government, is why I shall support the Government tonight.

**Mr Speaker:** Just before I call the right hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd), I should announce that she is the last speaker to be subject to the four-minute limit. As I am seeking to accommodate as many colleagues as I can, a three-minute limit will then have to be introduced, so the hon. Member for Dudley South (Mike Wood) will be subject to a three-minute limit. I call Ann Clwyd.

5.15 pm

**Ann Clwyd** (Cynon Valley) (Lab): I am going to read a letter from a constituent—a real person—that I received this morning by email:

“Dear Ann Clwyd MP

I am your constituent and I am deeply concerned at what Brexit uncertainty is already doing to our country. No form of Brexit commands a majority among politicians. There is only one sensible road left to pursue, and that is to take the decision back to the voters and let us decide.

Parliament is deadlocked. The government's version of Brexit has failed and been rejected by Parliament. Two years of uncertainty, divisive argument and no clear solutions to the country's biggest problems has got us nowhere.

Best for Britain's new research, carried out in partnership with HOPE not hate, proves 60% of people now want the final say on Brexit. Every region now supports letting the people decide. I have included the regional results below.

I would appreciate it if you could reply to this message to tell me: Do you support giving the people the final say on the Brexit deal, with the option to stay in the EU?

Please understand the strength of my feeling on this issue. There is no majority in Parliament for any form of Brexit. While Parliament is in deadlock, the country is uniting around a referendum to resolve it. Please give us the final say.”

My constituent then lists the proportion in support of a public vote on Brexit by region and country:

“East of England, 56.00%

East Midlands, 56.80%

London, 67.60%

North East, 59.80%

North West, 61.20%

South East, 57.80%

South West, 55.10%

West Midlands, 57.90%

Yorkshire and Humber, 58.90%

Scotland, 67.70%

Wales, 60.30%”.

He finishes with:

“Yours sincerely,

David Matthews

Cilfynydd, Wales”.

My answer to him is: I support a referendum and I want to stay in the European Union.

**Mr Speaker:** A three-minute limit is now to apply.

5.18 pm

**Mike Wood** (Dudley South) (Con): This House can have confidence in the Government because they have taken the country from the brink of bankruptcy to the point where we have a successful and growing economy that is creating prosperity and better opportunities for people in every part of the country. They recognise the hopes and aspirations of hard-working people—people who work hard and want their children to have better chances than they had.

The Government are giving children the best possible start in life, by doubling free childcare for three and four-year-olds. Next year, there will be more record spending on early years education. The reforms—originally made in the face of hostile opposition—by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove), when he was Secretary of State for Education, are now delivering improved standards in schools. From a record low of 19th in international comparators for reading under the Labour Government, we have risen to eighth under this one. I know that the Opposition do not like the figures for the number of children in good and outstanding schools, but the fact remains that in 2010, under the Labour Government, 66% of children were taught in good or outstanding schools, and that has now risen to 87%—

**Mike Kane** (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): There are more children!

**Mike Wood:** Yes, that is 87% of a bigger number—of course it is. It is even better. And that is despite the well-recorded increase in the difficulty of inspections.

**Tracy Brabin:** I thank the hon. Gentleman so much for giving way. I do appreciate it. I know that we are short of time. Does he agree that there are more children in good and outstanding schools because there are more children? Do his figures include the poorest children?

**Mike Wood:** I hesitate to explain basic mathematics. A rise from 66% to 87% of a bigger number is even more of an increase.

When people are looking for work, they are more likely to get a job. There have been, on average, 1,000 new jobs every day since the Government came to power in 2010. Four fifths of them are full time. Most jobs are more likely to be paid more, thanks to the introduction of the national living wage and increases in the national minimum wage. At the end of all that, people are allowed to keep more of the money that they have worked so very hard to earn. While Labour doubled the starting tax rate for the lowest paid workers, the Government have taken 5 million low-paid workers out of paying income tax altogether.

Let us turn now to people who are looking for their first home. House building had collapsed ahead of 2010 as a result of the recession, but rates of house building are higher now than in 29 of the past 30 years. The Government recognise people's aspirations to own their own home, but they also recognise the need for good social and private rented housing as well. While the Opposition are dogmatically opposed to letting people buy the houses in which they live, the Government are supporting first-time buyers and lifting the cap on housing revenue account borrowing to allow for more council-built social housing.

[Mike Wood]

At every stage in life, spending on the NHS will be £20 billion higher at the end of this five-year period than at the start. That is on top of the 15,000 extra doctors and the nearly 13,000 more nurses in our hospitals compared with 2010. Hard-working families deserve better than the paleo-Marxist Citizen Smith tribute act that is offered by the Opposition Front Bench team—

**Mr Howarth:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Is the term “pillock” considered unparliamentary?

**Mr Speaker:** I do not think that that word was used. I think the word was “paleo”. It is rather unfair that the point of order came when it did, and the hon. Member for Dudley South (Mike Wood) should certainly have 10 seconds to finish his speech.

**Mike Wood:** Economic security, greater opportunity, sustainable investment in our public services and many other reasons are why Dudley South and this House can have confidence in Her Majesty's Government this evening.

5.22 pm

**Jonathan Reynolds** (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): I rise to say that I have no confidence in Her Majesty's Government. In doing so, I will not address the domestic record of the Government—I wish that I had time to do so as it has been one of hunger and homelessness, and that is a record that needs revealing, but in three minutes that is clearly not possible.

The Government genuinely deserve to lose this vote today because there is only one reason for their existence, and only one reason why the Prime Minister is the Prime Minister, and that is Brexit. The job of this Government was to deliver Brexit. After the referendum, the majority of MPs accepted the result and wanted to work pragmatically on a deal to secure the best terms of our new relationship. We did not do so lightly. Let us not forget that the referendum was called only to try to solve some internal problems in the Conservative party. David Cameron had expected that there would be another hung Parliament and that the Liberal Democrats would be in coalition with him again and that he could drop the idea entirely, and he got it wrong.

As a result, we all got the most divisive politics that this country has had in the modern era. The denigration of expertise and reason became the new normal. All of us saw our friend murdered in that campaign, and yet, despite that, there was no doubt that this House had, and still does have, a cross-party majority for a Brexit deal. But how did the Prime Minister respond to that? Did she reach out across party lines? No. Did she seek to unite leavers and remainers? No. Did she provide leadership on the big questions? Absolutely not. Instead, we had this played from the beginning for narrow party advantage. Reasonable concerns about how customs would work, how the banking system would function, the rights of EU citizens and even which queue at passport control EU citizens would use were first dismissed and then, cynically and falsely, presented as opposition to Brexit itself. When an election was called, despite the Prime Minister giving her word, Downing Street briefed it as a chance to “Crush the saboteurs”. Well, how

ironic that the deal's biggest saboteur has turned out to be the Prime Minister herself, and it is her deal that has been crushed.

We all appreciate that the Conservative party is irrevocably split on this issue, and its decision on the final destination risks losing one half of its Members entirely. But the answer to that is to reach out and have a conversation with all of the House of Commons. Instead of that, the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) was appointed Foreign Secretary and travelled around Europe insulting our friends. Then there was the nationalistic rhetoric of the “citizens of nowhere” speech and the idea at Conservative conference that we could list foreign workers, as if we were living in 1930s Germany. Then we had the Chancellor threatening our friends and allies with economic warfare as if the UK were some overgrown school bully. All this has squandered centuries of good will and landed us where we are.

It is this Prime Minister, this Government, these red lines and this strategy that are to blame for bringing this country to the abyss. The Government have nothing left to offer; and, in the national interest, they should go.

5.25 pm

**Antoinette Sandbach** (Eddisbury) (Con): Well, it is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Jonathan Reynolds), although I could not disagree more with his characterisation of the situation.

I remember a Labour Prime Minister who promised this country a referendum on the Lisbon treaty, and virtually his last act in government was to sign it and renege on that promise to the British people. I feel that the resentment, after years of broken Labour promises in relation to referendums, bears a large part of the blame in the outcome of the referendum vote. That is not to mention the absolutely miserable way in which the Leader of the Opposition failed to campaign or make a proper case for remaining in the EU during the referendum debate. I will therefore take no lectures from the Labour party.

The hon. Gentleman talked about reaching out, but there is no explanation as to how the Labour policy would get over the line in terms of state aid because the Opposition say that they want a customs union, but they do not want to accept rules on state aid. They also say that they can negotiate a better deal, but do not want to accept the rules on free movement. The reality of the Labour party's position is that it would fail its own six tests.

I am a Member of this House who has shown a willingness to work across parties to get a decent and sensible Brexit result, despite the fact that I personally believe that the best deal that we have is remaining in the EU. I made a promise to try to implement the referendum result, but I do not see that there have been any constructive proposals from Opposition Front Benchers.

The reason that I have confidence in the Government—and I do—is that, although the press has been taken over with Brexit, we have been getting on with the job and delivering in so many other ways. Some 39,000 workers in my constituency have been taken out of tax because of the Government's proposals. I remember Gordon Brown introducing a 10p tax rate on those earning just over £4,500; the lowest paid had to pay tax. Now, a

low-paid worker in my constituency will not pay tax until they are earning at least £12,500. That is one of many achievements by the Government.

We have introduced a new benefit of two weeks' paid parental leave, which is one of the first new benefits that we have introduced for many years and is a significant achievement. There are also very good environmental policies coming out of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. There is a good record of which to be proud.

5.28 pm

**Emma Hardy** (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach).

The unsettled mood that we feel in the Chamber today and across the whole of Parliament is reflected across the whole of our society. Out there in the communities, there is a feeling and a desire for change—for something else. This feeling and desire for change manifests itself in different ways, but we would be wrong to ignore it and to underestimate its significance. It manifests itself in the anger that is felt in our communities, including the increased hate that all of us across the House are receiving. It manifests itself in the despair at, and dissociation from, democracy and the lack of faith in anybody in Parliament.

This is a pivotal moment, and it is about more than whether we think we should have a Labour Government or a Conservative Government, although of course the answer is Labour. It is about how we give back trust and faith to ordinary people. This feeling and mood for change is not going to go away. People are exhausted—they are exhausted by austerity. I do not think anybody in this House appreciates quite how draining poverty is and how the daily grind can get you down.

Even if Members ignore every other word I say, I would like them to reflect on this statistic: across Yorkshire, there has been a 30% increase in the number of suicides. As I have mentioned before, my constituency covers the Humber bridge, which has become a hotspot for suicides. People are driving there from around the country to take their own lives. What greater damning indictment of this Government can there be that they have left people in such a state of despair, feeling that they have no future whatever?

What answers are people being offered? Nothing. We have more arguments and Members tearing into each other on the Government Benches, while the people in our communities continue to suffer. They suffer when they go to the NHS. In terms of the nonsense spouted at us about all the good and outstanding schools, I suggest, with respect, that the hon. Member for Dudley South (Mike Wood) check the last time that those schools were inspected, which might give him a more accurate figure. Crime is increasing, and people feel unsafe in their homes. The antisocial behaviour that so many people here probably ignore because the gates to their properties allow them to cannot be ignored by the people in our communities.

This is a moment when we can really make a difference. It is in our gift to give people the change they need. We can channel that need for change into a positive vision for hope, but only if we vote down this Government and have a Labour Government, who will truly deliver for everybody in our country.

5.31 pm

**Maggie Throup** (Erewash) (Con): Even though I respect the comments made by the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Emma Hardy), I am concerned that she sees everything in a very different light from me. I am much more optimistic about our future.

The motion before us may seem simplistic, yet it raises questions that go much further. We are in the midst of a battle for the heart and soul of our country and all the things we hold dear. The decisions we take in this place today and over the coming weeks will irreversibly change the course of our history. They will shape Britain's standing in the world for a generation and, in the process, will perhaps determine the future of this Parliament—the mother of all Parliaments, which has served our nation through war and peace for the best part of 1,000 years.

On the central question of Europe, which has led us to this position, I make the following points. Like the long-time Brexiteers, I am fully committed to ensuring that the UK can end its membership of the European Union at 11 pm on 29 March, as set down in law. Nothing less than an agreement that ends the free movement of people and returns full control over our money and laws is acceptable to me and the majority of the people of Erewash who voted to leave in the referendum in June 2016. My message for the remainers is that I voted to remain in the European Union, but we lost that argument, and consequently the UK will be leaving the EU.

Europe may have brought us to this point, but that does not detract from the fact that the single biggest threat to the safety, security and prosperity of our country is sitting on the Opposition Benches. The choice before us today is clear: do we want a socialist Government who, within hours of being returned to office, would cause a “run on the pound”, in the words of the shadow Chancellor; a socialist Government who would drive investment out of Britain through their ideological pursuit of nationalisation; a socialist Government whose own Back Benchers advocate the confiscation of council houses bought under the right-to-buy scheme; and a socialist Government who would make my constituents poorer in every sense of the word? I cannot let that happen to my constituents in Erewash or countenance such outcomes. The Government have my full support and confidence today and in the future.

5.34 pm

**Geraint Davies** (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): Margaret Thatcher famously quoted Attlee in saying that referendums were the instruments of “demagogues and dictators” because Hitler used them to adopt supreme power and, basically, invade other countries after rearming. My reason for having no confidence in the Prime Minister is not simply because she has doubled the debt and created poverty and social injustice, but because she thinks the advisory referendum is an unconditional mandate to Brexit at any cost, in any circumstances, without consulting the people on whether this represents their reasonable expectations.

The people were offered more money and more trade, and control over their laws and over migration, but in fact they have not got any of those things. We will have to pay £39 billion. There will be a squeezing of the



[Geraint Davies]

economy, fewer jobs and less trade. We will not be with team EU when negotiating with big players such as China. Northern Ireland will be an open border for immigration via Dublin. We will not control our immigration, and if we did, we would in any case just switch from a cultural neighbour to more distant immigration.

There is no evidence that the people of Britain support the deal. It is a betrayal of conservatism because it moves us away from our most established market in the world and breaks up the Union. It is a betrayal of socialism because we will have a smaller cake to divide more equally. It is bad for our economy, our security, our environment and our common values.

It is my view that I have no confidence in the Prime Minister because she has no confidence in the people to make a judgment on the deal she has delivered. If they want it, let us go ahead. If we do not have that vote, we will just wait another two years in the transition period, when we could in fact have a vote on this, decide on reflection it is better for us all to remain and have two years sorting out this country, rather than having this situation where we just talk about Brexit and Britain is burning around us.

Yes, there will be some anger if we have a people's vote, but I put it to the House that there will be absolute rage if we do not and Brexit goes forward. People voted to leave; they did not vote to leave their jobs. Brexit is now being seen warts and all, and we are also seeing that Europe is a much more virtuous place than before. It was a massive defeat last night. Yes, the Prime Minister needs to look cross-party at all the options. If we cannot agree any deal, let us put the deal we have to the people, and they can decide whether to continue.

In the meantime, I am calling for a general election, but if we do not get a general election, we should have a people's vote. The Labour party should stand up for remain, and when we win that, there should be an election because we will have had a Government who were elected on a strong and stable Brexit but are weak and unstable. We will then deliver a Labour Government and a better Britain.

5.37 pm

**Alex Burghart** (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): I am obviously not terribly delighted that we are having a vote of confidence in the Conservative Government, but I suppose I might thank the Opposition for bringing my party back together today. We were heavily divided last night, but I can be confident that we are all going to go through the same Lobby together. It will be a bonding experience, so thank you very much for doing that for us.

It is of course quite right that we are having a vote of no confidence. We find ourselves in a peculiar hung Parliament in which, as the Leader of the Opposition said, the Government suffered a major defeat last night and have suffered a defeat on a money Bill. It is quite right that the confidence of the House is tested. However, we are all quite aware of what will happen. The Government are going to win this vote this evening, and then we are going to have to move on. The most interesting question is not about this vote, which is a foregone conclusion. It is about what is going to happen after that.

We know what the Prime Minister is going to do. She has offered to reach out, speak to other corners of the Commons and look for some consensus, but we still do not know what the Opposition are asking for. The fact that we have been put on the spot in a vote of no confidence, when the Opposition have not said what they would take to the public in the event of a general election is, quite frankly, shameful. That reminds me of how, in 1997, the Labour party managed to breeze into power without telling the public—[*Interruption.*] Yes, it won by a convincing majority, but it did not tell the public in advance what its policy was on the single European currency. That had to be wrung out of Labour when it was already in power. The Labour party has a track record on this. If it wants to go to the country, it at least should have the courtesy to tell the public what it would take into that vote.

**Helen Jones:** Record spending in the NHS.

**Alex Burghart:** Record debt is what we would have. The hon. Lady's party is offering this country and my voters—my tax-paying constituents—£1,000 billion of extra debt. That is £35,000 extra for everyone who lives in this country.

**Helen Jones** *rose*—

**Alex Burghart:** I am very happy to give way and take the extra time.

**Helen Jones:** The hon. Gentleman, perhaps because he is rather younger than me, seems to have forgotten that, when the Labour party took office, NHS waiting lists were 18 months for some specialties. Under the Labour Government, there were practically no waiting lists in some specialties. We are all proud of that record.

**Alex Burghart:** And when the hon. Lady's party left power, we had record debt, a crashed economy and a loss of confidence in our foreign policy after the disastrous Iraq war. The Labour party ran this country into the ground. Eight years later, we have record employment; we have rising wages—we have everything a sensible, evenly minded, well-balanced economy has brought. [*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. There is a very unseemly atmosphere, but the hon. Gentleman is at least still smiling, and that is to be welcomed. [*Interruption.*] Order. Let us hear the hon. Gentleman.

**Alex Burghart:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. The truth is that the Labour party left power under an enormous cloud. Everybody knows it. It left after a disastrous 13 years in office, in which the economy was destroyed, and Government Members are united in our desire to ensure that it does not have an opportunity to do that again. Let us be frank: the Blair-Brown years were a golden age compared with what would come after a general election this year, should the Labour party force one upon us. We would rather have Blair and Brown than Corbyn and McDonnell any day of the week, but those options are not available to the British public.

5.42 pm

**Naz Shah** (Bradford West) (Lab): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for tabling this motion of no confidence, which I will support in the Lobby this evening.

I came into politics challenged with trying to make a difference to the lives of the ordinary people of Bradford West—trying to be part of a system that is about putting people first, not about people clinging to power and positions, with self-preservation at the heart of everything they do. I have lived experience of destitution and poverty. A generation later, constituents come to my surgery in sheer destitution, crying because they do not know how they are going to feed their children or meet their basic needs, and the reality of insecure jobs and in-work poverty leads people with dependants further into destitution. We must ask whether this Government are fit for purpose.

I have spent a short time in the House. Although the final nail in the coffin was yesterday's catastrophic defeat—the largest defeat of any Government in the history of our democracy—the real tragedy for me and my constituents is that this Government have not been fit for purpose for a very long time. This Government were not fit for purpose when the UN special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights described the level of child poverty in the UK as

“not just a disgrace, but a social calamity and an economic disaster” in the fifth largest economy in the world. This Government were not fit for purpose when they pursued a policy of rolling out a hostile environment, which led to the tragedies of the Windrush scandal. This Government were not fit for purpose when they were found in contempt of Parliament.

This Government are not fit for purpose when they are repeatedly defeated in the courts by single parents and people with disabilities and forced to go back to the drawing board on their own policies. This Government were not fit for purpose when they failed again last year to stop the increase in homelessness on the streets of Britain, and even failed to save the life of the poor man who died outside the doors of Parliament just weeks ago. This Government were not fit for purpose when Conservative Members decided to use food banks for photo ops. This Government are not fit for purpose when films such as “I, Daniel Blake” are no longer a fiction but many people's reality.

This Government have consistently acted in the interests of the few, not the many, offering tax giveaways to the rich while viciously cutting services for the most vulnerable in this country. The Government were not fit for purpose when the Prime Minister knew her deal was dead before the recess but chose to sabotage and hold Parliament hostage by delaying the vote. The list goes on. How can those 117 Conservative colleagues who voted that this Prime Minister was not fit to lead their party go back to the electorate and say that she is fit to lead the country?

5.45 pm

**Bill Grant** (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bradford West (Naz Shah).

I would argue that, when Members consider their position on the confidence motion tonight, their assessment should be based not on just one vote—however fundamental that issue is for the nation's future—but on this Government's record in office. Three practical measures of a Government's relative success are taxation levels for working families, employment levels and investment in public services. It must be remembered that it is this Government who have cut taxes for

32 million working people, so that they keep more of the money they earn. It is this Government who have seen unemployment not just decline but plummet to a record low. It is this Government who are investing more than £20 billion in the NHS for our future health—and through Barnett consequential that will benefit NHS Scotland immensely. In the same period, all Opposition Front Benchers have achieved is an ever-changing conviction and little consensus on every issue. In fact, the only point of consensus appears to be that the Government have got it wrong on every issue. That is clearly not the case, and the facts do not support the Opposition's somewhat gloomy assessment.

This Government are pressing ahead with ongoing investment in research and development, with growth deals throughout the country, such as the one emerging in Ayrshire. They recognise the importance of the environment and have produced the 25-year environment plan—something never done before in the United Kingdom. They have secured a stable economy after a very weak inheritance, and they listen when changes are needed—for example, to universal credit. They are not a Government in crisis, as the Opposition allege to secure an election. They are a Government who are getting on with the business of governing.

The Prime Minister has worked incredibly hard on those and other issues over the past two years, and I earnestly encourage hon. Members to support the Government tonight. With everything else that is going on and the Conservatives being the only party with a clear desire to honour the referendum, this is not the time to hold an unnecessary and unwanted general election. It is time to get on with what we have been asked to do, before our constituents lose faith in every parliamentarian in this House. I have every confidence in Her Majesty's Conservative and Unionist Government, and I will be voting for them tonight.

5.47 pm

**Caroline Lucas** (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): Last night's defeat was an extraordinary humiliation for the Prime Minister. If ever there were a situation to be described as chickens coming home to roost, it was that, for it is a national calamity of the Prime Minister's own making. It was the Prime Minister who failed to reach out across the House to find consensus on a way forward from the narrow win for leave in the 2016 referendum. It was the Prime Minister who painted herself into a corner with a series of bright red lines, designed only to appease the most extreme Brexiteers in her party. It was the Prime Minister who triggered article 50 far too prematurely. Crucially, it was also the Prime Minister who resolutely failed to tackle any of the underlying injustices that drove the 2016 referendum result.

Many people voted leave because they believed that the status quo in this country is intolerable, and they are right—it is. We are a country of grotesque inequalities, not just between classes but geographically between regions, especially between north and south, and between thriving cities and failing towns within the same region. Last year, the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission identified the 30 worst places for social mobility. Every single one of them voted to leave. I do not think that is a coincidence. The Prime Minister's mantra about bringing the country back together rings very hollow in the light of the evidence.

[*Caroline Lucas*]

Welfare cuts since 2010 have cost lone parent households an average of more than £5,000, increasing child poverty rates in those households from 37% to 62%. The NHS has endured the longest period of austerity in its history. The evidence goes on. Today has to be the day we start to change the conversation about Brexit and the future of Britain. We have to do that not by slavishly repeating that Brexit is the will of the people, but by genuinely hearing the voices of those who have been economically and politically excluded for decades. The millions of people who rightly chose to give the establishment an almighty kicking in June 2016 deserve to have their concerns addressed and properly resolved.

A people's vote, if it learns the lessons from the failed remain campaign of 2016, can be the vehicle we need to have that honest debate in this country. It would be the chance to move on from the divisive and dangerous place we are in by committing to "Project Hope", rather than "Project Fear". Whoever is in No. 10 must be someone who can put the issue back to the people, because a general election fought by the two biggest parties, which both have a commitment to Brexit, does not take us forward. While I of course want to get rid of this toxic Government, I also want to ensure that we resolve this most pressing issue and get the question back to the people. Parliament has shown itself to be incapable of resolving it; the question needs to go back to the people.

5.50 pm

**Julian Knight** (Solihull) (Con): As ever, it is a huge pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (*Caroline Lucas*). We have heard a lot about polls today. I will give the House a couple. We all know the figures of 52% and 48%, and it is intrinsic and behoves the House to respect the referendum result, but another figure is 34%, which is the current polling for the Labour party. That is quite incredible at this time. The reasons for that figure were encapsulated by the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (*John Woodcock*), who said that the shadow Chancellor and the Leader of the House are simply unfit for high office. As people get closer to the potential of a buy-in decision, they will see that very starkly indeed. The other reason for the 34% polling is the six tests—the magic unicorn tests—which are designed to fail. The public are not foolish and they are not going to be hoodwinked. They know intrinsically that the six tests are sophistry of the most politically contemptible sort. At some point—later today, or tomorrow—the grown-ups will have to have a conversation about what the Opposition actually want.

**Mrs Maria Miller** (Basingstoke) (Con): What people and businesses in Basingstoke tell me is that they want certainty. How can they get certainty when there are challenges in the Government, and Parliament rejected the Government's plans yesterday?

**Julian Knight**: Certainty is all. I will be speaking about that in the Adjournment debate later—Jaguar Land Rover wants certainty, too. It is a little rich when people talk about the rights of EU citizens and UK citizens and then reject a deal that would protect those rights.

A second referendum would be a stain on this Parliament. The division would be enormous, and we have been entrusted. No deal makes no sense to me with the dislocation that it could cause to our economy. People talk about stockpiling, emergency provision and so on, but the reality would be what happens when the stocks run out or if we end up with dislocation. What happens if we then have to go to the EU and negotiate certain terms at that point? We would be in a very weak position. Both those options are out, so we have to come together sensibly.

Despite this stunt today—we will see Members filling up their Facebook pages with how many different times they can say different words to link in with their Momentum groups—it is time for sensible, grown-up people to face the consequences of the circumstances we are in. That is what the public want. They do not like this spectacle at all.

Let me look at the achievements of this Government. In 2010, we inherited a deficit at 11% of GDP. Let me be clear to the House that that is such an enormous sum that it cannot be borrowed for very long. Eventually, the markets call in the loans and the country ends up having to pay such a high interest rate that the economy ends up in a depression.

We, as a Government, had to sort that out, but we did it while protecting the NHS. We have announced an increase in NHS spending that is twice the level that Labour proposed at the 2017 general election. Not everything is perfect in that respect, and there are issues, but we are trying to solve them. When it comes to the big matter of the economy, however, to jobs, to healthcare, to the 1 million kids in better or outstanding schools, the Government are delivering. We have to get through Brexit and then we will deliver more.

5.54 pm

**Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): The provocation for this debate was the unprecedented defeat of the central plank of the Government's policy, which should have led seamlessly to a general election. In the Brexit debate earlier this week, I spoke about the threat that Brexit posed to the prosperity, opportunities and security of my constituents and many of my businesses, but I also represent some of the poorest communities in the UK, and although I am proud of the work it does, I am not proud to have the busiest food bank in London.

Last week, I spent an afternoon at one of St Mungo's homeless hostels in West Kensington talking to residents and staff. They told me that the annual street homelessness count, to be published on 31 January, would show it had doubled in the last year, and they gave me three reasons: universal credit, the increase in no recourse to public funds and tenancy takeover, which is where drug dealers seize the premises of vulnerable tenants. The war on the poor, the hostile environment and a descent into lawlessness are three of the worst consequences of austerity.

The cuts in police numbers, especially neighbourhood officer numbers, is putting whole communities at risk. I spent part of new year's eve at a crime scene in Fulham. An attempted murder led to the arrest of 40 people and the recovery of a number of dangerous weapons. I estimate that half the people I now see in my surgery have problems that would have made them eligible for legal aid before the passage of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012.



Yesterday, my clinical commissioning group, looking to make £44 million of cuts to its budget, began consulting on reducing opening hours for urgent care centres and GPs. That is not just bad in itself but in direct contradiction to the NHS strategy that calls for an extension of those services to justify the closures of A&Es and emergency beds. For the first time in a generation, we are seeing year-on-year real-terms cuts to school budgets. Inner-city schools do not just educate but give emotional and practical support to families struggling with poverty and poor living standards.

Perhaps the Government's worst betrayal is the 80% cut—100% under the former London Mayor—to funding for social housing when 800,000 people are on waiting lists. My local council and the Mayor of London are doing the best they can to alleviate the conditions I have described, but for real change we need a Labour Government. The Prime Minister's legacy will be to have ruined this country in half the time it took the Thatcher and Major Governments. Enough is enough. We need a general election and a Labour Government.

5.57 pm

**Chris Green** (Bolton West) (Con): This debate should be one of two halves. First, it is right that the Opposition challenge the Government on their record, but the second part ought to be that the Opposition seek to become the Government themselves and present a vision for the country, but they have demonstrably failed to demonstrate one that they could deliver in a few weeks if they won an election. That part has been wholly absent from this debate so far.

On referendum day three years ago, I spent a lot of time talking to constituents and visiting polling stations around my constituency in Wigan and Bolton, and it was startling. The polling stations in the poorest neighbourhoods and communities had turnouts they had never seen before—far higher than for local and general elections. This vote, this referendum on the EU, reached out in a way that politicians here had not done before, or at least not for decades. That is one of the key reasons it is so important to respect the referendum decision. People who perhaps had never voted before, or at least not for decades, or who thought that previous elections were not important enough for them to engage with, chose in this referendum to engage with politics and the life of the country. It is vital for the Government to respect that decision now. We are leaving the European Union on 29 March this year. If that decision is delayed by the suspension or even the cancellation of article 50, it will be a sign to the electorate—to all voters, whether leave or remain—that their decision is being disrespected. Worse still, if there is a second referendum to dismiss the first, we will be telling them, “Your vote was wrong; get it right the second time.” That is repugnant, and it would be deeply damaging to our democracy.

I urge the Government to focus on delivering Brexit, to focus on delivering on 29 March and to use the days that we have left as an opportunity to secure the best possible deal from the European Union; but on 29 March, we must leave.

6 pm

**Sir Edward Davey** (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): I will vote for the motion, not just because of the Government's failure on Brexit but because of their

failure on so many issues, including rising crime, the railways, the social care disaster and the schools budget. I think that the speech of the hon. Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) encapsulated that better than any other.

Brexit, however, is on everyone's mind. We have to ask why the Government are unable to deliver on Brexit, and we have to conclude that it is fundamentally because the Conservative party is split. It is absolutely divided. We saw that in the Lobbies last night, but we have also seen it in the record number of resignations from this Prime Minister's Government: 32 in just three years. That is another dreadful record, which shows that this Government are incapable of governing.

**Julian Knight:** I wonder whether the right hon. Gentleman knows how many Opposition Front Benchers have resigned since the current Leader of the Opposition came to power.

**Sir Edward Davey:** I was actually going to mention the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Alex Burghart), who said in his speech that the motion might unite the Conservatives. It probably will, because a rafter of turkeys ain't gonna vote for Christmas, but the ultimate division is still there. That should worry people throughout the country, because this Government and the Conservative party are incapable of delivering Brexit, as they have shown over the last two and a half years.

The right hon. Member for Putney (Justine Greening) was right: the Government must now reach across the aisles and talk to all parties. They must get Parliament to deliver in this policy area. If they are to succeed in doing that, they will do three things. Article 50 must be extended, no deal must be taken off the table, and the Government must make it clear that when a deal is agreed, it will be put to the British people with the option of remaining in the EU. That, I think, could produce consensus, could deliver, and could bring the House together.

At present, we hear the Conservatives blaming everyone but themselves. They blame the remainers; they blame the Opposition; and they blame the Governor of the Bank of England. Sometimes I think they are going to blame sunshine, moonlight, good times and the boogie. However, there is only one group to blame, and it is the Conservative party.

6.2 pm

**Alex Chalk** (Cheltenham) (Con): Many people ask me—and, I dare say, every Member of Parliament—“Why on earth would you go into politics?” They ask it particularly at times like this, but I know the answer, and I know the answer as a Conservative. I went into politics because I believe to my bones in social mobility. Let me make it crystal clear that I expect there are Members throughout the House who believe in that, but the issue that divides us is how to come up with solutions: how to go about achieving it, how to unlock potential, how to seek out the treasure that is in the heart of every man and woman.

I know that it is as a Conservative Member of Parliament that I have been able to provide opportunities in my community in Cheltenham that have allowed people to fulfil that potential. People say, “Cheltenham? For goodness' sake, it must be the most affluent place in the country.”

[Alex Chalk]

Not a bit of it: we have some of the most deprived communities anywhere in the country, where people live in generational, entrenched poverty.

What has the Conservative party done for my community? It has provided £22 million for a cyber-park in Cheltenham that will allow the finest minds to come in and out of GCHQ, and to create start-ups. If a person living nearby has come from generational poverty but something about them says, "I want to better myself, I want to go forward, I want to provide for my family and I want to build a future," that opportunity exists. More than £400 million has been provided for a road project. Some might say, "Who cares about a road project?" Road projects are what allow a local community to thrive; they allow opportunities to be generated and futures created.

But it is not just about infrastructure projects. Recognising the issue of homelessness, it is this Government who provided £1.3 million for social impact bonds. That means there is one-on-one support for individuals who can go and address the needs of the most vulnerable in our society: those suffering from drug addiction, or mental health problems, or debt. That has served to make a huge difference in my community, so it is not just a stronger community economically, but a fairer one, too. Moreover, £3 million has been made available to help deliver social housing in Cheltenham, in Portland Place.

Of course there is always room for improvement and always more to do, but on the issue of social mobility which is the party that is not just talking the talk but walking the walk? It is this Government who are achieving that and who are making a difference in my community, and that is why I will vote against this motion tonight.

6.5 pm

**Mr Gregory Campbell** (East Londonderry) (DUP): Since I came into the House in 2001, I have seen a significant increase in the number of Members across the political divides who have spoken and voted in favour and defence of this United Kingdom. I and the people at home are eternally grateful for that, and I am sure that is shared across the divide.

I will be voting against the motion tonight, because I retain confidence in this Government on the terms and conditions contained in the confidence and supply agreement we entered into some time ago. But I want at this stage to offer a piece of critical advice to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. In the past year and a half, her negotiations have not best served this United Kingdom, but the scale of last night's defeat can offer her and us an opportunity for a revised position from her. She should go back to the EU and make it clear, which she has not done until now, that whenever they say, "A deal is only doable if it contains the backstop that we have arranged and agreed with you," she will reply, "An agreement is doable, but not on the terms and conditions of that backstop, because it creates a division—a cleavage, a divorce—within our United Kingdom and we are not prepared to enter into any agreement that is based on that backstop." It is only when she gets to that stage that we get Mr Juncker last night, after realising the scale of the defeat and what might emerge beyond last night's defeat in subsequent

weeks, making a statement that has not been commented on: that they, the EU, are determined to get a deal. He was not saying that six months ago or six weeks ago, but he is saying it now because the appearance of no deal on the horizon has suddenly galvanised the EU nation states, and our Prime Minister must take advantage of that now. She must say to the EU, "We are prepared to get a deal, but we are prepared to get a good deal and a reasonable deal"—not a one-way deal like the deal that fell last night, but a deal that delivers both for the UK and the EU. It is on that basis that I will be voting against the motion tonight.

6.8 pm

**Rebecca Pow** (Taunton Deane) (Con): I rise to speak because I believe this Government are the right Government to carry on with their serious work not just on Brexit, but so many other important issues affecting our daily lives, and because I believe a chain of events that might lead to a general election will in no way be good for the country, and because I am genuinely fearful of what might happen if this great country, but especially our businesses, should get into the hands of the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn); should he ever get hold of the tiller, this country will not be in safe hands. An election will certainly not solve the impending business at hand, which is delivering on our relationship with the EU.

I believe that this Government are the best Government to deliver for us, not just nationally but locally. That is what is really important to me, as the MP for Taunton Deane. Since the Conservatives have been in power in my constituency, we have delivered more than any other Government. There are more people in work there than ever before, and more small and medium-sized enterprises are being set up. There is more funding coming our way, thanks to the strong economy. That is why my calls for £79 million for new theatres in the hospitals were agreed to and accepted, and it is why we got an additional £11 million for more health services locally.

We have had more funding for infrastructure—£28 million—and we are upgrading the A358, the Toneway and the motorway junction. We got £7 million to enable a road through Staplegrove, where more housing is being built. We are building more housing than ever before in Taunton Deane, and that is because of the strong economy. There is a great deal going on. More children in Taunton Deane are getting a better education than ever before, and we are building a new special school. All these things are possible only because of the strong economy and because of our understanding of what business needs. We have cut Labour's astonishing deficit by four fifths, which has restored the public finances. Finally, it will not surprise people that I want to touch on the environment. This Government have an unparalleled record on working for the environment, and we must continue with that great work. That is another good reason why we need to leave the EU.

I am backing the Prime Minister. She will come up with a deal, and we must do this through compromise. We must work as a team on these Benches and we must listen to the other side, but we must pull off Brexit. I am confident that this Government, with their track record on the economy and all the other things they have delivered, including on the environment, are the right Government to do that successfully and fairly so that

we leave future generations able to carry on the good work that we have set in place, to live in a fair and wonderful economy and to take this great nation into the future.

6.11 pm

**Stella Creasy** (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): The famous phrase is that a fish rots from the head down. It is a recognition that bad leadership infects all that it touches, and what greater example of that could there be than this present Government? The rot is not confined to Downing Street; it is infecting the whole country. Not strong and stable, but stubborn and self-obsessed. Brexit is by far the clearest, but by no means the only, example. The Prime Minister has turned Brexit into a bizarre modern-day Schleswig-Holstein question. Palmerston claimed that question to be so complicated that only three people understood it: one was dead; one had been driven mad by it; and one had forgotten it altogether. The truth is, however, that this is not a complicated situation. It is the Prime Minister's red lines that have killed her deal; it is her red lines that have driven this Parliament mad; and it is her red lines that are now best forgotten.

This infectious failure has covered all the bases. This is a Government who cannot organise a tailback on the M20. They are presiding over a shortage of nurses, while stockpiling fridges. They are alienating our EU citizen neighbours, while deporting our Windrush families. They are a Government obsessed with what stickers are on the Speaker's wife's car, while ignoring pleas for help with issues such as knife crime. The roll call goes on and on. Universal credit, homelessness, the cost of living, the refugees crying out for sanctuary, the human rights of the women of Northern Ireland—at every turn, this Government cannot get a grip, and those burning injustices burn harder as a result.

This country is divided, and this Parliament is divided. The deadlock is deepening, not dissolving, and the Prime Minister cannot even be bothered to pick up the phone. No party can continue to prevaricate while the far right grows stronger. That will not stop with Brexit, and Brexit does not deal with the crisis of confidence in our politics that we all now face. We are not the only country facing difficult choices or challenges, but we are the only country that thinks that, because we are the mother of all democracies, there is nothing wrong with how we approach things. Change has to come, for all our sakes, but for that to happen, it has to start at the top and we have to stop the rot.

6.14 pm

**Huw Merriman** (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): I rise to speak on the behalf of not just Brenda from Bristol, but all the Brendas in Bexhill and Battle, who are probably thinking right now, "The last thing we want is a general election, but we want our Parliament and all our MPs to work better together to fix the issues of our day." I have enjoyed this afternoon because I have had the opportunity to listen to many feelings, hopes and aspirations, but it depresses me that people would still rather shout at each other instead of reaching out, identifying issues that are common to us all and trying to fix them.

I am proud of the things that the Government have helped me deliver in my constituency since my election in 2015. All my secondary schools are now good or

outstanding. Last Friday, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care spent time seeing how our health service is joined up with our social care team, and it made me proud to see amazing leaders working as one, which is a good example for Parliament.

Of course, I am not naive, and I recognise that the Opposition must oppose and that the Government must govern. I am also not so naive as to say that there are no big challenges in my constituency. For example, I will be setting up a taskforce on homelessness because I have noticed the streets in Bexhill getting worse. I have also noticed more casework from my constituents because services are not available at the levels they once were.

Many of the points made by Opposition Members are therefore correct. Equally, however, we now have more people in employment than ever before. Things cannot be as bad as Opposition Members say, but perhaps they are not as good as Government Members sometimes say. If we all took that attitude and worked out how to fix the things that really matter to people, we might also be able to fix the issues of Brexit.

I want to touch on something that I thought would have been fixed by now when I was elected in 2015—social care reform. It is within us in this House to fix things for the most vulnerable and elderly people in our communities. We agree on so much. The Opposition talk about a wealth tax, and the Conservative manifesto talked about people paying more. We are almost there, and yet our occasional hatred for each other stops us reaching out.

When it comes to reaching out, there is one thing that I would like my Government to do to show that they really are listening, and it relates to the £65 charge for EU citizens to maintain the same rights that they enjoyed before the referendum. That does not feel fair to me, and I speak to many Members on both sides of the Chamber who feel the same. If the Government are listening, they should reach out to every Member who agrees with me, be they leaver or remainer, and offer that olive branch. If we start doing things that way, perhaps people will appreciate that the Government are listening and perhaps then we will work better together in the manner that all our constituents expect.

6.17 pm

**Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): I have no confidence in this Government and I never have done. I have no confidence because of how the Department for Work and Pensions treats people. I have no confidence because of the constituent who was sanctioned because they were visiting their dying father. I have no confidence because another constituent was sanctioned while waiting to start a job with the DWP. I have no confidence because of the way people on the personal independence payment are treated. I have no confidence because of how the two-child policy and the rape clause have been pursued against vulnerable women in our society: they must be scrapped. I have no confidence because of the closure of Glasgow's jobcentres.

I have no confidence in the Government because of the implementation of the hostile environment, with refugees having been left waiting and constituents unable to be with their families. I have no confidence because of the constituent who lost out on his wife's visa because he was £7 under the threshold. I have no confidence in the Government because of the good character test that is being applied to children, some of whom cannot get



[Alison Thewliss]

citizenship because the Government think they are not of good enough character. While speaking of good character, I have no confidence in the Government because the Home Office told my constituent that he could not get citizenship because he had volunteered with the Red Cross and that that was a sign of bad character. I have no confidence in the Government because of their pursuance of section 322(5) of the immigration rules, whereby people have lost out on leave to remain because they had made a legitimate change to their tax returns that the Government thought was somehow wrong.

I have no confidence in the Government because of their abject failure to deal with Scottish limited partnerships and to reform Companies House. It is almost as if they like money laundering in this country. I have no confidence in the Government because of their refusal, despite all the evidence, to allow Glasgow to pursue supervised drug consumption rooms. It is expected that drug deaths in Scotland will top 1,000 this coming year, but the Government refuse to act for ideological reasons, so I have absolutely no confidence in them.

I have no confidence in the Government because they fail to realise that young people deserve a fair day's pay for a fair day's work. They think that under-25s are not worth the same when they go out to work. This pretently living wage fails to give people the dignity in work that they deserve.

I have no confidence in the Government because of their failure to tackle the real and present danger that Brexit will cause to all our constituents. They have put their head in the sand and are refusing to accept that the single market and the customs union are the best way forward.

I do have confidence in the people of my constituency. I have confidence in the people of Glasgow and the people of Scotland who voted for independence with such hope in 2014, and I know that when Scotland gets its chance again it will have no confidence in this Government and lots of confidence in itself.

6.20 pm

**James Cartledge** (South Suffolk) (Con): I am sure that at some point in your life, Mr Speaker, it is possible that you have owned a copy of that famous political book "The Downing Street Years" by Margaret Thatcher. If so, given your memory, you may well recall its very first words: "Ayes, 311. Noes, 310." That was the result of the no-confidence vote in 1979 that brought Margaret Thatcher to power. How would my colleagues feel if, as they browse in a bookstore a few years from now, they see a copy of "The Downing Street Years" by the Leader of the Opposition and the opening sentence is a narrow victory in a vote of no-confidence that led to a new era in British politics? We all know that new era would not be like the previous one to which I have referred.

That vote in 1979 ushered in an era in which free enterprise returned to the heart of British politics. We went through a difficult period of adjustment in our economy, which culminated in the end of socialism and the fall of the Berlin wall—the greatest victory in the history of modern conservatism. Such a vote tonight would bring in a different era and all that would be

turned back. There would be a return to nationalisation, command and control, the idea that the state knows best and confiscatory tax rates. Not education, education, education but regulation, regulation, regulation.

I am proud to speak from the Conservative Benches tonight. I became a Conservative after seeing what it was like in eastern Europe and because of my experience of the true face of that supposedly compassionate ideology. Those who turned a blind eye to it should be ashamed.

I started with Callaghan and I finish with Callahan—not the former Labour Prime Minister but Detective Inspector Harry Callahan of the San Francisco police department. To anyone who thinks it is a good idea for Labour to win the no-confidence vote tonight and then get into power, all I can say is, "I hope you're feeling lucky."

6.22 pm

**Clive Lewis** (Norwich South) (Lab): Some Conservative Members have been calling into question the motivations of the Opposition in calling this no-confidence vote. Let us be clear that yesterday's vote was not just a defeat but a complete and utter rout. Some Members have talked about historical parallels, but if yesterday's vote had been a battle, it would compare with the battle of Cannae, in which Hannibal annihilated the Roman army. It was a textbook defeat, just like last night was a textbook example of arrogance and hubris in government.

Last night's vote aside, let me run through the myriad reasons why the Opposition and I have no confidence in the Government. In-work poverty is at 4 million people, and homelessness is soaring. Yesterday, we learned in Norwich and Norfolk that 38 of our 53 children's centres are being closed. Why? Because Norfolk County Council says that the Government's cuts are forcing that to happen. It was a day of complete shame in my city. Without a hint of irony, the Government, while closing down our children's centres, have declared Norwich an opportunity area as they attempt to improve failing social mobility. It is a policy akin to attempting to fill up a bath with no plug.

In education, schools face real-terms funding cuts. In *The Guardian* today Norfolk County Council, in the media again, is under fire from the local government ombudsman for failing to address concerns and look after children with special educational needs.

On mental health, after the Prime Minister personally promised to improve that Cinderella service, Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust has been put into special measures again—that makes three times in four years, which is a first for any trust in the country. In this day and age, real-terms funding is down by 13% but demand is up by 50%.

Let me deal with an issue that the House and, in particular, the Government have failed to adequately address: the impending climate catastrophe and biodiversity loss. Above all else, given the timescales we are talking about, this is a calamity waiting to happen, but the Government are comprehensively failing on it. Time after time, we hear the greenwash from Conservative Members that they will do what it takes on the environment. They slashed solar subsidies, with 9,000 job losses; and fracking has been announced, put forward and is now actually happening, and not just in this country—they are also doing it in China, with taxpayers' money. The climate science tells us that we need to leave that gas in

the ground—80% of it—and that this cannot happen. In the words of that legend of Norwich, Delia Smith, I say to those on the Government Benches, “Let’s be ‘avin’ you.” Let us have that general election. Let us have that vote. Support this motion.”

6.25 pm

**Helen Whately** (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): There are moments in this Chamber for political knockabout, for consensus and for constructive debate, and I am very disappointed that when we have such a momentous decision to make about how we take forward our exit from the EU, we are having this debate today. I appreciate that yesterday’s vote is a reason why it has been called, but this would have been made slightly better had the Leader of the Opposition been able to give a clear answer on his position on Brexit in the months and months in which he has been asked about it. All he has been able to do is say that he wants a general election, and he continues to say that. I sincerely hope that after this evening, when I believe he will lose this vote, he will move on and start giving some clarity on his position on Brexit. It is simply not fair to the country that the Opposition cannot put together their position, at this point in time, when I recognise that here in Parliament we need to come together and solve how we leave the EU.

That is what businesses, particularly in my constituency, are calling on us to do. They are asking us to get on with it. What I also hear from businesses more often than not is that their concern is not so much about the uncertainty of Brexit, but about what would happen if the Leader of the Opposition were to become Prime Minister. It is what would happen if his party and his hard-left version of Labour were to take charge of our economy and our country, because that would be the worst possible thing for our country. I would have no confidence, on behalf of my constituents, in what he and his Government would do for our economy, for our security or even for our public services. He may claim to be a champion of our public services, but not only would they be completely unsustainable and unfundable under his economic model, but I have no confidence that he would be able to improve their performance. We have done that in government, whether in schools, where children are now learning to read, which is fundamental to their having better opportunities in life, or in the NHS. As we heard last week, we now have a long-term plan for a sustainable national health service, and funded sustainably.

I look forward to our continuing to deliver on these commitments in government, but first we need to deliver Brexit. These are difficult times, not just in the UK, but for countries across the western world. We need to come together, move forward, deliver on Brexit, continue making Britain a better place to live and build our place in the world outside the EU.

6.28 pm

**Thelma Walker** (Colne Valley) (Lab): I rise in support of the Leader of the Opposition’s motion. As a teacher and headteacher throughout my career, trust has always been important to me: the trust children had in me as their teacher, and the trust that teachers had in me as their headteacher, to understand their needs and make the right decisions on their behalf. Trust in relationships

and in the workplace is crucial. Today’s debate is not about whether the Prime Minister has the ability to make decisions on our behalf; it is about whether we trust her to understand the mood of the country, the zeitgeist, and the needs of every region and demographic, and make the right decisions. The Government have suffered the biggest parliamentary defeat in history, been found in contempt of Parliament, overseen the steepest rise in poverty and averaged a resignation per month.

I trust the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Front-Bench team as people who understand the struggles that many in our country are facing. I trust them to have the compassion and intellect to understand and empathise with the people of this country, and to be able to make the decisions that will improve all our lives.

Is the Prime Minister a good public servant? Yes. Does she work hard? Yes. Do I respect her? Yes—I respect anyone who devotes their life to public service. But is the Prime Minister a diplomat? Does she show warmth and empathy? Is she able to negotiate with the other 27 countries in the EU, in our interests? Clearly not. I do not trust our Prime Minister to represent our country and negotiate a deal that is in the best interests of the people of Colne Valley—my constituents—or our country.

For me, this is not just about whether we are in the EU or not; it is about the kind of society that I want my granddaughter to live in. Just before Christmas, my five-year-old granddaughter came into Parliament for the first time, and she loved it. Fast forward 30 years to when she is a grown woman—do I want her to inherit the world determined by this Government? No, I do not. I wonder how she will judge the Government’s handling of Brexit when she is a grown woman. I see it as a full-blown display of incompetence, focused purely on party interests, and as a failure to take strong action to protect jobs and the economy, workers’ rights, environmental protections and national security.

I do not trust the Government with my constituents’ future, my granddaughter’s future or our country’s future. I have, therefore, no confidence in the Government. I do trust a person like the Leader of the Opposition to understand diplomacy.

6.31 pm

**Jack Brereton** (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): When I was elected, my constituents in Stoke-on-Trent South were clear: they voted overwhelmingly for Brexit and overwhelmingly in rejection of what the Labour party has become and now stands for. The Momentum-led Labour party does not represent predominantly working-class communities like mine in the midlands and the north. Years of Labour have done nothing to improve my city, Stoke-on-Trent—quite the reverse, with our local industries decimated and our local communities taking the brunt and being left behind.

Since Conservatives came to power, Stoke-on-Trent’s industries have started to blossom again, with record numbers of people working, and the best place to start a new business is now Stoke-on-Trent. This success is thanks to the hard work of our businesses and our communities, yes, but most significantly it is thanks to the policies of Conservatives. We have seen a Government who have transformed our economy, from the ruins of

[*Jack Brereton*]

Labour's crash to one of the most successful developed economies. Having supported local businesses to grow, invest and take on more people, we have seen more than 3.4 million more people in work, with unemployment at a record low; measures to keep taxes low; and the introduction of a national living wage. A basic-rate taxpayer is now more than £1,200 better off than they were in 2010—[*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I know the House is excited, but the hon. Gentleman must get a respectful hearing.

**Jack Brereton:** Thank you, Mr Speaker.

We must continue to pursue measures that will help to address the cost of living, and we must focus on growing aspirations, creating better opportunities and improving job prospects for our communities. That would be threatened by a Labour Government led by the Leader of the Opposition. Labour's unfunded plans for £1 trillion of extra spending would see us racking up huge debts and would mean massive tax rises for people in constituencies like mine who can least afford them. And for what? For ideologically motivated white elephants, nationalisation of our industries, and the raiding of the public purse to pursue policies that have been tried and have failed time and again, threatening jobs, our industries and our economic prosperity. Every time we have had a Labour Government, they have left our country with more people out of work than when they started.

As I have said many times before, my constituency, Stoke-on-Trent South, voted overwhelmingly to leave. At every opportunity, I have voted in this House to enact Brexit and deliver on the wishes of my constituents. For this House to go against what the British public and most of my constituents voted for would be a total betrayal of democracy, but that is what a significant proportion of Opposition MPs want. They have repeatedly voted for measures to thwart Brexit, frustrating and trying to prevent or delay us from leaving on 29 March. This motion shows that the Labour leadership would rather play party politics than put the national interest and our country first. The Labour leader has been clear: they want a general election, going against the majority who are fed up with politicians and want us to get on with delivering for our country.

6.35 pm

**Mr Paul Sweeney** (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): When I think of the confidence that I have in this Government, I think about how they have treated the most vulnerable people in our country. When I think of my constituents, I think of a 10-year-old boy who was orphaned when his mother died. Instead of nurturing him, trying to care for him and providing him with security, this Government threatened to deport him. That was a most shameful act and a disgrace, and it is typical of this Government's hostile environment policy. For that and many other reasons, I have no confidence in this Government. It is about how they have treated my constituents and many vulnerable people across this country. It is also about how they have handled this negotiation in such a feckless and dysfunctional manner. They could not agree ahead of time what their negotiating objectives were. There was no spirit of collaboration,

even after the Prime Minister lost her majority in this place. There was no attempt on a collegial basis to agree negotiating objectives for this country and to deliver in the national interest of this country. That was not achieved. Indeed, this Government have subverted democracy at every turn when it suited their interests, even though they do not command a majority of the popular consent of the people, or even a majority in this House of Commons.

Even though this is a hung Parliament, the Government have packed their Select Committees with Tory majorities by procedural sleight of hand. They repeatedly seek to circumvent or abuse the Sewel convention in their dealings with the devolved Administrations. Indeed, this Government became the first Administration in parliamentary history to be held in contempt of Parliament.

**Danielle Rowley** (Midlothian) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that, in Scotland, people will be watching this thinking it is an absolute shambles? The Government rode roughshod over us and we have no trust, no faith at all, in this Government. We need a general election now.

**Mr Sweeney:** Absolutely. We need a general election because there is no way to clear this impasse. There is a clear lack of faith in the Government and a clear lack of will from the Government to engage productively to reach out to build a national consensus to achieve the way forward. It is now the job of Parliament to take control. The only way to do that is to reset the clock, have a general election and allow a new mandate to be formed in the interests of delivering for the people of this country. That is the only way to do it. That is why I will be supporting the motion of the Leader of the Opposition tonight to bring down this failing Government and to deliver a mandate that will act in the national interest of this country.

**Mr Speaker:** Two minutes. I call Luke Graham.

6.37 pm

**Luke Graham** (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): I will try to keep my contribution very short. I rise tonight in support of the Government, mainly because I hear the frustrations of the people in this country. I hear them from my constituents and we hear them in this House. There is confusion on our split party position. We are criticised for the red lines, but all we hear from Labour are its blurred lines, its lack of clear direction and its inability to come forward with a constructive alternative to the Government's proposals.

Parties of all colours failed to make a constructive case for the United Kingdom's position in the European Union. Many contributions in this Chamber this afternoon have lamented that fact. Many of them have been driven by anger, which is fine; anger is an easy emotion and it is one that many of our constituents feel. However, when party politics fail and policies fall down, MPs need to step up. That is what we need to do in the coming weeks.

What has come from the defeat last night is a clear determination from my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to reach out across this Chamber, to come back with different proposal and to listen to people from across the political spectrum—not those who turn up in this Chamber and say they work in the national



interest, but only work in the nationalist interest, but those MPs who are here genuinely to serve their constituents and to protect and preserve our United Kingdom.

It is incredibly easy to criticise, but as Members of Parliament we cannot abdicate our responsibilities for what we were elected to do. Our constituents do not want another general election. They want us to get on with our jobs.

6.39 pm

**Tom Watson (West Bromwich East) (Lab):** This has been a very passionately argued debate. At my count, 59 Members gave speeches, and they were not holding back. The scene was set by the hon. Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope), who said that the Prime Minister must accept the verdict of the House last night. The necessity for that was underpinned by my right hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley (Mr Howarth), who highlighted the fact that she is a Prime Minister with no majority and no authority. That is perhaps why the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) talked about the Prime Minister's record lack of humility and the right hon. Member for Twickenham (Sir Vince Cable), in what I thought was a soulful speech, spoke of the Government's arrogant approach to these negotiations. Why is that so important? Because, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) said, the UK is more divided and fearful for the future than ever before.

We have had some comic moments in this debate. I was particularly amused by the contribution of the hon. Member for Mid Norfolk (George Freeman); his "Life of Brian" speech—an homage to one of the greatest satirical farces in British film history—was very appropriate for the times we are in. The hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Alex Burghart) also talked about the Conservative party re-bonding in the Lobby tonight.

I cannot fail to note the passionate and sometimes breathless critiques of the last nine years of austerity economics by colleagues on the Opposition Benches, particularly my hon. Friends the Members for Gedling (Vernon Coaker), for Ilford North (Wes Streeting), for Warrington North (Helen Jones) and for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Emma Hardy). And a special prize must go to the hon. Member for Dudley South (Mike Wood), who at very short notice gave a four-minute speech in three minutes by speaking 25% faster.

As the Prime Minister said in this debate, this is a "crucial moment in our nation's history",

but it is an unenviable task to summarise this debate today and to ask Members of this House to pass judgment on her stewardship of our country. First, let me say very clearly that I am not one of those people who question her motives. I agree with the hon. Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr), who said that she was motivated by public duty. I do not doubt that she has sincerely attempted to fulfil the task given to us by the voters in this referendum. I have no doubt, too, that she has tried her best and given it her all. But she has failed, and I am afraid the failure is hers and hers alone. I am certain that every Member of this House admires her resilience. To suffer the humiliations on a global stage that she has done would have finished off weaker people far sooner. Yet the reality is that, if the Prime Minister really sat down and thought carefully about the implications for our country of last night's defeat, she would have resigned.

Throughout history, Prime Ministers have tried their best and failed. There is no disgrace in that—that's politics. But this Prime Minister has chosen one last act of defiance, not just defying the laws of politics, but defying the laws of mathematics. It was Disraeli who said:

"A majority is always better than the best repartee."

The Prime Minister is without a majority for a flagship policy, with no authority and no plan B. The result last night was 432 to 202. That is not a mere flesh wound. No one doubts her determination, which is generally an admirable quality, but misapplied it can be toxic. The cruellest truth of all is that she does not possess the necessary skills—the political skills, the empathy, the ability and, most crucially, the policy—to lead this country any longer.

I know that there are many good people in the Government, and they will be examining their consciences as the clock runs down on these Brexit negotiations. Because the Prime Minister has refused to resign, we now face a choice between a general election to sort out this mess or continued paralysis under her leadership. But now the ante has been raised. The Government have been defeated on a Brexit plan that has been their sole reason for existing for the past two and a half years. They have not just been defeated on the most crucial issue facing our country; they have suffered the worst defeat of any British Government in history. The clock is ticking. MPs have shown that they are ready to take back control over what has been, from start to finish, a failed Brexit process. The question facing the House tonight is whether it is worth giving this failed Prime Minister another chance to go back pleading to Brussels, another opportunity to humiliate the United Kingdom and another few weeks to waste precious time. Our answer tonight must be a resounding no.

Let me remind the House why. It was this Prime Minister who chose to lay down red lines that never commanded the support of Parliament. It was this Prime Minister who refused to guarantee the rights of EU nationals who have made their lives and their homes in this country. It was this Prime Minister who time and again tried to shut Parliament out, refusing to give us a meaningful vote and refusing to release the legal advice on the deal. She has treated this place and Members on both sides of it with utter disdain.

The right hon. Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) said:

"the road to tyranny is paved with Executives ignoring Parliament."—*[Official Report, 19 October 2017; Vol. 629, c. 1009.]*

That is what the Prime Minister has done, and so Parliament is having to assert its rightful authority. At every turn, she has chosen division over unity. She has not tried to bring the 17 million people who voted leave and the 16 million people who voted remain together. She should have tried to assure those who voted remain. Instead, she chose to placate the most extreme of her colleagues on the leave side of the debate. That has left the nation more divided than it was in June 2016.

Out on the streets, in homes, schools and hospitals, people are struggling, and they take no hope and no strength from this ailing Government. What happened to those burning injustices that the Prime Minister said it was her mission to fight when she came into office? Racism, classism, homelessness and insecure

[Tom Watson]

jobs have all grown and burned brighter than ever before, and for so much of this, she is responsible. If the House declares tonight that it has no confidence in the Government, it will open the possibility of a general election and a decisive change in direction for our country on Brexit and for workers, young people and our vital services.

The Prime Minister will forever be known as the “nothing has changed” Prime Minister, but something must change. Our only choice left is to change her and her Government in a general election. We know that she has worked hard, but the truth is that she is too set in her ways and too aloof to lead. She lacks the imagination and agility to bring people with her, and she lacks the authority on the world stage to negotiate this deal. Ultimately, she has failed. It is not through lack of effort or dedication, and I think the country recognises that effort. In fact, the country feels genuinely sorry for the Prime Minister—I feel sorry for her—but she cannot confuse pity for political legitimacy or sympathy for sustainable support. The evidence is clear.

I know that Government Members will want to support the Prime Minister in the vote this evening out of loyalty to the party, but everyone in this Chamber, no matter which Lobby they go through, knows in their heart that this Prime Minister is not capable of getting a deal through. Government Members know it. They know that we know they know it, and the country knows it. That is why we must act. That is why we need something new. That is why we need a general election. I commend this motion to the House.

6.49 pm

**The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Michael Gove):** As you know, Mr Speaker, having sat throughout this entire debate, it has been a passionate debate, characterised by many excellent speeches. I commend my hon. Friends the Members for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish), for Bolton West (Chris Green), for East Surrey (Mr Gyimah), for Mid Norfolk (George Freeman), and for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer), my right hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry), and my hon. Friends the Members for Stirling (Stephen Kerr), for Dudley South (Mike Wood), for Faversham and Mid Kent (Helen Whately) and for Stoke-on-Trent South (Jack Brereton) on my side for a series of outstanding speeches.

It has also been the case, as the shadow Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, the hon. Member for West Bromwich East (Tom Watson), pointed out, that there have been many powerful speeches from the Opposition Benches as well. I, like him, want to pay particular tribute to the hon. Members for Warrington North (Helen Jones), for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) and for Ilford North (Wes Streeting) and the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne) for moving and passionate speeches. Their constituencies are lucky to have them as advocates for their concerns and their needs.

However, perhaps the bravest and finest speech that came from the Opposition Benches was given by the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (John Woodcock). It takes courage—and he has it, having been elected on a Labour mandate and representing working-class

people—to say that the leader of the party that he joined as a boy is not fit to be Prime Minister. He speaks for his constituents, and he speaks for the country.

That takes me to the speech from the shadow Secretary of State, the hon. Member for West Bromwich East. He spoke well, but I felt he did not rise to the level of events. One thing that was characteristic of his speech is that he did not once mention in his speech the Leader of the Opposition or why he should be Prime Minister. I have a lot of time for the hon. Gentleman, and we have several things in common: we have both lost weight recently—him much more so; we are both friends of Israel—him much more so; and we both recognise that the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) is about the worst possible person to lead the Labour party—him much more so.

As well as great speeches from the Back Benches, we had some interesting speeches from the Front Benches. We had a speech of over 20 minutes from my great friend, the leader of the Scottish National party in this place, the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford). Again, however, in those 20 minutes he did not once mention the common fisheries policy. I think everyone in Scotland who recognises the potential to free ourselves from the common fisheries policy that Brexit provides will note that, in 20 minutes of precious parliamentary time, the SNP did not mention them, is not interested in them and, as far as the fishing people of Scotland are concerned, literally has nothing to say.

I must now turn to the speech from the leader of the Liberal Democrats, the right hon. Member for Twickenham (Sir Vince Cable)—someone for whom I also have affection and respect. He made a number of good points, but he also said that he regretted the referendum. This from a party that was the first in this House to say that we should have a referendum on EU membership. Because he does not like the result of the last referendum, he now wants another referendum. The Liberal Democrat policy on referendums is not the policy of Gladstone or Lloyd George; it is the policy of Vicky Pollard—“No, but yeah, but no, but yeah.”

I should also commend the speech given by the leader of the Democratic Unionist party in this place, the right hon. Member for Belfast North (Nigel Dodds). He explained that he had been inundated with text messages today from people in this House saying, “Please, please, please back the Government tonight”—and some of those text messages had even come from Conservatives.

Critically, when we think about confidence in this country and in this Government, I think a daily vote in confidence is being executed by the individuals investing in this country, creating jobs and opportunity for all our citizens. Under this Government, this country remains the most successful country for foreign direct investment of any country in Europe, with more than £1,300 billion being invested in the past year. That is why *Forbes Magazine* says that this country is the best destination in the world for new jobs. It is why the independent organisation JLL says that the best place in the world for the future of services is here in the United Kingdom. It is why, once again, London has been recorded by independent inspectors as the best place in the world for tech investment. We see that when the Spanish rail firm Talgo shortlists six destinations for investment in new rolling stock, and

all six are in the United Kingdom; when Boeing opens a new factory in Sheffield to create jobs for British workers; when Chanel moves from France to London to establish a new corporate headquarters, and when Starbucks moves from Amsterdam to London to ensure more investment and jobs. The Opposition should wake up and smell the coffee. All this—in the words of the BBC—despite Brexit.

That investment—those jobs that have been created under my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's inspirational leadership—has been made in public services and social justice. As we heard from my hon. Friends the Members for Dudley South (Mike Wood) and for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman), there are 1.9 million more children in good and outstanding schools. It is also the case that the gap between the poorest and the richest in our schools has narrowed under this Conservative Government. We have a record level of investment in the NHS and, thanks to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, a 10-year plan and £20 billion of investment—£394 million extra every week—for our NHS.

We also invest in our national security. We meet the 2% target for investment in NATO and we have two new aircraft carriers, which are capable of projecting British force and influence across the world in defence of freedom and democracy. By contrast, while we are standing up for national security, what about the right hon. Member for Islington North? He wants to leave NATO. He wants to get rid of our nuclear deterrent. He said recently in a speech, “Why do countries boast about the size of their armies? That is quite wrong. Why don't we emulate Costa Rica, which has no army at all?” No allies, no deterrent, no army—no way can this country ever allow that man to be our Prime Minister and in charge of our national security.

If the Leader of the Opposition cannot support our fighting men and women, who does he support? Who does he stand beside? It was fascinating to discover that he was there when a wreath was laid to commemorate those who were involved in the massacre of Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics. He says he was present but not involved. “Present but not involved” sums him up when it comes to national security. When this House voted to bomb the fascists of ISIS after an inspirational speech by the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), 66 Labour Members, including the hon. Member for West Bromwich East, voted with this Government to defeat fascism. I am afraid the Leader of the Opposition was not with us. In fighting fascism, he was present but not involved.

Similarly, when this House voted to take the action necessary when Vladimir Putin executed an act of terrorism on our soil, many good Labour Members stood up to support what we were doing, but not the Leader of the Opposition. When we were fighting Vladimir Putin—

**Danielle Rowley:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

**Mr Speaker:** I hope it is a genuine point of order.

**Danielle Rowley:** The motion is about the Government. How is this relevant? Is this not dangerous?

**Mr Speaker:** If the Secretary of State were out of order, I would have said so. I did not because he is not.

**Michael Gove:** Thank you very much, Mr Speaker.

If the Leader of the Opposition will not stand up against Putin when he attacks people in this country, if he will not stand up against fascists when they are running riot in Syria, if he will not stand up for this country when the critical national security questions are being asked, how can we possibly expect him to stand up for us in European negotiations? Will he stand up for us against Spain over Gibraltar? Will he stand up against the Commission to ensure that we get a good deal? Of course he will not, because he will not even stand up for his own Members of Parliament.

Why is it that a Labour Member of Parliament needs armed protection at her own party conference? Why is it that nearly half of female Labour MPs wrote to the Leader of the Opposition to say that he was not standing up against the vilification and the abuse that they received online which had been carried out in his name? If he cannot protect his own Members of Parliament, if he cannot protect the proud traditions of the Labour party, how can he possibly protect this country? We cannot have confidence in him to lead. We have confidence in this Government, which is why I recommend that the House votes against the motion.

7 pm

*Debate interrupted (Order, this day).*

*Question put.*

*The House divided: Ayes 306, Noes 325.*

**Division No. 296]**

**[7 pm**

**AYES**

Abbott, rh Ms Diane	Byrne, rh Liam
Abrahams, Debbie	Cable, rh Sir Vince
Ali, Rushanara	Cadbury, Ruth
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena	Cameron, Dr Lisa
Amesbury, Mike	Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Antoniazzi, Tonia	Campbell, Mr Ronnie
Ashworth, Jonathan	Carden, Dan
Austin, Ian	Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Bailey, Mr Adrian	Champion, Sarah
Bardell, Hannah	Chapman, Douglas
Barron, rh Sir Kevin	Chapman, Jenny
Beckett, rh Margaret	Charalambous, Bambos
Benn, rh Hilary	Cherry, Joanna
Berger, Luciana	Clwyd, rh Ann
Betts, Mr Clive	Coaker, Vernon
Black, Mhairi	Coffey, Ann
Blackford, rh Ian	Cooper, Julie
Blackman, Kirsty	Cooper, Rosie
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta	Cooper, rh Yvette
Blomfield, Paul	Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Brabin, Tracy	Cowan, Ronnie
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben	Coyle, Neil
Brake, rh Tom	Crausby, Sir David
Brennan, Kevin	Crawley, Angela
Brock, Deirdre	Creagh, Mary
Brown, Alan	Creasy, Stella
Brown, Lyn	Cruddas, Jon
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas	Cryer, John
Bryant, Chris	Cummins, Judith
Buck, Ms Karen	Cunningham, Alex
Burden, Richard	Cunningham, Mr Jim
Burgon, Richard	Daby, Janet
Butler, Dawn	Dakin, Nic
	Davey, rh Sir Edward



David, Wayne  
 Davies, Geraint  
 Day, Martyn  
 De Cordova, Marsha  
 De Piero, Gloria  
 Debonnaire, Thangam  
 Dent Coad, Emma  
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh  
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin  
 Dodds, Anneliese  
 Doughty, Stephen  
 Dowd, Peter  
 Drew, Dr David  
 Dromey, Jack  
 Duffield, Rosie  
 Eagle, Ms Angela  
 Eagle, Maria  
 Edwards, Jonathan  
 Efford, Clive  
 Elliott, Julie  
 Ellman, Dame Louise  
 Elmore, Chris  
 Esterson, Bill  
 Evans, Chris  
 Farrelly, Paul  
 Farron, Tim  
 Fellows, Marion  
 Field, rh Frank  
 Fitzpatrick, Jim  
 Fletcher, Colleen  
 Flint, rh Caroline  
 Fovargue, Yvonne  
 Foxcroft, Vicky  
 Frith, James  
 Furniss, Gill  
 Gaffney, Hugh  
 Gapes, Mike  
 Gardiner, Barry  
 George, Ruth  
 Gethins, Stephen  
 Gibson, Patricia  
 Gill, Preet Kaur  
 Glindon, Mary  
 Godsiff, Mr Roger  
 Goodman, Helen  
 Grady, Patrick  
 Grant, Peter  
 Gray, Neil  
 Green, Kate  
 Greenwood, Lilian  
 Greenwood, Margaret  
 Griffith, Nia  
 Grogan, John  
 Gwynne, Andrew  
 Haigh, Louise  
 Hamilton, Fabian  
 Hanson, rh David  
 Hardy, Emma  
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet  
 Harris, Carolyn  
 Hayes, Helen  
 Hayman, Sue  
 Healey, rh John  
 Hendrick, Sir Mark  
 Hendry, Drew  
 Hepburn, Mr Stephen  
 Hill, Mike  
 Hillier, Meg  
 Hobhouse, Wera  
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret  
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon  
 Hoey, Kate

Hollern, Kate  
 Hopkins, Kelvin  
 Hosie, Stewart  
 Howarth, rh Mr George  
 Huq, Dr Rupa  
 Hussain, Imran  
 Jardine, Christine  
 Jarvis, Dan  
 Johnson, Diana  
 Jones, Darren  
 Jones, Gerald  
 Jones, Graham  
 P.  
 Jones, Helen  
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan  
 Jones, Sarah  
 Jones, Susan Elan  
 Kane, Mike  
 Keeley, Barbara  
 Kendall, Liz  
 Khan, Afzal  
 Killen, Ged  
 Kinnock, Stephen  
 Kyle, Peter  
 Laird, Lesley  
 Lake, Ben  
 Lamb, rh Norman  
 Lammy, rh Mr David  
 Lavery, Ian  
 Law, Chris  
 Lee, Karen  
 Leslie, Mr Chris  
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma  
 Lewis, Clive  
 Linden, David  
 Lloyd, Stephen  
 Lloyd, Tony  
 Long Bailey, Rebecca  
 Lucas, Caroline  
 Lucas, Ian C.  
 Lynch, Holly  
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan  
 Madders, Justin  
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid  
 Mahmood, Shabana  
 Malhotra, Seema  
 Mann, John  
 Marsden, Gordon  
 Martin, Sandy  
 Maskell, Rachael  
 Matheson, Christian  
 Mc Nally, John  
 McCabe, Steve  
 McCarthy, Kerry  
 McDonagh, Siobhain  
 McDonald, Andy  
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm  
 McDonald, Stuart  
 C.  
 McDonnell, rh John  
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat  
 McGinn, Conor  
 McGovern, Alison  
 McInnes, Liz  
 McKinnell, Catherine  
 McMahan, Jim  
 McMorrin, Anna  
 Mearns, Ian  
 Miliband, rh Edward  
 Monaghan, Carol  
 Moon, Mrs Madeleine  
 Moran, Layla

Morgan, Stephen  
 Morris, Grahame  
 Murray, Ian  
 Nandy, Lisa  
 Newlands, Gavin  
 Norris, Alex  
 O'Hara, Brendan  
 O'Mara, Jared  
 Onn, Melanie  
 Onwurah, Chi  
 Osamor, Kate  
 Owen, Albert  
 Peacock, Stephanie  
 Pearce, Teresa  
 Pennycook, Matthew  
 Perkins, Toby  
 Phillips, Jess  
 Phillipson, Bridget  
 Pidcock, Laura  
 Platt, Jo  
 Pollard, Luke  
 Pound, Stephen  
 Powell, Lucy  
 Qureshi, Yasmin  
 Rashid, Faisal  
 Rayner, Angela  
 Reed, Mr Steve  
 Rees, Christina  
 Reeves, Ellie  
 Reeves, Rachel  
 Reynolds, Emma  
 Reynolds, Jonathan  
 Rimmer, Ms Marie  
 Robinson, Mr Geoffrey  
 Rodda, Matt  
 Rowley, Danielle  
 Ruane, Chris  
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd  
 Ryan, rh Joan  
 Saville Roberts, Liz  
 Shah, Naz  
 Sharma, Mr Virendra  
 Sheerman, Mr Barry  
 Sheppard, Tommy  
 Sherriff, Paula  
 Shuker, Mr Gavin  
 Siddiq, Tulip  
 Skinner, Mr Dennis  
 Slaughter, Andy  
 Smeeth, Ruth  
 Smith, Angela

Smith, Cat  
 Smith, Eleanor  
 Smith, Laura  
 Smith, Nick  
 Smith, Owen  
 Smyth, Karin  
 Snell, Gareth  
 Sobel, Alex  
 Spellar, rh John  
 Starmer, rh Keir  
 Stephens, Chris  
 Stevens, Jo  
 Stone, Jamie  
 Streeting, Wes  
 Stringer, Graham  
 Sweeney, Mr Paul  
 Swinson, Jo  
 Tami, rh Mark  
 Thewliss, Alison  
 Thomas, Gareth  
 Thomas-Symonds,  
 Nick  
 Thornberry, rh Emily  
 Timms, rh Stephen  
 Trickett, Jon  
 Turley, Anna  
 Turner, Karl  
 Twigg, Derek  
 Twigg, Stephen  
 Twist, Liz  
 Umunna, Chuka  
 Vaz, rh Keith  
 Vaz, Valerie  
 Walker, Thelma  
 Watson, Tom  
 West, Catherine  
 Western, Matt  
 Whitehead, Dr Alan  
 Whitfield, Martin  
 Whitford, Dr Philippa  
 Williams, Hywel  
 Williams, Dr Paul  
 Williamson, Chris  
 Wilson, Phil  
 Wishart, Pete  
 Yasin, Mohammad  
 Zeichner, Daniel

**Tellers for the Ayes:**  
**Jessica Morden and**  
**Jeff Smith**

#### NOES

Adams, Nigel  
 Afolami, Bim  
 Afriyie, Adam  
 Aldous, Peter  
 Allan, Lucy  
 Allen, Heidi  
 Amess, Sir David  
 Andrew, Stuart  
 Argar, Edward  
 Atkins, Victoria  
 Bacon, Mr Richard  
 Badenoch, Mrs Kemi  
 Baker, Mr Steve  
 Baldwin, Harriett  
 Barclay, rh Stephen  
 Baron, Mr John  
 Bebb, Guto  
 Bellingham, Sir Henry  
 Benyon, rh Richard  
 Beresford, Sir Paul  
 Berry, Jake  
 Blackman, Bob  
 Blunt, Crispin  
 Boles, Nick  
 Bone, Mr Peter  
 Bottomley, Sir Peter  
 Bowie, Andrew  
 Bradley, Ben  
 Bradley, rh Karen  
 Brady, Sir Graham  
 Braverman, Suella  
 Brereton, Jack  
 Bridgen, Andrew  
 Brine, Steve  
 Brokenshire, rh James  
 Bruce, Fiona

Buckland, Robert	Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl	Lancaster, rh Mark	Quince, Will
Burghart, Alex	Girvan, Paul	Latham, Mrs Pauline	Raab, rh Dominic
Burns, Conor	Glen, John	Leadsom, rh Andrea	Redwood, rh John
Burt, rh Alistair	Goldsmith, Zac	Lee, Dr Phillip	Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
Cairns, rh Alun	Goodwill, rh Mr Robert	Lefroy, Jeremy	Robertson, Mr Laurence
Campbell, Mr Gregory	Gove, rh Michael	Leigh, rh Sir Edward	Robinson, Gavin
Cartlidge, James	Graham, Luke	Letwin, rh Sir Oliver	Robinson, Mary
Cash, Sir William	Graham, Richard	Lewer, Andrew	Rosindell, Andrew
Caulfield, Maria	Grant, Bill	Lewis, rh Brandon	Ross, Douglas
Chalk, Alex	Grant, Mrs Helen	Lewis, rh Dr Julian	Rowley, Lee
Chishti, Rehman	Gray, James	Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian	Rudd, rh Amber
Chope, Sir Christopher	Grayling, rh Chris	Lidington, rh Mr David	Rutley, David
Churchill, Jo	Green, Chris	Little Pengelly, Emma	Sandbach, Antoinette
Clark, Colin	Green, rh Damian	Lopez, Julia	Scully, Paul
Clark, rh Greg	Greening, rh Justine	Lopresti, Jack	Seely, Mr Bob
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth	Grieve, rh Mr Dominic	Lord, Mr Jonathan	Selous, Andrew
Clarke, Mr Simon	Griffiths, Andrew	Loughton, Tim	Shannon, Jim
Cleverly, James	Gyimah, Mr Sam	Mackinlay, Craig	Shapps, rh Grant
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey	Hair, Kirstene	Maclean, Rachel	Sharma, Alok
Coffey, Dr Thérèse	Halfon, rh Robert	Main, Mrs Anne	Shelbrooke, Alec
Collins, Damian	Hall, Luke	Mak, Alan	Simpson, David
Costa, Alberto	Hammond, rh Mr Philip	Malthouse, Kit	Simpson, rh Mr Keith
Courts, Robert	Hammond, Stephen	Mann, Scott	Skidmore, Chris
Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey	Hancock, rh Matt	Masterton, Paul	Smith, Chloe
Crabb, rh Stephen	Hands, rh Greg	May, rh Mrs Theresa	Smith, Henry
Crouch, Tracey	Harper, rh Mr Mark	Maynard, Paul	Smith, Royston
Davies, Chris	Harrington, Richard	McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick	Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
Davies, David T. C.	Harris, Rebecca	McPartland, Stephen	Soubry, rh Anna
Davies, Glyn	Harrison, Trudy	McVey, rh Ms Esther	Spelman, rh Dame Caroline
Davies, Mims	Hart, Simon	Menzies, Mark	Spencer, Mark
Davies, Philip	Hayes, rh Sir John	Mercer, Johnny	Stephenson, Andrew
Davis, rh Mr David	Heald, rh Sir Oliver	Merriman, Huw	Stevenson, John
Dinenage, Caroline	Heappey, James	Metcalfe, Stephen	Stewart, Bob
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan	Heaton-Harris, Chris	Miller, rh Mrs Maria	Stewart, Iain
Docherty, Leo	Heaton-Jones, Peter	Milling, Amanda	Stewart, Rory
Dodds, rh Nigel	Henderson, Gordon	Mills, Nigel	Streeter, Sir Gary
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.	Herbert, rh Nick	Milton, rh Anne	Stride, rh Mel
Donelan, Michelle	Hermon, Lady	Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew	Stuart, Graham
Dorries, Ms Nadine	Hinds, rh Damian	Moore, Damien	Sturdy, Julian
Double, Steve	Hoare, Simon	Mordaunt, rh Penny	Sunak, Rishi
Dowden, Oliver	Hollingbery, George	Morgan, rh Nicky	Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Doyle-Price, Jackie	Hollinrake, Kevin	Morris, Anne Marie	Swire, rh Sir Hugo
Drax, Richard	Hollobone, Mr Philip	Morris, David	Syms, Sir Robert
Duddridge, James	Holloway, Adam	Morris, James	Thomas, Derek
Duguid, David	Howell, John	Morton, Wendy	Thomson, Ross
Duncan, rh Sir Alan	Huddleston, Nigel	Mundell, rh David	Throup, Maggie
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain	Hughes, Eddie	Murray, Mrs Sheryll	Tolhurst, Kelly
Dunne, rh Mr Philip	Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy	Murrison, Dr Andrew	Tomlinson, Justin
Ellis, Michael	Hurd, rh Mr Nick	Neill, Robert	Tomlinson, Michael
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias	Jack, Mr Alister	Newton, Sarah	Tracey, Craig
Elphicke, Charlie	James, Margot	Nokes, rh Caroline	Tredinnick, David
Eustice, George	Javid, rh Sajid	Norman, Jesse	Trevelyan, Anne-Marie
Evans, Mr Nigel	Jayawardena, Mr Ranil	O'Brien, Neil	Truss, rh Elizabeth
Evennett, rh Sir David	Jenkin, Sir Bernard	Offord, Dr Matthew	Tugendhat, Tom
Fabricant, Michael	Jenkyns, Andrea	Opperman, Guy	Vaizey, rh Mr Edward
Fallon, rh Sir Michael	Jenrick, Robert	Paisley, Ian	Vara, Mr Shailesh
Field, rh Mark	Johnson, rh Boris	Parish, Neil	Vickers, Martin
Ford, Vicky	Johnson, Dr Caroline	Patel, rh Priti	Villiers, rh Theresa
Foster, Kevin	Johnson, Gareth	Paterson, rh Mr Owen	Walker, Mr Charles
Fox, rh Dr Liam	Johnson, Joseph	Pawsey, Mark	Walker, Mr Robin
Francois, rh Mr Mark	Jones, Andrew	Penning, rh Sir Mike	Wallace, rh Mr Ben
Frazer, Lucy	Jones, rh Mr David	Penrose, John	Warburton, David
Freeman, George	Jones, Mr Marcus	Percy, Andrew	Warman, Matt
Freer, Mike	Kawczynski, Daniel	Perry, rh Claire	Watling, Giles
Fysh, Mr Marcus	Keegan, Gillian	Philp, Chris	Whately, Helen
Gale, rh Sir Roger	Kennedy, Seema	Poulter, Dr Dan	Wheeler, Mrs Heather
Garnier, Mark	Kerr, Stephen	Pow, Rebecca	Whittaker, Craig
Gauke, rh Mr David	Knight, Stephen	Prentis, Victoria	Whittingdale, rh Mr John
Ghani, Ms Nusrat	Knight, rh Sir Greg	Prisk, Mr Mark	Wiggin, Bill
Gibb, rh Nick	Knight, Julian	Pritchard, Mark	Williamson, rh Gavin
	Kwarteng, Kwasi	Pursglove, Tom	Wilson, rh Sammy
	Lamont, John	Quin, Jeremy	Wollaston, Dr Sarah

Wood, Mike  
Wragg, Mr William  
Wright, Mr Jeremy  
Zahawi, Nadhim

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
**Julian Smith and**  
**Christopher Pincher**

*Question accordingly negatived.*

**The Prime Minister:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I am pleased that the House has expressed its confidence in the Government tonight. I do not take this responsibility lightly, and my Government will continue their work to increase our prosperity, guarantee our security and strengthen our Union—and yes, we will also continue to work to deliver on the solemn promise that we made to the people of this country to deliver on the result of the referendum and leave the European Union.

I believe that this duty is shared by every Member of this House. We have a responsibility to identify a way forward that can secure the backing of the House, and to that end I have proposed a series of meetings between senior parliamentarians and representatives of the Government over the coming days. I should like to invite the leaders of parliamentary parties to meet me individually, and I should like to start those meetings tonight. The Government approach the meetings in a constructive spirit, and I urge others to do the same, and we must find solutions that are negotiable and command sufficient support in the House. As I have said, we will return to the House on Monday to table an amendable motion and to make a statement about the way forward.

The House has put its confidence in this Government. I stand ready to work with any Member of the House to deliver on Brexit, and to ensure that this House retains the confidence of the British people.

**Mr Speaker:** I call Jeremy Corbyn.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Last night the House rejected the Government's conclusion of its negotiations with the European Union—*[Interruption.]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I called the Prime Minister on a point of order, and the Prime Minister was heard. She was heard in relative tranquillity, and certainly with courtesy. The same courtesy will be extended to the Leader of the Opposition, and to others who seek to raise points of order. That is the way it is.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Last night, the House rejected the Government's deal emphatically. A week ago, the House voted to condemn the idea of a no-deal Brexit. Before there can be any positive discussions about the way forward, the Government must remove, clearly and once and for all, the prospect of the catastrophe of a no-deal Brexit from the EU, and all the chaos that would come as a result of that. I invite the Prime Minister to confirm now that the Government will not countenance a no-deal Brexit from the European Union.

**Ian Blackford:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I must say that I welcome the offer of talks from the Prime Minister. It is important that all of us recognise the responsibility that we have, and, on the back of the defeat of the Government's motion last night, that we have to work together where we can to find a way forward. I commit the Scottish National party to working

constructively with the Government. However, it is important in that regard that we make it clear to the Prime Minister, in the spirit of openness in these talks, that the issue of extending article 50, of a people's vote and avoiding a no deal have to be on the table. We have to agree to enter these talks on the basis that we can move forward and achieve a result that will unify all the nations of the United Kingdom.

**Mr Speaker:** Thank you.

**Sir Edward Davey:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. From the Liberal Democrats position, we are clear that we want to engage in talks with Her Majesty's Government, but it is important that the Government make clear that no deal is not an option. It is very important that the Prime Minister does not—as, to be fair to her, earlier today she did not—rule out extending article 50; it is important that the House has that chance to think and come together. Finally, I ask the Prime Minister to ensure that this House gets a chance to take control of our own business as we go through the next few days and weeks.

**Mr Speaker:** Thank you.

**Nigel Dodds:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. The result of the motion of no confidence tonight illustrates the importance of the confidence and supply arrangement currently in place between—*[Interruption.]* I am always delighted when our opponents illustrate the strength of that relationship and what it is delivering for Northern Ireland; and when the people of Northern Ireland see that investment in education and health and infrastructure, they will thank this Parliament and this party and this Government for that extra investment. *[Interruption.]* May I say this—*[Interruption.]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Mr Stone, that is very unseemly behaviour. Normally you behave with great dignity in this place; calm yourself, man—get a grip.

**Nigel Dodds:** May I say, however, that the confidence and supply arrangement is of course built upon delivering Brexit on the basis of our shared priorities, and for us that is the Union, and we want to deliver Brexit, taking back control of our laws, our borders and our money, and leave the European Union as one country? Let us work in the coming days to achieve that objective.

**Mr Speaker:** Thank you.

**Mr Carmichael** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** If the right hon. Gentleman really feels he must make a point of order then he may, although he has been represented by his right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Sir Edward Davey). *[Interruption.]* No, out of generosity of spirit.

**Mr Carmichael:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I thank the Prime Minister for her assurance that the motion that will be brought on Monday will be amendable, and may I seek your guidance, Mr Speaker, about how we on this side of the House, and indeed on the Conservative Benches as well, who want to see this matter put to a people's vote might on Monday be given the opportunity to do so, including the opportunity given to the Leader of the Opposition now that we know there is not to be a general election?



**Mr Speaker:** My response to the right hon. Gentleman, apart from thanking him for his point of order, is to say that if there is an amendable motion of which the Prime Minister, on behalf of the Government, has given notice, manifestly there will be an opportunity for people to table amendments, and we shall have then to see what happens. The right hon. Gentleman would not expect me to make a commitment in advance, but I know what he thinks and I have heard what he said.

We come now to the Adjournment—*[Interruption.]* Order. If hon. Members do not wish to hear the hon. Member for Solihull (Julian Knight) dilate on the matter of car production in Solihull, which seems an unaccountable choice on their part, I hope that they will leave the Chamber quickly and quietly so that the occupant of the Chair can hear the hon. Gentleman deliver his oration. *[Interruption.]* Order. We come now to the Adjournment, when I can divert the Whip from the attention of his hon. Friend the Member for Mid Bedfordshire (Ms Dorries), who is whispering into his ear, no doubt extremely meaningfully.

## Car Production: Solihull

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—*(Mike Freer.)*

7.25 pm

**Julian Knight** (Solihull) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker. We finally move to the main business of the day. Obviously, it is a great pleasure to follow the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove), and I am sure that my speech will be just as resounding as his. That fantastic oration is not at all a hard act to follow.

I secured this debate prior to the announcements of job reductions at Jaguar Land Rover in the west midlands. We have unfortunately seen a slow trend over the past year, with a drip, drip of job losses in the Jaguar Land Rover group, but the announcements that have just been made are much more substantial and have brought forward the Jaguar Land Rover development partnership. I know that my right hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Dame Caroline Spelman) is playing a leading part in that, as well as in the work being done in the House to promote the needs of the UK car industry, and of Jaguar Land Rover in particular. I am sure that all hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham), will join me in wishing that organisation great success.

I believe that in order to take the right action to support the British car industry, and the towns and families that depend on it, politicians must have an accurate understanding of the real drivers behind the current challenges, and not allow this issue to get caught up in the arguments over Brexit, for example. I therefore want to use my speech to set out why Jaguar Land Rover is so important to Solihull and the wider west midlands economy and the real reasons behind its current difficulties. I shall also set out my recommendations for what Ministers can do to support this crucial industry.

Solihull is rightly proud of that the fact that it is one of Britain's great manufacturing towns. It is home to some of our country's most popular global brands and, as I said in the House the other day, it is one of only a few constituencies to enjoy an actual trade surplus in goods with the European Union. As a consequence, thousands of local residents are employed in those industries, including at the JLR plant at Lode Lane, and they have played a big role in shaping the character of our town.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on bringing forward this debate and I understand his reasons for doing so. It is also good to see other Members with a particular interest in the matter here in the Chamber. A similar situation in Northern Ireland is the Bombardier issue. Does he agree that consideration must be given to bringing work back from foreign plants—such as Slovakia in the case of Jaguar Land Rover—and to keeping jobs here in the United Kingdom? This is what should be happening with Bombardier. Does he agree that the Government should be looking at incentives to encourage the retention of jobs in the big manufacturing bases here in the United Kingdom?

**Julian Knight:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. The way to bring jobs into the UK is to create a business environment in which investment can flourish, and that is basically the point of my speech.

**Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this timely debate. He is right that not a lot can be said about the meetings we have had with Jaguar Land Rover, because that information is confidential, but Jaguar Land Rover is in a totally different situation from Bombardier. We want to support the hon. Gentleman, as he knows, in ensuring that Jaguar Land Rover goes on to create more jobs, and I am sure that he will want to touch on the question of the supply line. I have had a number of letters from small companies that are a bit concerned about the situation, although we have had some reassurances and there will be further discussions. I wish the hon. Gentleman all the best.

**Julian Knight:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I wonder whether he has seen my speech, because I am just about to mention Jaguar Land Rover's successes, which are manifest. I mentioned employment at the start of my speech, and the reality is that we have gone back to the situation that we were in in 2016.

**Mr Andrew Mitchell** (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important debate. I have a feeling that I know what he is going to say, and he will have huge and strong support from my constituents in the royal town of Sutton Coldfield due to Jaguar Land Rover's critical importance in our region.

**Julian Knight:** I thank my right hon. Friend for his intervention. I know for a fact that many people who work at Jaguar Land Rover live in his constituency, and the royal town of Sutton Coldfield is a close partner with Solihull in many respects, so I welcome his comment.

JLR faces serious challenges, but it is important not to allow them to eclipse what is still an encouraging picture overall. In 2010, it employed just 12,000 people in the UK. However, even after the latest reductions, it will still employ over 38,000 workers across the country, including 10,000 in Solihull—a more than threefold increase nationwide. The past eight years have also seen substantial revenue growth, from £6 billion a year to £25 billion a year—a more than fourfold increase. Over the past five years, JLR has invested some £80 billion in the UK, which is basically the same as the defence and education budgets put together. It is an enormous investment, and a further round of investment was announced alongside the job news last week.

Overall, the UK continues to enjoy the most productive automotive manufacturing sector in Europe, and productivity remains about 50% higher than the British manufacturing average. In short, Solihull remains a great place for British manufacturers and exporters, and I will do everything I can to help them succeed as part of the new Jaguar Land Rover development partnership, to which I will return later.

We must ensure that the details of this important issue are not confused or obscured. There is no doubt that our relationship with the European Union is a matter of serious concern to JLR and every other manufacturer that depends on international just-in-time supply chains, but JLR's management has been clear

that the driving forces behind the current reductions are twofold: a serious fall in demand in China and a slump in demand for diesel cars in the aftermath of the Volkswagen emissions scandal. Exposure to downturns in foreign markets is part and parcel of being an exporter, but the second reason—the fallout from the VW emissions scandal—is a problem made in Wolfsburg that is threatening jobs and investment in the UK.

For years, Governments of both parties encouraged Britons to buy diesel and, by extension, encouraged British car makers to service that need. According to Professor David Bailey, more than 90% of JLR's domestic sales are diesels. But after Volkswagen was found to have been fiddling its emissions scores, we suddenly saw a scramble to be seen to crack down on diesel, which has had predictable results. Jaguar sales are down 26% so far this year, and that pattern has been repeated across the UK car industry, where overall diesel registrations have plunged by a third since January to March 2017.

Respected economists from the Centre for Economics and Business Research have shown that such policies are hugely detrimental to the economy. Many such policies also fail to account for the huge differences between old-fashioned diesel engines and so-called cleaner diesel alternatives of the sort manufactured by Jaguar Land Rover in my constituency. Those cars are just as clean as petrol alternatives. In fact, *What Car?* recently named a diesel as its car of the year, saying that it combined the low CO<sub>2</sub> for which diesels are known with lower NO<sub>x</sub> output than many petrol alternatives. What is worse—this is perverse in many respects—many people are now switching to petrol without realising that they could be buying a more polluting vehicle than the diesel that they could have bought instead, perhaps at a good discount.

**Dame Caroline Spelman** (Meriden) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. He is doing a great job of trying to rehabilitate the truth about new diesel engines, which will help to justify the huge investment that both JLR and the Government have put into developing them. I hope that this debate will help to disabuse people of the myths about the differences between petrol and diesel.

**Julian Knight:** I was recently diagnosed as asthmatic, which, for someone who cycled up mountains less than two years ago, is a frightening and life-altering experience in many respects. I am very conscious of the fact my right hon. Friend raises, but we need to get it right so that we do not end up ensuring that older polluting diesels are kept on the roads longer because people are afraid to change them as they will lose money. We need to encourage people to transition to new technology, but at the same time, we need to fill that gap with cleaner diesel until the capacity is there.

**Matt Western** (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): I thank the hon. Gentleman for bringing this important and timely debate before us. Having worked with him and other colleagues on the automotive industry and Jaguar Land Rover, I know he shares my passion.

I think the hon. Gentleman agrees with me that the transition he describes is critical and that the Government must work with manufacturers to ensure that we get a co-ordinated, managed transition away from diesel and petrol towards cleaner fuels. Will he speak about diesel

taxation and how we should not penalise consumers but support them in the transition? That would particularly help Jaguar Land Rover.

**Julian Knight:** The hon. Gentleman has put his thoughts on the record. He is correct about the transition, and we cannot ask car manufacturers to move at pace to those new technologies and then take EU policy that could potentially damage the income streams that allow them to invest. We need to be nuanced and thoughtful about that while protecting our environment.

**Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con):** My hon. Friend is making some excellent points. Jaguar Land Rover has invested a huge amount of money in south Staffordshire, on the border with Wolverhampton, precisely to build those engines at its engine plant. That has brought huge numbers of excellent job opportunities to both Wolverhampton and Staffordshire. Will he join me in paying tribute to its foresight on those clean engines?

**Julian Knight:** I certainly will, and I know the impact that investment has had on my hon. Friend's local community and on the wider west midlands economy. Those jobs are fantastic. The pay is much higher than the national average wage, which creates jobs in the local economy through the multiplier effect. They are jobs that we have to keep and develop. The key word is "transition."

**Mr Jim Cunningham:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Julian Knight:** I am conscious of time. Sorry.

Jaguar Land Rover has announced that all new models will be electrified from 2020, and I have no doubt that other manufacturers will follow suit. It is a simple fact that we do not yet have the infrastructure to handle a wholesale shift towards electric vehicles in the near future.

As I told the House during the passage of the Automated and Electric Vehicles Act 2018, the current capacity for public charging points does not come close to that provided by traditional filling stations. It will take time to put the necessary infrastructure in place and, until it is ready, our environmental goals are best served by encouraging motorists to switch to cleaner, modern vehicles of all types before we get rid of the internal combustion engine by 2040.

As the MP for a car-making town, and as a former chairman of the all-party parliamentary group for fair fuel for UK motorists and UK hauliers, I am grateful for the Government's proactive approach to the sector. The previously mentioned sector deal is welcome, and I am proud to have the opportunity to serve on the new JLR development partnership, which will give the company, firms in its supply chain, trade union officials and others the opportunity to liaise directly with the Business Secretary, the Mayor of the West Midlands and other local politicians.

I also note the £500 million investment in the new advanced propulsion centre, which is intended to research, develop and industrialise new low-carbon automotive technologies, and in other initiatives such as the Faraday battery challenge and the supplier competitiveness and productivity programme. The car industry has proven

itself more than willing to collaborate with Ministers in this field, match-funding not just the advanced propulsion centre but also another £225 million for R&D investment.

We face a period of economic uncertainty, especially for exporters, as we negotiate our future relationship with the European Union and start to pursue our own independent trade policy. It is vital to the wellbeing of constituencies such as mine and the entire British economy, not to mention the Government's own long-term environmental and technological ambitions, that we do everything we can to offer stability and certainty to companies such as Jaguar Land Rover. Only then will they be able to make the investment needed to protect jobs, drive growth and make our eventual transition to electric cars a reality.

7.39 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Richard Harrington):** I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull (Julian Knight) on securing this debate, although I must confess I am a little disappointed because, when I came into the Chamber, I saw lots of people, who I thought had come to listen to this debate. I thought, "Perhaps it is because of Jaguar." Jaguars are known as "supertoys" by many people. Members may aspire to owning them and I can strongly recommend them. I have had a little indication that Madam Deputy Speaker may have a product manufactured by this company. So if representatives from the company are listening, I can say that we do have her endorsement.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** And the Minister.

**Richard Harrington:** And indeed myself, although not at taxpayers' expense. In addition, it is not a "supertoy"; it is a more modest model.

Tonight's subject is very important and I wish to thank other Members who have contributed. Jaguar Land Rover has an excellent group of MPs in the area, and I was pleased to meet them last week to discuss the announcement that was made. *[Interruption.]* I see the hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington (Matt Western) shaking his head. I do hope I have not affronted him if I have not met him—most Members were there. If I have, I really apologise and I will make sure he is always invited.

**Matt Western:** I do not believe I was invited, but I very much hope that I will be invited in future.

**Richard Harrington:** If the hon. Gentleman was not invited, I would like to apologise to him. This was all done at the last minute. I will meet him whenever he likes, either informally or in a meeting with officials. The point I was making is that JLR is a cross-party matter, and it is treated in that way by the Government and by the company.

In the time we have, I wish briefly to outline the steps the Government have taken since JLR announced last Thursday that it will reduce its global workforce by about 4,500 people. I will then move on to address the arguments put forward by my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull. As he highlighted, the UK automotive industry remains one of our great success stories, and global demand for UK designed, engineered and manufactured vehicles



[Richard Harrington]

is strong. Our industry is regarded internationally as very productive. Our industrial strategy builds on these strengths and invests in the future, to put the UK at the forefront of the next generation of electric and autonomous vehicles. JLR is a key part of our automotive manufacturing base, supporting high-quality jobs, both directly and across the automotive supply chain.

As my hon. Friend noted, last Thursday, Jaguar Land Rover confirmed that it is offering voluntary redundancy packages to its UK workforce, to reduce the headcount. As this is a voluntary redundancy programme, the company cannot give any figures on the number of Solihull workers who might be affected. However, JLR has made it clear to us, in a call that the Secretary of State and I had with its chief executive just before the announcement, that those working on production lines are not part of this programme; this predominantly relates to marketing and management staff. I do not make light of that; these people will be made redundant—we hope it will be with their agreement—and what job they do does not particularly matter. He also stressed to us that the apprenticeship programme, which has been supported so well by my hon. Friend and other local MPs, will continue, as will graduate recruitment and the recruitment of specific staff that the company needs.

The decision to offer these redundancies is the next phase of a £2.5 billion “Charge and Accelerate” turnaround plan, which the company announced last September. As I say, I have spoken several times to the chief executive and he has explained how these redundancies will streamline the business and help to ensure the company’s long-term health for the future. As I say, I do think a lot of every member of staff and their families, who face an uncertain time. I assure the House that we are working closely with colleagues throughout the west midlands to offer whatever support we can.

We are also working to support the company itself. We have a long-standing relationship with the firm and its parent company in India. Since the turnaround plans were announced last September, we have worked even more closely with the company in support of its long-term strategy as it invests and transitions to autonomous, connected and electric vehicles.

**Mr Jim Cunningham:** First, one of the important factors here is that the development of the electric vehicles takes place at Whitley in Coventry. Secondly, the Minister might want to think about whether a scrappage scheme would help the situation. I do not know—it would have to be put to the company—but it struck me as something that we should perhaps think about and explore to help the company. Thirdly, as my hon. Friend the Member for Warwick and Leamington (Matt Western) said, there is the issue of taxation. Lastly, when we talk about the labour force, it is important to remember that a lot of the labour force bought houses, certainly in my constituency and others, so we have to do as much as possible to help them if they run into difficult situations with, for example, mortgages.

**Richard Harrington:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. He was at the meeting last week and I know that, like other Members, he spends a lot of time with Jaguar. Let me go through his points briefly. I must

confess that I have not thought about a scrappage scheme, but I am happy to do so now, as he suggested. I will come to the matter of taxation and the electric vehicles later in my speech.

I was just about to confirm that Andy Street, the Mayor of the West Midlands Combined Authority, and the Secretary of State convened the Jaguar Land Rover development partnership, which brought together the company and local MPs, including my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull, whom I thank for having come at short notice. Other local MPs were invited and I hope that, although I might have missed him out from my meeting, the hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington was not missed out from that one. I was not there, in case there was an urgent question in the House on the subject; somebody had to be here to deal with it. I do not know whether I drew the short straw or the long one, but I intend to be there in future. It is a part of my responsibilities that I look forward to taking up. Also present were trade union representatives, trade bodies, local government and almost anyone who we felt was relevant and could be invited. The partnership is a continuing group. It heard from chief executive Ralf Speth about the significant investment that Jaguar Land Rover continues to make in the UK. He gave many examples of how the company is investing in the future, including in Solihull.

I accept the point that the hon. Member for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham) just made about working families throughout the UK, not just in his Coventry constituency—

**Mr Jim Cunningham:** I did say other constituencies.

**Richard Harrington:** The hon. Gentleman certainly did. The lives of people throughout the UK are affected. As my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull said, these are not just jobs: they are well-paid, highly skilled, well-respected jobs, and long should they continue. Jaguar Land Rover seems positive about the future. Last week, I met Steve Turner, one of the trade union representatives, and I have to say, without betraying Steve’s confidence, that I asked him what the management is really like—I have dealt with the chief executive and so on—and he said it is absolutely very good. I believe that, and I think everyone involved has confirmed that, so I am confident for the future.

Let me turn to the specific points. Jaguar has confirmed that the next-generation electric drive units will be produced at the company’s engine manufacturing centre in Wolverhampton, from later this year. The units will be powered by batteries assembled at a new JLR battery centre located at Hams Hall in Birmingham. That clearly reinforces the company’s commitment to the west midlands.

Over the past year, Jaguar Land Rover has announced investment in its key plants in Solihull and Halewood, to build the next generation of models, including electric vehicles. For Solihull in particular, in June 2018 the company announced hundreds of millions of pounds of investment in a technology upgrade to accommodate the next generation of flagship Land Rover models. Hopefully—this is certainly the intention—that will future-proof the site.

We are determined to ensure that the UK continues to be one of the most competitive locations in the world for automotive and other advanced manufacturing. My hon. Friend mentioned the automotive sector deal,

which was published just over a year ago. The Government are working with industry to invest in the future. This includes a £1 billion commitment over 10 years through the Advanced Propulsion Centre, which is very impressive. Jaguar Land Rover has benefited from this support; most recently as part of a £4.4 million project through the Advanced Propulsion Centre, and a £11.2 million one through the connected and autonomous vehicles intelligent mobility fund.

I now want to turn to other arguments made by my hon. Friend. As he rightly points out, while Jaguar Land Rover has had great success over the past decade, the number of challenges facing the company are significant. Falling sales in China has been a major factor and it has had an impact on many global automotive companies. In addition, the broad trend of declining consumer demand for diesel has had an impact.

I make no apology for the Government's bold vision on ultra low emissions vehicles, which we set out in our road to zero strategy. I am sure that, in the long run, Jaguar will be a major beneficiary of that strategy, as, of course, will be the environment of this country, Europe and, I hope, the world. We want to be at the forefront of this and aim for all new cars and vans to be effectively zero emission by 2040. Hopefully, by 2050 and beyond, every car will be zero emission. I agree with the critical point made by my hon. Friend: diesel plays an important role in reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from road transport during the transition and it will continue to have an important role for years to come. We need to be clear on this point, both in our own minds and in our communication with industry, and I believe that we have been.

The Government's road to zero strategy is clear that diesel, particularly the new generation of diesel engines, is a perfectly acceptable choice environmentally and economically. For those Members who are not familiar with this document, I suggest that they look at it. There has been much talk of the Government playing a role in destroying diesel and talking it down.

**Julian Knight:** I am really encouraged by what the Minister has said in that regard. The reality is that the collapse in diesel is a Europe-wide issue; we know that. It is just that we need this nuance—this idea that cleaner

diesel does play a role—shouted from the rooftops, provided that the industry can show that this clean diesel does not harm the environment.

**Richard Harrington:** I do not have it within my power to shout from the rooftops, but I will shout from this Chamber for those people who are listening. The new clean diesels are really, really good. I confess to having a penchant for this particular kind of vehicle.

**Matt Western:** I thank the Minister for being so generous with his time. Let me return to this important point. He is speaking about shouting from the rooftops. Perhaps the most critical point to shout about is taxation. I appreciate the points that have just been made by the hon. Member for Solihull (Julian Knight). There is a global issue, as we have seen in north America and across Europe, on diesel, but it is in the Government's gift to change taxation and not to penalise. The maximum vehicle excise duty addition that was put in was £560 on a vehicle.

**Richard Harrington:** I am bursting to respond to the hon. Gentleman's point, but I have two minutes left, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I do not want to torment your time—well, you will not let me; you would tell me not to.

My hon. Friend made the same point. I am pleased to remind the House that, on 19 December, the Treasury published a review of the impact of the worldwide harmonised light vehicles test procedure on vehicle excise duty and company car tax. The review is open until 17 September<sup>1</sup>. Officials from the Department have been working closely with Jaguar Land Rover and others to ensure that the industry's evidence is considered in the review and I look forward to the outcome.

I congratulate my hon. Friend. He really is a major spokesman for the company, together with his colleagues. This debate is but a small part of the work that he does. My door is always open to him and to the company. I look forward to a great future for Jaguar Land Rover, and I know that the west midlands will be a key part of that.

*Question put and agreed to.*

7.54 pm

*House adjourned.*

## Deferred Divisions

### ENERGY CONSERVATION

That the draft Energy Efficiency (Private Rented Property) (England and Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2018, which were laid before this House on 27 November 2018, be approved.

*The House divided: Ayes 330, Noes 240.*

*Votes cast by Members for constituencies in England and Wales: Ayes 302, Noes 233.*

### Division No. 294]

#### AYES

Adams, Nigel  
Afolami, Bim  
Afriyie, Adam  
Aldous, Peter  
Allan, Lucy  
Allen, Heidi  
Amess, Sir David  
Andrew, Stuart  
Argar, Edward  
Atkins, Victoria  
Bacon, Mr Richard  
Badenoch, Mrs Kemi  
Baker, Mr Steve  
Baldwin, Harriett  
Barclay, rh Stephen  
Baron, Mr John  
Bebb, Guto  
Bellingham, Sir Henry  
Benyon, rh Richard  
Beresford, Sir Paul  
Berry, Jake  
Blackman, Bob  
Blunt, Crispin  
Boles, Nick  
Bone, Mr Peter  
Bottomley, Sir Peter  
Bowie, Andrew  
Bradley, Ben  
Bradley, rh Karen  
Brady, Sir Graham  
Brake, rh Tom  
Braverman, Suella  
Brereton, Jack  
Brine, Steve  
Brokenshire, rh James  
Bruce, Fiona  
Buckland, Robert  
Burghart, Alex  
Burns, Conor  
Burt, rh Alistair  
Cable, rh Sir Vince  
Cairns, rh Alun  
Campbell, Mr Gregory  
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair  
Cartlidge, James  
Cash, Sir William  
Caulfield, Maria  
Chalk, Alex  
Chishti, Rehman  
Churchill, Jo  
Clark, Colin  
Clark, rh Greg  
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth  
Clarke, Mr Simon  
Cleverly, James  
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey  
Coffey, Dr Thérèse  
Collins, Damian

Costa, Alberto  
Courts, Robert  
Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey  
Crabb, rh Stephen  
Crouch, Tracey  
Davey, rh Sir Edward  
Davies, Chris  
Davies, David T. C.  
Davies, Glyn  
Davies, Mims  
Davis, rh Mr David  
Dinenage, Caroline  
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan  
Docherty, Leo  
Dodds, rh Nigel  
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.  
Donelan, Michelle  
Dorries, Ms Nadine  
Double, Steve  
Dowden, Oliver  
Doyle-Price, Jackie  
Drax, Richard  
Duddridge, James  
Duguid, David  
Duncan, rh Sir Alan  
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain  
Dunne, rh Mr Philip  
Ellis, Michael  
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias  
Elphicke, Charlie  
Eustice, George  
Evans, Mr Nigel  
Evennett, rh Sir David  
Fabricant, Michael  
Farron, Tim  
Field, rh Mark  
Ford, Vicky  
Foster, Kevin  
Fox, rh Dr Liam  
Francois, rh Mr Mark  
Frazer, Lucy  
Freeman, George  
Freer, Mike  
Gale, rh Sir Roger  
Garnier, Mark  
Gauke, rh Mr David  
Ghani, Ms Nusrat  
Gibb, rh Nick  
Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl  
Girvan, Paul  
Glen, John  
Goldsmith, Zac  
Goodwill, rh Mr Robert  
Gove, rh Michael  
Graham, Luke  
Graham, Richard  
Grant, Bill  
Grant, Mrs Helen

Gray, James  
Grayling, rh Chris  
Green, Chris  
Green, rh Damian  
Greening, rh Justine  
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic  
Griffiths, Andrew  
Gyimah, Mr Sam  
Hair, Kirstene  
Halfon, rh Robert  
Hall, Luke  
Hammond, rh Mr Philip  
Hammond, Stephen  
Hancock, rh Matt  
Hands, rh Greg  
Harper, rh Mr Mark  
Harrington, Richard  
Harris, Rebecca  
Harrison, Trudy  
Hart, Simon  
Hayes, rh Sir John  
Heald, rh Sir Oliver  
Heapey, James  
Heaton-Harris, Chris  
Heaton-Jones, Peter  
Henderson, Gordon  
Herbert, rh Nick  
Hermon, Lady  
Hinds, rh Damian  
Hoare, Simon  
Hobhouse, Wera  
Hollingbery, George  
Hollinrake, Kevin  
Hollobone, Mr Philip  
Holloway, Adam  
Howell, John  
Huddleston, Nigel  
Hughes, Eddie  
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy  
Hurd, rh Mr Nick  
Jack, Mr Alistair  
James, Margot  
Jardine, Christine  
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil  
Jenkin, Sir Bernard  
Jenkyns, Andrea  
Jenrick, Robert  
Johnson, Dr Caroline  
Johnson, Gareth  
Johnson, Joseph  
Jones, Andrew  
Jones, rh Mr David  
Jones, Mr Marcus  
Kawczynski, Daniel  
Keegan, Gillian  
Kennedy, Seema  
Kerr, Stephen  
Knight, rh Sir Greg  
Knight, Julian  
Kwarteng, Kwasi  
Lamb, rh Norman  
Lamont, John  
Lancaster, rh Mark  
Latham, Mrs Pauline  
Leadsom, rh Andrea  
Lee, Dr Phillip  
Lefroy, Jeremy  
Leigh, rh Sir Edward  
Letwin, rh Sir Oliver  
Lewer, Andrew  
Lewis, rh Brandon  
Lewis, rh Dr Julian

Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian  
Lidington, rh Mr David  
Little Pengelly, Emma  
Lopez, Julia  
Lopresti, Jack  
Lord, Mr Jonathan  
Loughton, Tim  
Mackinlay, Craig  
Maclean, Rachel  
Main, Mrs Anne  
Mak, Alan  
Malthouse, Kit  
Mann, Scott  
Masterton, Paul  
May, rh Mrs Theresa  
Maynard, Paul  
McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick  
McPartland, Stephen  
McVey, rh Ms Esther  
Menzies, Mark  
Mercer, Johnny  
Merriman, Huw  
Metcalfe, Stephen  
Miller, rh Mrs Maria  
Milling, Amanda  
Mills, Nigel  
Milton, rh Anne  
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew  
Moore, Damien  
Mordaunt, rh Penny  
Morgan, rh Nicky  
Morris, Anne Marie  
Morris, David  
Morris, James  
Morton, Wendy  
Mundell, rh David  
Murray, Mrs Sheryll  
Murrison, Dr Andrew  
Neill, Robert  
Newton, Sarah  
Nokes, rh Caroline  
Norman, Jesse  
O'Brien, Neil  
Offord, Dr Matthew  
Opperman, Guy  
Paisley, Ian  
Parish, Neil  
Patel, rh Priti  
Pawsey, Mark  
Penning, rh Sir Mike  
Penrose, John  
Percy, Andrew  
Perry, rh Claire  
Philp, Chris  
Pincher, rh Christopher  
Poulter, Dr Dan  
Pow, Rebecca  
Prentis, Victoria  
Prisk, Mr Mark  
Pritchard, Mark  
Pursglove, Tom  
Quin, Jeremy  
Quince, Will  
Raab, rh Dominic  
Redwood, rh John  
Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob  
Robertson, Mr Laurence  
Robinson, Gavin  
Robinson, Mary  
Rosindell, Andrew  
Ross, Douglas  
Rowley, Lee



Rudd, rh Amber  
 Rutley, David  
 Sandbach, Antoinette  
 Scully, Paul  
 Seely, Mr Bob  
 Selous, Andrew  
 Shannon, Jim  
 Shapps, rh Grant  
 Sharma, Alok  
 Shelbrooke, Alec  
 Simpson, David  
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith  
 Skidmore, Chris  
 Smith, Chloe  
 Smith, Henry  
 Smith, rh Julian  
 Smith, Royston  
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas  
 Soubry, rh Anna  
 Spelman, rh Dame Caroline  
 Spencer, Mark  
 Stephenson, Andrew  
 Stevenson, John  
 Stewart, Bob  
 Stewart, Iain  
 Stewart, Rory  
 Stone, Jamie  
 Streeter, Sir Gary  
 Stride, rh Mel  
 Stuart, Graham  
 Sturdy, Julian  
 Sunak, Rishi  
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond  
 Swinson, Jo  
 Swire, rh Sir Hugo

Syms, Sir Robert  
 Thomas, Derek  
 Thomson, Ross  
 Throup, Maggie  
 Tolhurst, Kelly  
 Tomlinson, Justin  
 Tomlinson, Michael  
 Tracey, Craig  
 Tredinnick, David  
 Trevelyan, Anne-Marie  
 Truss, rh Elizabeth  
 Tugendhat, Tom  
 Vaizey, rh Mr Edward  
 Vara, Mr Shailesh  
 Vickers, Martin  
 Villiers, rh Theresa  
 Walker, Mr Charles  
 Walker, Mr Robin  
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben  
 Warburton, David  
 Warman, Matt  
 Watling, Giles  
 Whately, Helen  
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather  
 Whittaker, Craig  
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John  
 Wiggin, Bill  
 Williamson, rh Gavin  
 Wilson, rh Sammy  
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah  
 Wood, Mike  
 Woodcock, John  
 Wragg, Mr William  
 Wright, rh Jeremy  
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Elmore, Chris  
 Esterson, Bill  
 Evans, Chris  
 Farrelly, Paul  
 Fitzpatrick, Jim  
 Fletcher, Colleen  
 Flint, rh Caroline  
 Fovargue, Yvonne  
 Foxcroft, Vicky  
 Frith, James  
 Furniss, Gill  
 Gaffney, Hugh  
 Gapes, Mike  
 Gardiner, Barry  
 George, Ruth  
 Gill, Preet Kaur  
 Glindon, Mary  
 Godsiff, Mr Roger  
 Goodman, Helen  
 Green, Kate  
 Greenwood, Lilian  
 Greenwood, Margaret  
 Griffith, Nia  
 Grogan, John  
 Gwynne, Andrew  
 Hamilton, Fabian  
 Hanson, rh David  
 Hardy, Emma  
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet  
 Harris, Carolyn  
 Hayes, Helen  
 Hayman, Sue  
 Hendrick, Sir Mark  
 Hepburn, Mr Stephen  
 Hill, Mike  
 Hillier, Meg  
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon  
 Hollern, Kate  
 Hopkins, Kelvin  
 Howarth, rh Mr George  
 Huq, Dr Rupa  
 Hussain, Imran  
 Jarvis, Dan  
 Johnson, Diana  
 Jones, Darren  
 Jones, Gerald  
 Jones, Helen  
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan  
 Jones, Susan Elan  
 Kane, Mike  
 Keeley, Barbara  
 Kendall, Liz  
 Khan, Afzal  
 Killen, Ged  
 Kinnock, Stephen  
 Kyle, Peter  
 Laird, Lesley  
 Lake, Ben  
 Lavery, Ian  
 Lee, Karen  
 Leslie, Mr Chris  
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma  
 Lewis, Clive  
 Lloyd, Tony  
 Lucas, Caroline  
 Lucas, Ian C.  
 Madders, Justin  
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid  
 Mahmood, Shabana  
 Mann, John  
 Marsden, Gordon  
 Martin, Sandy

Maskell, Rachael  
 Matheson, Christian  
 McCabe, Steve  
 McCarthy, Kerry  
 McDonagh, Siobhain  
 McDonald, Andy  
 McDonnell, rh John  
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat  
 McGinn, Conor  
 McGovern, Alison  
 McInnes, Liz  
 McKinnell, Catherine  
 McMahan, Jim  
 McMorrin, Anna  
 Mearns, Ian  
 Miliband, rh Edward  
 Moon, Mrs Madeleine  
 Morden, Jessica  
 Morgan, Stephen  
 Morris, Grahame  
 Murray, Ian  
 Nandy, Lisa  
 Norris, Alex  
 Onn, Melanie  
 Onwurah, Chi  
 Osamor, Kate  
 Owen, Albert  
 Peacock, Stephanie  
 Pearce, Teresa  
 Pennycook, Matthew  
 Perkins, Toby  
 Phillips, Jess  
 Phillipson, Bridget  
 Pidcock, Laura  
 Platt, Jo  
 Pollard, Luke  
 Pound, Stephen  
 Powell, Lucy  
 Qureshi, Yasmin  
 Rashid, Faisal  
 Rayner, Angela  
 Reed, Mr Steve  
 Rees, Christina  
 Reeves, Ellie  
 Reeves, Rachel  
 Reynolds, Emma  
 Reynolds, Jonathan  
 Rimmer, Ms Marie  
 Rodda, Matt  
 Rowley, Danielle  
 Ruane, Chris  
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd  
 Ryan, rh Joan  
 Saville Roberts, Liz  
 Shah, Naz  
 Sharma, Mr Virendra  
 Sheerman, Mr Barry  
 Sherriff, Paula  
 Skinner, Mr Dennis  
 Slaughter, Andy  
 Smeeth, Ruth  
 Smith, Angela  
 Smith, Cat  
 Smith, Eleanor  
 Smith, Jeff  
 Smith, Laura  
 Smith, Nick  
 Smith, Owen  
 Smyth, Karin  
 Snell, Gareth  
 Sobel, Alex  
 Spellar, rh John

### NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane  
 Abrahams, Debbie  
 Ali, Rushanara  
 Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena  
 Antoniazzi, Tonia  
 Ashworth, Jonathan  
 Austin, Ian  
 Bailey, Mr Adrian  
 Beckett, rh Margaret  
 Benn, rh Hilary  
 Berger, Luciana  
 Betts, Mr Clive  
 Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta  
 Blomfield, Paul  
 Brabin, Tracy  
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben  
 Brennan, Kevin  
 Brown, Lyn  
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas  
 Bryant, Chris  
 Buck, Ms Karen  
 Burden, Richard  
 Burgon, Richard  
 Butler, Dawn  
 Byrne, rh Liam  
 Cadbury, Ruth  
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan  
 Campbell, Mr Ronnie  
 Carden, Dan  
 Champion, Sarah  
 Chapman, Jenny  
 Charalambous, Bambos  
 Clwyd, rh Ann  
 Coaker, Vernon

Cooper, Julie  
 Cooper, Rosie  
 Cooper, rh Yvette  
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy  
 Coyle, Neil  
 Crausby, Sir David  
 Creagh, Mary  
 Creasy, Stella  
 Cruddas, Jon  
 Cryer, John  
 Cummins, Judith  
 Cunningham, Alex  
 Cunningham, Mr Jim  
 Daby, Janet  
 Dakin, Nic  
 David, Wayne  
 Davies, Geraint  
 De Cordova, Marsha  
 De Piero, Gloria  
 Debonnaire, Thangam  
 Dent Coad, Emma  
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh  
 Dodds, Anneliese  
 Doughty, Stephen  
 Dowd, Peter  
 Drew, Dr David  
 Dromey, Jack  
 Duffield, Rosie  
 Eagle, Ms Angela  
 Eagle, Maria  
 Edwards, Jonathan  
 Efford, Clive  
 Elliott, Julie  
 Ellman, Dame Louise

Starmer, rh Keir  
Stevens, Jo  
Streeting, Wes  
Stringer, Graham  
Sweeney, Mr Paul  
Tami, rh Mark  
Thomas, Gareth  
Thomas-Symonds, Nick  
Thornberry, rh Emily  
Timms, rh Stephen  
Trickett, Jon  
Turley, Anna  
Turner, Karl  
Twigg, Derek

Twigg, Stephen  
Twist, Liz  
Vaz, Valerie  
Walker, Thelma  
Watson, Tom  
West, Catherine  
Whitehead, Dr Alan  
Whitfield, Martin  
Williams, Hywel  
Williams, Dr Paul  
Williamson, Chris  
Wilson, Phil  
Yasin, Mohammad  
Zeichner, Daniel

Cable, rh Sir Vince  
Cadbury, Ruth  
Cairns, rh Alun  
Cameron, Dr Lisa  
Campbell, rh Sir Alan  
Campbell, Mr Ronnie  
Carden, Dan  
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair  
Cartlidge, James  
Caulfield, Maria  
Chalk, Alex  
Champion, Sarah  
Chapman, Douglas  
Chapman, Jenny  
Charalambous, Bambos  
Cherry, Joanna  
Chishti, Rehman  
Churchill, Jo  
Clark, Colin  
Clark, rh Greg  
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth  
Cleverly, James  
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey  
Clwyd, rh Ann  
Coaker, Vernon  
Coffey, Dr Thérèse  
Collins, Damian  
Cooper, Julie  
Cooper, Rosie  
Cooper, rh Yvette  
Corbyn, rh Jeremy  
Costa, Alberto  
Courts, Robert  
Cowan, Ronnie  
Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey  
Coyle, Neil  
Crabb, rh Stephen  
Crausby, Sir David  
Crawley, Angela  
Creagh, Mary  
Creasy, Stella  
Crouch, Tracey  
Cruddas, Jon  
Cryer, John  
Cummins, Judith  
Cunningham, Alex  
Daby, Janet  
Dakin, Nic  
Davey, rh Sir Edward  
David, Wayne  
Davies, Chris  
Davies, David T. C.  
Davies, Glyn  
Davies, Mims  
Day, Martyn  
De Cordova, Marsha  
De Piero, Gloria  
Debonnaire, Thangam  
Dent Coad, Emma  
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh  
Dinenage, Caroline  
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan  
Docherty, Leo  
Docherty-Hughes, Martin  
Dodds, Anneliese  
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.  
Donelan, Michelle  
Dorries, Ms Nadine  
Double, Steve  
Doughty, Stephen  
Dowd, Peter  
Dowden, Oliver

Doyle-Price, Jackie  
Drax, Richard  
Drew, Dr David  
Dromeey, Jack  
Duddridge, James  
Duffield, Rosie  
Duguid, David  
Duncan, rh Sir Alan  
Dunne, rh Mr Philip  
Eagle, Ms Angela  
Eagle, Maria  
Edwards, Jonathan  
Efford, Clive  
Elliott, Julie  
Ellis, Michael  
Ellman, Dame Louise  
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias  
Elmore, Chris  
Elphicke, Charlie  
Esterson, Bill  
Eustice, George  
Evans, Chris  
Evans, Mr Nigel  
Evennett, rh Sir David  
Fabricant, Michael  
Farrelly, Paul  
Farron, Tim  
Fellows, Marion  
Field, rh Mark  
Fitzpatrick, Jim  
Fletcher, Colleen  
Flint, rh Caroline  
Ford, Vicky  
Foster, Kevin  
Fovargue, Yvonne  
Fox, rh Dr Liam  
Foxcroft, Vicky  
Frazer, Lucy  
Freeman, George  
Freer, Mike  
Frith, James  
Furniss, Gill  
Gaffney, Hugh  
Gale, rh Sir Roger  
Gapes, Mike  
Gardiner, Barry  
Garnier, Mark  
Gauke, rh Mr David  
George, Ruth  
Gethins, Stephen  
Ghani, Ms Nusrat  
Gibb, rh Nick  
Gibson, Patricia  
Gill, Preet Kaur  
Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl  
Girvan, Paul  
Glen, John  
Glindon, Mary  
Godsiff, Mr Roger  
Goldsmith, Zac  
Goodman, Helen  
Goodwill, rh Mr Robert  
Gove, rh Michael  
Grady, Patrick  
Graham, Luke  
Graham, Richard  
Grant, Bill  
Grant, Mrs Helen  
Grant, Peter  
Gray, James  
Gray, Neil  
Grayling, rh Chris

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

UK PARTICIPATION IN THE EU AGENCY FOR  
CRIMINAL JUSTICE COOPERATION (EUROJUST): POST-  
ADOPTION OPT-IN DECISION

That this House takes note of Regulation 2018/1727 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation (Eurojust), and replacing and repealing Council Decision 2002/187/JHA; endorses the Government's decision to request to opt in under Protocol 21 on the Position of the United Kingdom and Ireland in respect of the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice annexed to the EU Treaties; and supports the Government's assessment that Eurojust provides a valuable service to the UK and that opting in would enable us to maintain operational continuity and minimise disruption for UK law enforcement and prosecution authorities during the proposed Implementation Period.

*The House divided: Ayes 577, Noes 20.*

**Division No. 295]**

**AYES**

Abbott, rh Ms Diane  
Abrahams, Debbie  
Adams, Nigel  
Afolami, Bim  
Afriyie, Adam  
Aldous, Peter  
Ali, Rushanara  
Allan, Lucy  
Allen, Heidi  
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena  
Amess, Sir David  
Andrew, Stuart  
Antoniazzi, Tonia  
Argar, Edward  
Ashworth, Jonathan  
Atkins, Victoria  
Austin, Ian  
Bacon, Mr Richard  
Badenoch, Mrs Kemi  
Bailey, Mr Adrian  
Baldwin, Harriett  
Barclay, rh Stephen  
Bardell, Hannah  
Baron, Mr John  
Bebb, Guto  
Beckett, rh Margaret  
Bellingham, Sir Henry  
Benn, rh Hilary  
Benyon, rh Richard  
Beresford, Sir Paul  
Berger, Luciana  
Berry, Jake  
Betts, Mr Clive  
Black, Mhairi

Blackford, rh Ian  
Blackman, Bob  
Blackman, Kirsty  
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta  
Blomfield, Paul  
Boles, Nick  
Bone, Mr Peter  
Bottomley, Sir Peter  
Bowie, Andrew  
Brabin, Tracy  
Bradley, Ben  
Bradley, rh Karen  
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben  
Brady, Sir Graham  
Brake, rh Tom  
Braverman, Suella  
Brennan, Kevin  
Brereton, Jack  
Brine, Steve  
Brock, Deidre  
Brokenshire, rh James  
Brown, Alan  
Brown, Lyn  
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas  
Bruce, Fiona  
Bryant, Chris  
Buck, Ms Karen  
Buckland, Robert  
Burden, Richard  
Burghart, Alex  
Burgon, Richard  
Burt, rh Alistair  
Butler, Dawn  
Byrne, rh Liam

Green, Chris	Johnson, Joseph	Maynard, Paul	Pidcock, Laura
Green, rh Damian	Jones, Andrew	Mc Nally, John	Pincher, rh Christopher
Green, Kate	Jones, Darren	McCabe, Steve	Platt, Jo
Greening, rh Justine	Jones, rh Mr David	McCarthy, Kerry	Pollard, Luke
Greenwood, Lillian	Jones, Gerald	McDonagh, Siobhain	Poulter, Dr Dan
Greenwood, Margaret	Jones, Helen	McDonald, Andy	Pound, Stephen
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic	Jones, rh Mr Kevan	McDonald, Stewart Malcolm	Pow, Rebecca
Griffith, Nia	Jones, Mr Marcus	McDonald, Stuart C.	Powell, Lucy
Griffiths, Andrew	Jones, Susan Elan	McDonnell, rh John	Prentis, Victoria
Grogan, John	Kane, Mike	McFadden, rh Mr Pat	Prisk, Mr Mark
Gwynne, Andrew	Kawczynski, Daniel	McGinn, Conor	Pritchard, Mark
Gyimah, Mr Sam	Keegan, Gillian	McGovern, Alison	Pursglove, Tom
Hair, Kirstene	Keeley, Barbara	McInnes, Liz	Quin, Jeremy
Halfon, rh Robert	Kendall, Liz	McKinnell, Catherine	Quince, Will
Hall, Luke	Kennedy, Seema	McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick	Qureshi, Yasmin
Hamilton, Fabian	Kerr, Stephen	McMahon, Jim	Raab, rh Dominic
Hammond, rh Mr Philip	Khan, Afzal	McMorrin, Anna	Rashid, Faisal
Hammond, Stephen	Killen, Ged	McPartland, Stephen	Rayner, Angela
Hancock, rh Matt	Kinnock, Stephen	Mearns, Ian	Reed, Mr Steve
Hands, rh Greg	Knight, rh Sir Greg	Menzies, Mark	Rees, Christina
Hanson, rh David	Knight, Julian	Mercer, Johnny	Reeves, Ellie
Hardy, Emma	Kwarteng, Kwasi	Merriman, Huw	Reeves, Rachel
Harman, rh Ms Harriet	Kyle, Peter	Metcalfe, Stephen	Reynolds, Emma
Harper, rh Mr Mark	Laird, Lesley	Miliband, rh Edward	Reynolds, Jonathan
Harrington, Richard	Lake, Ben	Miller, rh Mrs Maria	Rimmer, Ms Marie
Harris, Carolyn	Lamb, rh Norman	Milling, Amanda	Robertson, Mr Laurence
Harris, Rebecca	Lamont, John	Mills, Nigel	Robinson, Gavin
Harrison, Trudy	Lancaster, rh Mark	Milton, rh Anne	Robinson, Mary
Hart, Simon	Latham, Mrs Pauline	Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew	Rodda, Matt
Hayes, Helen	Lavery, Ian	Monaghan, Carol	Ross, Douglas
Hayes, rh Sir John	Law, Chris	Moon, Mrs Madeleine	Rowley, Danielle
Hayman, Sue	Leadsom, rh Andrea	Moore, Damien	Rudd, rh Amber
Heald, rh Sir Oliver	Lee, Karen	Mordaunt, rh Penny	Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
Heapey, James	Lee, Dr Phillip	Morden, Jessica	Rutley, David
Heaton-Harris, Chris	Lefroy, Jeremy	Morgan, rh Nicky	Sandbach, Antoinette
Heaton-Jones, Peter	Leigh, rh Sir Edward	Morgan, Stephen	Saville Roberts, Liz
Henderson, Gordon	Leslie, Mr Chris	Morris, David	Scully, Paul
Hendrick, Sir Mark	Letwin, rh Sir Oliver	Morris, Grahame	Seely, Mr Bob
Hendry, Drew	Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma	Morris, James	Selous, Andrew
Hepburn, Mr Stephen	Lewer, Andrew	Morton, Wendy	Shah, Naz
Herbert, rh Nick	Lewis, rh Brandon	Mundell, rh David	Shannon, Jim
Hermon, Lady	Lewis, Clive	Murray, Ian	Shapps, rh Grant
Hill, Mike	Lewis, rh Dr Julian	Murray, Mrs Sheryll	Sharma, Alok
Hillier, Meg	Liddell-Grainger, Mr	Murrison, Dr Andrew	Sharma, Mr Virendra
Hinds, rh Damian	lan	Nandy, Lisa	Sheerman, Mr Barry
Hoare, Simon	Lidington, rh Mr David	Neill, Robert	Shelbrooke, Alec
Hobhouse, Wera	Linden, David	Newlands, Gavin	Sheppard, Tommy
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon	Little Pengelly, Emma	Newton, Sarah	Sherriff, Paula
Hollern, Kate	Lloyd, Tony	Nokes, rh Caroline	Simpson, David
Hollingbery, George	Lopez, Julia	Norman, Jesse	Simpson, rh Mr Keith
Hollinrake, Kevin	Lopresti, Jack	Norris, Alex	Skidmore, Chris
Hollobone, Mr Philip	Lord, Mr Jonathan	O'Brien, Neil	Skinner, Mr Dennis
Holloway, Adam	Loughton, Tim	Offord, Dr Matthew	Slaughter, Andy
Hopkins, Kelvin	Lucas, Caroline	O'Hara, Brendan	Smeeth, Ruth
Hosie, Stewart	Lucas, Ian C.	Onn, Melanie	Smith, Angela
Howarth, rh Mr George	Mackinlay, Craig	Onwurah, Chi	Smith, Cat
Howell, John	Maclean, Rachel	Opperman, Guy	Smith, Chloe
Huddlestone, Nigel	MacNeil, Angus Brendan	Osamor, Kate	Smith, Eleanor
Hughes, Eddie	Madders, Justin	Owen, Albert	Smith, Jeff
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy	Mahmood, Mr Khalid	Parish, Neil	Smith, rh Julian
Huq, Dr Rupa	Mahmood, Shabana	Patel, rh Priti	Smith, Laura
Hurd, rh Mr Nick	Main, Mrs Anne	Pawsey, Mark	Smith, Nick
Hussain, Imran	Mak, Alan	Peacock, Stephanie	Smith, Owen
Jack, Mr Alister	Malthouse, Kit	Pearce, Teresa	Smith, Royston
James, Margot	Mann, John	Penning, rh Sir Mike	Smth, Karin
Jardine, Christine	Mann, Scott	Pennycook, Matthew	Snell, Gareth
Jarvis, Dan	Marsden, Gordon	Penrose, John	Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil	Martin, Sandy	Perkins, Toby	Sobel, Alex
Jenrick, Robert	Maskell, Rachael	Perry, rh Claire	Soubry, rh Anna
Johnson, Dr Caroline	Masterton, Paul	Phillips, Jess	Spellar, rh John
Johnson, Diana	Matheson, Christian	Phillipson, Bridget	Spelman, rh Dame Caroline
Johnson, Gareth	May, rh Mrs Theresa	Philp, Chris	Spencer, Mark



Starmer, rh Keir  
 Stephens, Chris  
 Stephenson, Andrew  
 Stevens, Jo  
 Stevenson, John  
 Stewart, Bob  
 Stewart, Iain  
 Stewart, Rory  
 Stone, Jamie  
 Streeter, Sir Gary  
 Streeting, Wes  
 Stride, rh Mel  
 Stringer, Graham  
 Stuart, Graham  
 Sturdy, Julian  
 Sunak, Rishi  
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond  
 Sweeney, Mr Paul  
 Swinson, Jo  
 Swire, rh Sir Hugo  
 Syms, Sir Robert  
 Tami, rh Mark  
 Thewliss, Alison  
 Thomas, Derek  
 Thomas, Gareth  
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick  
 Thornberry, rh Emily

Throup, Maggie  
 Timms, rh Stephen  
 Tolhurst, Kelly  
 Tomlinson, Justin  
 Tomlinson, Michael  
 Tracey, Craig  
 Tredinnick, David  
 Trickett, Jon  
 Truss, rh Elizabeth  
 Tugendhat, Tom  
 Turley, Anna  
 Turner, Karl  
 Twigg, Derek  
 Twigg, Stephen  
 Twist, Liz  
 Vaizey, rh Mr Edward  
 Vara, Mr Shailesh  
 Vaz, Valerie  
 Vickers, Martin  
 Villiers, rh Theresa  
 Walker, Mr Charles  
 Walker, Mr Robin  
 Walker, Thelma  
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben  
 Warburton, David  
 Warman, Matt  
 Watling, Giles

Watson, Tom  
 West, Catherine  
 Whately, Helen  
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather  
 Whitehead, Dr Alan  
 Whitfield, Martin  
 Whitford, Dr Philippa  
 Whittaker, Craig  
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John  
 Wiggin, Bill  
 Williams, Hywel  
 Williams, Dr Paul

Williamson, Chris  
 Williamson, rh Gavin  
 Wilson, Phil  
 Wishart, Pete  
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah  
 Wood, Mike  
 Woodcock, John  
 Wragg, Mr William  
 Wright, rh Jeremy  
 Yasin, Mohammad  
 Zahawi, Nadhim  
 Zeichner, Daniel

**NOES**

Baker, Mr Steve  
 Blunt, Crispin  
 Campbell, Mr Gregory  
 Cash, Sir William  
 Clarke, Mr Simon  
 Cunningham, Mr Jim  
 Davies, Geraint  
 Francois, rh Mr Mark  
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard  
 Jenkyns, Andrea

McVey, rh Ms Esther  
 Paisley, Ian  
 Redwood, rh John  
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob  
 Rosindell, Andrew  
 Rowley, Lee  
 Ruane, Chris  
 Smith, Henry  
 Thomson, Ross  
 Wilson, rh Sammy

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

# House of Commons

*Thursday 17 January 2019*

*The House met at half-past Nine o'clock*

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## Oral Answers to Questions

### ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### **Leaving the EU: No Deal**

1. **Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): How much his Department has spent on preparations for the UK leaving the EU without a withdrawal agreement. [908618]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (David Rutley):** I bring apologies from the Secretary of State this morning. He will not be attending these proceedings because he is attending vital cross-party meetings in Downing Street—[*Interruption.*] I am sure that Members across the House will understand that those meetings are vitally important at this stage.

In answer to Question 1, in the 2017 autumn Budget, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs was allocated an additional £310 million to support its work on EU exit preparations in this financial year, 2018-19, with a further £10 million being repurposed from existing budgets. DEFRA is using that additional funding to prepare for and deliver its ambitious programme of EU exit activities in readiness for all scenarios, including preparations for the UK leaving the EU without a withdrawal agreement, as is the duty of a responsible Government.

**Mr Speaker:** Further to what the Minister has just said, I advise the House that the Secretary of State, in keeping with his usual courtesy, informed me last night of his intended absence. I shall greatly miss him, but we look forward to seeing the fellow again before too long.

**Mr Hollobone:** Well, I am not sure that the House does understand the Secretary of State's absence, Mr Speaker. DEFRA questions are only half an hour long; surely those meetings could have been delayed for 30 minutes. My question to the Minister is: will DEFRA be 100% ready in the event of us having to leave with no deal?

**David Rutley:** The Department is working flat out to prepare for no deal. As the House knows, we are bringing on the onshoring of environment, agriculture and fisheries policies, involving 55 major projects and

120 statutory instruments. We will be recruiting around 2,700 officials to ensure that we are well prepared in a no-deal scenario.

**Mary Creagh** (Wakefield) (Lab): We know that householders are stockpiling food and that businesses are spending money that they can ill afford, as is the Minister's Department, on a no-deal Brexit that would harm the food industry, the farming industry and of course the chemicals industry, which his Department regulates. In a phone call on Tuesday night, the Chancellor said that a no-deal Brexit would be ruled out and off the table by the end of next week. Does the Minister agree?

**David Rutley:** The best way to avoid no deal is by agreeing a deal, and that is why we are working constructively—[*Interruption.*] The House made its views clear on the Government's proposed deal and we are now working constructively with major parties across the House to get a deal in place. I am just disappointed that the Leader of the Opposition did not turn up to do that, and that he has not even agreed with the advice of the former Prime Minister, Tony Blair.

**Dame Caroline Spelman** (Meriden) (Con): The Secretary of State is sorely missed this morning. I wanted to commend him for his barnstorming speech last night. Hon. Members and others like myself who represent farming constituencies all received letters before Tuesday's vote from the farming organisations—the National Farmers Union, the Country Land and Business Association and the Tenant Farmers Association—saying that “above all” they wanted to see a no-deal Brexit ruled out. Given the overwhelming majority in Parliament for that, will the Minister give us some reassurance that the Government will support the view of the majority?

**David Rutley:** Well, I will do my very best to make up for the absence of our esteemed Secretary of State, who did indeed put in a fantastic performance yesterday. I can assure my right hon. Friend that we are working closely with the NFU and the farming sector in seeking to find that deal. We know that many farmers voted to leave, but few wanted to leave with no deal. That is why we are working incredibly hard to ensure that we get that deal into place.

15. [908635] **Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): Of the six parties in the House, the Prime Minister met three last night. Labour Front Benchers are not meeting her, so I suppose we can work out who the Secretary of State must be meeting today. He told me last week that he thinks the other European countries will be looking enviously at the Prime Minister's deal. Is that still the Government's position, and if so, are they not concerned that that would threaten the entire European project, because everyone would want the glorious new future that Britain is going to have?

**David Rutley:** The EU has its own challenges, which it is no doubt seeking to take forward. We are clear that we want to take a deal forward. We felt that the deal was a good deal, but Parliament has had its say. We are now responding constructively in these negotiations, and I

am grateful to the Scottish National party for taking that forward. I just wish that Labour would take a similar stance.

**Jeremy Lefroy** (Stafford) (Con): Last Saturday I had the honour of attending the plough service to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Staffordshire NFU, an extremely good organisation representing farmers throughout my constituency. At that service, a number of members came up to me and expressed how concerned they are about any prospect of no deal. Will my hon. Friend set out what the consequences would be for my farmers if there were, indeed, no deal?

**David Rutley:** The Secretary of State has made it clear in his contributions here and at the recent farming conference in Oxford that there could be significant disruption for the farming sector, which is why we are working very hard to make sure that Staffordshire NFU members and farmers across the country get the best possible protection. I meet the NFU every week to listen to and work through its concerns and, of course, the No. 1 priority is to make sure we get this deal. Again, I am grateful to those parties that have sought to become part of that process and dialogue.

14. [908634] **Dr Philippa Whitford** (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): Without a deal, Scottish farmers could soon face tariffs of 30% on dairy products and 46% on lamb, which would make them uncompetitive and would damage Scotland's food and drink industry. I would have liked to ask the perhaps future Prime Minister to rule out a no deal, but will the Minister do so?

**David Rutley:** I can assure the hon. Lady that I am not the future Prime Minister. That will not happen. She does not have to worry about that. [*Interruption.*] Well, I am certainly not. I am merely filling in for him while he is not here.

The hon. Lady asks an important question, which other hon. Members have also asked. We want to make sure that protections are in place, and we want to get this deal in place, because a no deal would potentially have a disruptive effect on farmers. We will work together closely to ensure a deal happens.

**Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): It is absolutely right that the Government prepare for all eventualities, including no deal, but does my hon. Friend share my sense of incredulity at hearing those who spent most of this week attacking the deal on the table, and attacking every other deal the EU has ever done, now complaining about the prospect of there not being one?

**David Rutley:** That is the case we made. The Government and many Conservative Members felt that the deal was a good deal, but clearly we now need to respond to what the House has said, and we are doing that.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister is a well-intentioned fella. Will he take a strong message from those of us who care about DEFRA, the environment and our farming sector that we do care, that we are willing to help get this right and that we are willing to do so on an all-party basis, as long as we can bury this nonsense of a no-deal Brexit?

**David Rutley:** The hon. Gentleman is also a good fella with good intentions, and I share his concerns about no deal. What we need to do now is to find a deal that the House can unite behind. The Secretary of State would say that if he were in his place, and it is important that the Leader of the Opposition now joins that process.

**Deidre Brock** (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): I, too, am sorry not to see the Secretary of State in his place at the Dispatch Box after what was quite the bravura audition yesterday. Someone once said:

“The day after we vote to leave, we hold all the cards and we can choose the path we want.”

It seems that those cards and paths have been pretty expensive so far. Can the Minister tell us whether his Department's largesse has sorted out the export health certificate system, which of course relies on a single spreadsheet? Has he made export agreements with 154 countries to replace the EU agreements? Lastly, has this been the worst poker hand ever played?

**David Rutley:** Lots of questions there, but I can assure the hon. Lady that I am even more saddened not to see the Secretary of State here because I am having to answer all his questions on this subject.

On the hon. Lady's substantive point, we are working on the export health certificate process, and we are working on the other trade agreements. My hon. Friend the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the farming Minister, is working on those issues as well. Each of those steps is being dealt with.

#### Animal Cruelty Crimes: Sentencing

2. **Stephen Timms** (East Ham) (Lab): When he plans to bring forward legislative proposals for maximum five-year sentences for the most serious crimes of animal cruelty. [908619]

11. **Angela Smith** (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): When he plans to bring forward legislative proposals for maximum five-year sentences for the most serious crimes of animal cruelty. [908629]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (David Rutley):** The Government will introduce the necessary legislation to increase the maximum penalty for animal cruelty from six months' imprisonment to five years' imprisonment as soon as parliamentary time allows.

**Stephen Timms:** I am grateful for that answer, but the Select Committee on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs called for five-year maximum sentences in 2016, Ministers promised that in 2017 and the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food said last June that it would be in place by the end of March this year, but there is still no sign of it happening. Why has there been such a long delay? Can the Under-Secretary give us a firm, reliable timeframe for when this much-needed change will actually take place?

**David Rutley:** I can tell the right hon. Gentleman that we are moving as fast as we can on this. We need to find the right legislative vehicle, but it is our intention to take this forward, as I told yesterday's Public Bill Committee on Finn's law.



**Angela Smith:** Can the Minister confirm whether any DEFRA Minister, including the Secretary of State, has had any discussions on five-year sentencing with either the Leader of the House or the Chief Whip in order to secure parliamentary time for this measure?

**David Rutley:** A very active dialogue is going on to determine the right vehicle, involving the usual channels within the House; those conversations have taken place.

**Neil Parish** (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): Can the Government get out of crawler gear and get into first or second, because we have to bring about this five-year sentencing? At the moment, someone who pleads guilty to a horrendous crime of animal cruelty gets a maximum of four months, because they get an automatic 30% reduction. It is crazy that huge amounts of animal welfare abuse happens and we have such short sentences. So please get on with it.

**David Rutley:** We will get on with it. We take animal welfare seriously; we have introduced a third-party ban on sales of puppies and kittens, and we are working on this very actively.

#### Leaving the EU: Care and Protection of Animals

3. **Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): What steps his Department plans to take to maintain standards on the care and protection of animals after the UK leaves the EU. [908620]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (David Rutley):** The Government have made it clear that our exit from the EU will not lead to a lowering of our high animal welfare standards. Our regulatory system will offer the same level of assurance of animal welfare following our departure from the EU as it does now. The European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 will ensure that existing EU standards are maintained once we leave the EU, and we are actively exploring options for strengthening the UK system in the future.

**Sir Desmond Swayne:** How will the Minister crack down on puppy farming?

**David Rutley:** The measure we announced on 23 December will make sure that there is a ban on third-party sales of puppies and kittens, which will mean that unscrupulous breeders and puppy farmers will no longer be able to hide. This is an important piece of legislation and it shows that we have got into a much higher gear on animal welfare legislation.

**Mr Clive Betts** (Sheffield South East) (Lab): The International Trade Secretary has been touring the world negotiating trade deals in the past few months. Will the Minister say precisely what involvement DEFRA Ministers have in ensuring that animal welfare issues are contained in any agreement that that Secretary of State is concluding?

**David Rutley:** DEFRA leads on agricultural issues in these trade deals and there is a clear intention that our standards will not be watered down.

**Mr Gregory Campbell** (East Londonderry) (DUP): Can the Minister lay to rest some of the vile scare stories that have been emanating in the past few months about how, in certain circumstances in which we may leave the EU, there will be a diminution in animal care standards? Can he confirm that whatever the circumstances after 29 March we will retain the highest possible standards?

**David Rutley:** The hon. Gentleman makes a good point, and I assure him that we will make sure the existing regulations come over and we will maintain those high standards.

**Melanie Onn** (Great Grimsby) (Lab): Inside or outside the EU, Boohoo, the online retailer, has been found to be advertising clothing as “faux fur” when in fact it has contained animal fur, including rabbit. So may I ask what checks are in place and what action the Government are prepared to take to ensure that there is no animal cruelty in the clothing industry?

**David Rutley:** The hon. Lady raises an important point. This is a clear trading standards issue and, as I understand it, action has been taken, as it should be in those circumstances.

#### Serious and Organised Waste Crime

4. **Mr Simon Clarke** (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Con): What steps he is taking to tackle serious and organised waste crime. [908621]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Dr Thérèse Coffey):** Last year, the Department commissioned a review of serious and organised crime in the waste sector. Recommendations from that review informed our strategic approach, which we set out in the resources and waste strategy. That includes plans to prevent, detect and deter all forms of waste crime, including with the creation of a joint unit for tackling waste crime and a dedicated disruption team.

**Mr Clarke:** I thank the Minister for that answer. We also face the problem of casual fly-tipping. Residents in Guisborough have been appalled by some of the examples we have seen on Wilton Lane and on the moor road. Will she set out what the Government are doing to address that, too?

**Dr Coffey:** Fly-tipping is a genuine blight on local communities. Additional powers have been given to councils, and from this month local authorities now have the power to issue penalties of up to £400 to householders who have ignored their duty of care and whose waste is fly-tipped. The message is very clear: when somebody comes to offer to take your waste away, check online and check their licence to see that they are legitimate, because otherwise you could be getting a fine from your council.

**Matt Western** (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): Following on from that question, rural crime is a major issue, particularly in the villages around Warwick and Leamington. Across the whole of Warwickshire it is costing about £650,000 to clear up fly-tipping, but

wider crime is also an issue. What does the Minister recommend I should be saying to farmers in my communities?

**Dr Coffey:** It is important that evidence is gathered to try to tackle the issue. I know that farmers are taking preventive action to try to stop people entering their areas illegally. It matters that we also work together on other issues of rural crime, such as hare coursing, and other significant routes used by serious and organised crime to try to exploit the countryside.

**Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP):** Does the Minister intend to liaise with the Ministry of Justice on increasing the ability of the judiciary to make examples of those who flout the law? The fines are less than the financial advantage of waste disposal, which does not add up.

**Dr Coffey:** As I have said, we have set out our intentions in our resources and waste strategy. Fining is one approach and different types of sentences is another. That is the kind of work we are doing with the MOJ and, of course, the Home Office.

#### Leaving the EU: Farming Policy

5. **Craig Tracey (North Warwickshire) (Con):** What plans he has for farming policy after the UK leaves the EU. [908623]

**The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (George Eustice):** The Agriculture Bill is a central part of the Government's programme of legislation to deliver a smooth departure from the European Union. It is the most significant reform of agricultural legislation in more than 70 years. The Bill creates powers to build a new environmental land management system; to incentivise higher animal welfare; to support technology and investment on farms; and to improve fairness and transparency in the supply chain.

**Craig Tracey:** I welcome the Agriculture Bill, because for nearly 50 years our farmers have been tied to a fundamentally flawed common agricultural policy where payments are skewed towards the largest landowners. Can the Minister provide further detail on the public goods that will be rewarded under the new scheme?

**George Eustice:** I thank my hon. Friend for the sterling work he did on the Agriculture Bill Committee and as a member of the DEFRA team until recently. As he says, we are completely changing the focus of our agricultural support for the delivery of public goods. That could include improving habitats, water quality and soil health, promoting biodiversity, advancing animal welfare and allowing public access.

**Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab):** The Minister will have received the letter sent to every single Member of this House from all of the farming leaders asking the Government to take no deal off the table. That would also unlock meaningful cross-party talks on how we get out of this total mess, so why will the Government not do that?

**George Eustice:** The way to get no deal off the table is to agree a deal and to engage in a discussion about it. I simply say to hon. Members: what kind of deal do they think they would get from the European Union if they are unwilling to countenance no deal? It is nonsense.

**David Duguid (Banff and Buchan) (Con):** I welcome this Government's commitment to, and Ministers' earlier responses on, the issues of public goods, the environment and animal welfare. Will my hon. Friend confirm that future agricultural policy will also include a commitment to high-quality food and food safety?

**George Eustice:** My hon. Friend makes a very important point. The Government have been absolutely clear that we will not compromise our animal welfare and food safety standards in pursuit of a trade deal.

**Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD):** Hill farmers are essential to our landscape, food production, biodiversity and water management. Does the Minister realise that 91% of hill farm incomes come from the basic payment scheme, which his Government are planning to phase out over the next seven years? Will he therefore commit to a bespoke scheme or set of schemes to support upland farmers and other upland businesses?

**George Eustice:** Upland farmers, including sheep farmers, will be able to readily access many of the public goods listed in clause 1 of the Bill. Organisations such as the Uplands Alliance are very excited about the potential for a new scheme based on payment for the delivery of public goods.

**Ben Lake (Ceredigion) (PC):** The Bew review is looking into the mechanisms for allocating farm funding across the UK post Brexit, but do the Government intend to launch reviews of the legislative and governance frameworks that may be necessary to maintain a level playing field for Welsh farmers in the UK's future internal market?

**George Eustice:** There are two ways in which a UK framework can be delivered. First, it is important to recognise that agriculture is devolved. Although the Welsh Government have asked us to add a schedule to our Bill, which is currently going through Parliament, they also intend to introduce their own future legislation. There are provisions relating to compliance with WTO rules, and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy will also provide an approach to state aid rules.

**Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op):** On Tuesday, I met members of the Irish Farmers' Association—there were other things going on as well as the debate—and they made it very clear to me how vital it is to get a long-term customs arrangement in place as soon as possible. They say that that view is shared by farmers in Northern Ireland. What is the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs doing to make sure that that happens?

**George Eustice:** As was made clear at the very start of this session, the Secretary of State is, as we speak, in dialogue with Members of this House to establish a consensus, so that we can indeed have a customs arrangement after March.

**Dr Drew:** The Minister has been quite sanguine in saying that he now supports the Norway option. Is that view shared by the rest of the DEFRA team?

**George Eustice:** The DEFRA team, which includes me, supported the Prime Minister's deal, because the deal that she brought forward was the way to most

closely deliver the outcome of the referendum. That deal has now been rejected by this House, so of course we must consider all alternatives.

### Protection of Pollinators

7. **Matt Warman** (Boston and Skegness) (Con): What steps he is taking to protect bees and other pollinators. [908625]

**The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (George Eustice):** Protecting pollinators and the habitat is a priority for this Government, and our 2017 review of England's 10-year national pollinator strategy highlights some positive progress. We have also simplified countryside stewardship and introduced new messages to help farmers put pollinators back into our landscapes through our pollinator package.

**Matt Warman:** Three thousand sugar beet farmers will drill their crop this year, 100 of whom will be in my constituency. Many of them rely on neonicotinoids, but it is vital that we rely on scientific evidence. Eleven EU countries have granted emergency authorisation. What are the Government doing to support sugar beet farmers?

**George Eustice:** I am sympathetic to the issue raised by sugar beet growers. Of course, sugar beet is a non-flowering crop, and it does have a particular issue with the peach potato aphid and the virus that goes with it. The growers did put forward an emergency application. The advice from our expert committee on pesticides was that it did not satisfy the criteria, but we invited them to make a subsequent application.

### Foxhunting

8. **Christian Matheson** (City of Chester) (Lab): How many reports he has received of foxes being killed by hunts in England in 2018. [908626]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Dr Thérèse Coffey):** The Department has not received any reports of foxes being killed in illegal ways, but I would not expect it to, as people are expected to report that to the local police. It is the Ministry of Justice that keeps the statistics on crime records.

**Christian Matheson:** The League Against Cruel Sports reports 32 kills last year, which is the bare minimum because it cannot monitor every hunt. May I suggest to Ministers that the reason why they do not collect these figures is that if they did, they would have to do something about enforcing the laws that already exist?

**Dr Coffey:** The Hunting Act 2004 makes it clear that, apart from certain exemptions, there is a ban on hunting with dogs. It is important that people take their evidence to the local police forces. I am aware of the incident in Cheshire through social media, and I understand that Cheshire police is investigating it. It is a crime, and it is up to the police force to investigate.

**Mr Speaker:** I call Richard Graham—not here. Where is the fella? It is a great shame—oh dear! Well, never mind, Hannah Bardell is here.

### Leaving the EU: Food and Drink Standards

10. **Hannah Bardell** (Livingston) (SNP): What steps he is taking to maintain food and drink standards after the UK leaves the EU. [908628]

**The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (George Eustice):** As we leave the EU under the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, retained EU law will ensure that we maintain our existing food and drinks standards.

**Hannah Bardell:** The Secretary of State has previously been reported as promising a genetic food revolution in the new year. In a statement, the National Farmers Union warned in the strongest possible terms against any lowering of food standards post Brexit. Will the Secretary of State or the Minister now put an end to this uncertainty, which the Secretary of State created? Will he accept an amendment to the Agriculture Bill to ensure that the standards of our high-quality produce are never lowered or diluted?

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I see that the hon. Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham) is now scampering into the Chamber. He will have to catch his breath. The fella's missed his question—dear oh dear! Anyway, it is better later than never. It is good to see the chappie, and I am glad that he is in good health.

**George Eustice:** We have been absolutely clear that we will not water down or dilute our approach to food standards, food safety or animal welfare in pursuit of a trade deal. Any future treaty establishing a trade deal would of course come back to this House under the provisions of the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010 and would be subject to a ratification process by this House.

**Martin Vickers** (Cleethorpes) (Con): Is the Department considering improving and increasing standards post Brexit?

**George Eustice:** As we leave the European Union and establish national control in these areas, of course it is possible that we can improve our legislation in a number of areas where EU regulations do not quite work.

**Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): The Codex Alimentarius sets the standards used by the World Trade Organisation. Reportedly, the UK hardly ever speaks up in defence of strong food safety labelling and marketing safeguards at those meetings. What confidence can we have that the UK Government will do so post Brexit?

**George Eustice:** I do not accept that caricature. Indeed, we worked very hard last year to ensure that a British official took the chairmanship of one of the important Codex committees dealing with food standards, and internationally we are always promoting animal welfare and food standards through organisations such as the OIE and Codex.



### Plastic Pollution

12. **Mrs Pauline Latham** (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): What steps he is taking to reduce plastic pollution. [908631]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Dr Thérèse Coffey):** The Government recently published the resources and waste strategy, which sets out our plans to reduce plastic pollution. We have already consulted on banning straws, cotton buds and stirrers, and are consulting on extending the carrier bag charge. We will shortly be publishing our consultation on key reforms to existing packaging waste regulations, which will include a deposit refund scheme for drinks containers and increasing consistency in the recycling system.

**Mrs Latham:** The “Countryfile” programme on Sunday showed that farms use huge quantities of very thick plastic, which apparently can no longer be recycled and is being kept on airfields. How can the Government ensure that this product does not go into landfill?

**Dr Coffey:** It is possible to recycle plastic bales, but I am conscious that the secondary market may not be well established. With the reforms that we will shortly be consulting on, my hon. Friend will see that it will be in the interests of producers to ensure that materials are recyclable, otherwise it will cost them more.

**Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): I recently visited Canning Street Primary School in my constituency, where the children presented to me their “Keep Benwell Clean” campaign, because they are tired of walking to school through rivers of plastic. Will the Minister accept my invitation to visit the school and explain to the children there why their environment has to be polluted in this way, and what she and local authorities can do to change that?

**Dr Coffey:** I commend the children for being so concerned about plastic pollution and litter. I am sure that they are being champions in picking up litter where appropriate. That should be seen no longer as a punishment, but as a duty of civic service. Next time I am in Newcastle, which I anticipate will not be before 29 March, I will do my best to visit the children at that school.

**Carol Monaghan** (Glasgow North West) (SNP): Scotland led the UK in tackling the waste produced from single-use polythene bags, and the Scottish Government are now looking at a deposit return scheme for plastic bottles. Where such a scheme has been used, there have been recycling rates of up to 95%. Will the UK Government consider following suit with a plastic bottle recycling scheme?

**Dr Coffey:** We will shortly be publishing our proposals and the next steps towards introducing a deposit return scheme. I will be meeting Roseanna Cunningham again next month; she will have her plastics summit, and we will have a British-Irish Council meeting. Ideally we would like to work together on a UK scheme, and although we are conscious that that might not be possible, we will do what we can.

### Topical Questions

T1. [908636] **Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

**The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (George Eustice):** The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs continues to progress plans for our departure from the EU, including preparing a comprehensive set of statutory instruments under the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 to ensure we have a functioning statute book on day one. We are also progressing the Agriculture Bill and the Fisheries Bill, which have cleared Committee stage recently.

**Diana Johnson:** May I just say to the Minister that it is such a shame that his Government are not willing to rule out a no-deal scenario?

The EU pet travel scheme currently allows pet owners to travel between EU countries with their animals with minimal forward planning. That is especially important for guide dog owners. But the Government are now saying that, under a no-deal Brexit, guide dog owners will have to plan their travel at least four months in advance. This is totally unacceptable, so what are the Government doing to ensure that assistance dog owners do not see inferior travel arrangements in the event of a no-deal Brexit?

**George Eustice:** The guidance that the hon. Lady cites is obviously for a worst-case scenario, but the reality on pet travel schemes is that we would have the freedom to adopt a risk-based approach, and we would anticipate that the EU would do the same. We already have provisions with Norway, for instance, that enable a pet travel scheme to operate even though Norway is outside the European Union. We are in discussion with guide dog charities to address the issue.

T2. [908637] **Gillian Keegan** (Chichester) (Con): I recently spent a day with Sussex police and the Environment Agency checking permits on vans and lorries carrying toxic waste. Although these efforts are a step in the right direction, fly-tipping incidents in Chichester almost doubled in 2018 compared with the previous five years, and they cause considerable cost to local landowners and the council. What steps is my hon. Friend taking to tackle serious and organised waste crime?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Dr Thérèse Coffey):** As I outlined to the House earlier, we recently published our resources and waste strategy. It is a key point that we need to tackle this serious and organised crime. We have already given the Environment Agency powers that it is using to do so, and indeed given powers to local councils, but there is more to do. We hope to bring forward future legislation to tackle outstanding issues.

**Sue Hayman** (Workington) (Lab): On Tuesday, the National Audit Office published a highly critical report on the Government’s monitoring of the natural environment. The report states that DEFRA “has not...done enough to engage other parts of government with its approach”.

So what confidence can we have in the Secretary of State, who is clearly busy doing other things today, to deliver his promised green Brexit?

**Dr Coffey:** We are currently working on the metrics and targets, as set out in our 25-year environment plan, to have something that is sustainable going forward. It is also important to note that we have laid draft clauses of the environmental governance Bill. In them we refer to a policy statement, which will operate right across Government, embedding into what we do as a Government the need to ensure that we leave the environment in a better place than when we inherited it.

**Sue Hayman:** That is all very well, but what we need is not warm words. We get many, many warm words from this Department but very little real action, and we need action to protect our natural environment and to bear down on climate change. So what is actually happening in response to this report?

**Dr Coffey:** The report was published only yesterday, so we need to consider it and will then reply. Only this week, we launched the clean air strategy, which was recommended by the World Health Organisation as something for other countries around the world to follow. We are going through with a new Agriculture Bill and Fisheries Bill. We are preparing an environment Bill. These are all examples of action, which the House has asked for, on issues such as clean air. There is also what we are doing with our local nature recovery networks, and we are doing all sorts of things to try to improve biodiversity. The hon. Lady will be aware of our commitment to make sure that we achieve a target of 30% marine protected areas around the world by 2030, and we will be launching our final decision on marine conservation zones shortly. So frankly, this Government are acting to make the environment a better place.

T4. [908640] **Mary Robinson** (Cheadle) (Con): The Greater Manchester combined authority is in the process of producing a clean air plan for the region to reduce harmful emissions. The Mayor, who has previously ruled out a congestion charge, is now apparently considering a charge on older cars, as well as taxis and vans, which is clearly a concern for small businesses in my area that may be impacted by it. Will my hon. Friend outline whether any funding could be made available from central Government for the retrofitting of non-compliant vehicles so that small businesses in Cheadle will not be penalised should the Mayor press ahead with those plans?

**Dr Coffey:** It really matters that we work with local authorities to make sure that we improve air quality as quickly as possible. There are broader issues with particulate matter and similar, but we are still behind on nitrogen dioxide. The Greater Manchester area is late in presenting its plan to the Department, and we are continuing to work with it. Where there are those sorts of measures—not a congestion zone but a charging zone for more polluting vehicles—we will work on, and try to fund in the best way we can, the measures needed to mitigate that.

T3. [908639] **Hannah Bardell** (Livingston) (SNP): Paterson Arran Ltd is a major, important employer in my constituency, and arguably produces the best shortbread in the world. It has written to me raising serious concerns about the impact of a no-deal Brexit. It imports a

significant number of commodities, and its business would be seriously damaged by a no-deal Brexit. Will the Minister and the Cabinet now take a no-deal Brexit off the table, extend article 50, and take the vote to the people?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (David Rutley):** As I have said in reply to earlier questions, we are working very hard to ensure that there is a deal. We want to work with all parties to do that. I was impressed when I met businesses in Scotland with the Food and Drink Federation Scotland. We need to take these steps, and I understand where the company is coming from on those issues.

T6. [908642] **Peter Heaton-Jones** (North Devon) (Con): May I thank the Minister for meeting me and a delegation of farmers from North Devon before Christmas? I am meeting those farmers again tomorrow evening. Can the Minister confirm that the Government are considering their concerns—indeed, our concerns—about the Rural Payments Agency and the Agriculture Bill in particular?

**George Eustice:** It was a real pleasure to meet my hon. Friend and a number of his constituents. We will give careful consideration to the amendments tabled to the Bill on Report and also to representations from organisations such as the NFU. The Rural Payments Agency has made significant improvement this year to the delivery of payments under the basic payment scheme, with 94% being paid by the end of December.

T7. [908643] **Laura Smith** (Crewe and Nantwich) (Lab): Unlike others, I was pleased to see the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Macclesfield (David Rutley), in his place, because he too represents a Cheshire constituency. I am sure he shares my concern and that of local people who have been getting in touch with me that current legislation appears to be doing little to prevent foxhunting from taking place in Cheshire. Will the Government do the right thing and strengthen the Hunting Act by adding a recklessness clause, to end the ridiculous situation where a hunt can avoid prosecution simply by claiming that the chasing and killing of a fox by their dog was an accident?

**Dr Coffey:** The Hunting Act is already tightly drawn, and there has been a mixture of successful and unsuccessful prosecutions so far. It really matters that the police have the evidence presented to them, so that they can make a stronger case to the Crown Prosecution Service to tackle illegal hunting, which we all deplore.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Well, let us hear the fella—I call Richard Graham.

**Richard Graham** (Gloucester) (Con): Thank you very much for calling me, Mr Speaker.

One of the most exciting developments of recent times has been the announcement from the University of Manchester of a way of desalinating water through graphene sieves, which can turn it into drinking water. That has huge implications around the world. Does the

Minister agree that one of the greatest possible benefits is the decrease in the number of water bottles, which so often find their way into the marine ecosystem?

**Dr Coffey:** I also saw that interesting announcement by the University of Manchester, which just shows the benefits of this Government having invested in the university to develop graphene. There are a number of ways in which we can try to reduce the impact of plastics, and we will continue to support water companies in their long-term plans, including on desalination.

**Kerry McCarthy** (Bristol East) (Lab): Yet another report has been published this morning—this time in *The Lancet*—highlighting the damage that our food systems are doing to not only public health, with 11 million avoidable deaths, but the climate. I have been banging on about this for more than 10 years in this place. Is there any chance that the Government will ever listen to these reports?

**George Eustice:** It was a pleasure to have the hon. Lady on the Agriculture Bill Committee, where she raised some of those issues. In particular, we discussed the impact of imported soya on our environment and the steps we are taking to reduce that.

**Mr Speaker:** “Banging on” in this place tends to be a prerequisite of achieving anything. It is the colloquial version of my “persistence pays” principle.

**Anne-Marie Trevelyan** (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con): Would a Minister be willing to meet me to discuss banning the use of bolt guns as a method of putting down greyhounds that are no longer used in the racing industry?

**Dr Thérèse Coffey:** We need to tackle in a humane way however animals are put down, whether they are wildlife, domestic animals or racing animals. I am sure that a Minister will be delighted to meet my hon. Friend.

**Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): City of York Council is planning to develop the land adjacent to Askham bog, which is a site of special scientific interest. What discussions has the Minister had with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government about development next to SSSIs?

**Dr Coffey:** The hon. Lady will be aware that SSSIs have an exceptionally high protection status under the national planning policy framework, which was updated last year. It is really important that these matters are considered carefully and that such development is avoided, but it will come down to a local decision for the local planning authority.

**Neil Parish** (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): The Minister has talked about amendments to the Agriculture Bill. Will he and the Secretary of State really look at those amendments, and especially those that maintain high standards for imported foods, so that we do not put our own farmers out of business?

**George Eustice:** I can reassure my hon. Friend that I have already looked closely at some of the interesting amendments he has tabled.

**Ruth Cadbury** (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): Last week, Heathrow announced that it wanted another 25,000 flights a year through the airport, irrespective of runway 3's development. What advice has DEFRA given the Department for Transport on the noise and air quality implications of that unwelcome development?

**Dr Thérèse Coffey:** As with any development, an environmental impact assessment will be needed to cover those particular items, which will need to be considered with what is regarded as illegal.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op) *rose*—

**Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab) *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Oh, very well. I call Barry Sheerman.

**Mr Sheerman:** “Oh, very well”, Mr Speaker? I am actually going to ask a topical question, unlike some of our colleagues.

May I remind the ministerial team that until we came under European regulation, we were the dirty person of Europe? We filled our seas with sewage, and we buried our waste in holes in the ground. Did the Minister see the wonderful BBC programme only last Sunday showing the real curse of agricultural plastic waste, which we are doing very little about? Will she and the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food get together with others, on an all-party basis, to try to clean up the environment and get a good deal from Europe?

**Dr Thérèse Coffey:** That was nearly as long as a speech in an Adjournment debate, but the last one of those that the hon. Gentleman secured for me to respond to was about the circular economy of left-over paint, and he did not even show up for that.

In answer to the hon. Gentleman's question, I would say that he should read the resources and waste strategy. I have already answered the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Derbyshire (Mrs Latham): I said that we are working on this. We need to work with farmers to make sure there is a secondary market for that sort of plastic bale.

**Mr Speaker:** I do not know whether the Minister managed to see the programme, but I dare say it is available on catch-up TV.

**Mr Sheerman:** “Countryfile”.

**Mr Speaker:** We are most grateful to the hon. Gentleman.

**Chi Onwurah:** At the last EFRA questions, the Secretary of State was in his place and he was typically effusive in his praise for the glorious north-eastern countryside that so many of my constituents enjoy. However, he refused to say how he would protect small-scale farmers, on whom the beauty and variety of our landscape depend, from the massive American agro-industrial machine. Will the Minister now set out his red lines to protect our landscape post Brexit?

**George Eustice:** Clause 1 of the Agriculture Bill makes explicit provision to support and incentivise our landscapes and countryside to help some of those smaller



farmers. The modelling that has been done suggests that the issue is not actually all about size: some of our smaller family farms are technically the most proficient.

## CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

*The right hon. Member for Meriden, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—*

### Protection of Historic Church Buildings

1. **Alex Burghart** (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): What steps the Church of England is taking to ensure that historic church buildings are protected. [908606]

**The Second Church Estates Commissioner (Dame Caroline Spelman):** The Church of England continues to suffer thefts of metal and other items of historical and architectural interest from its churches. The Archbishop's Council conducted an inquiry into this, and the trend appears to be gradually moving from east to west and from south to north. I encourage my hon. Friend to look at the Church of England website for ways of protecting his churches more successfully.

**Alex Burghart:** I thank my right hon. Friend for her answer. We are blessed with a great many historic churches in Brentwood and Ongar; too often, they have to be kept locked for very long periods of the week, making them inaccessible to the public. What conversations has she or the Government had with Historic England and the police to ensure that more of our historic churches can be open to the people who wish to use them?

**Dame Caroline Spelman:** My hon. Friend has a real gem in the form of a beautiful Anglo-Saxon church—St Andrews, Greensted—which, despite the fact that it does not have a metal roof, has suffered these kind of thefts. At the end of last year, the Church of England participated in a Historic England review called Operation Crucible as part of the strategy against metal theft. There is no question but that the Scrap Metal Dealers Act 2013 needs to be tightened to recognise illegitimate businesses, which often have their own forges and furnaces and melt down the metal before it even reaches scrap dealers' yards.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): In the UK, there are some 340 important historic churches. National lottery funding has made money available to some of them, but there is certainly a shortfall in funds. May I ask the right hon. Lady whether other funding avenues could be made available for preservation works?

**Dame Caroline Spelman:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for that question. The Church would direct him, his churches and others with historical churches facing the threat of metal theft, towards a Home Office panel for grants to protect religious buildings from hate crimes. Some churches have been recipients of these grants.

**Martin Vickers** (Clethorpes) (Con): Sadly, many of our most beautiful churches are now closed for worship and have been declared redundant. Will my right hon. Friend assure me that Church Commissioners will continue to do all they can to preserve those beautiful buildings?

**Dame Caroline Spelman:** The Church of England opens as many churches as it closes—there is often a misunderstanding about that—and whether people come to worship or to visit the historical artefacts, increasing footfall through churches is a deterrent to crime and theft. I encourage all hon. Members with beautiful churches in their communities to use them or lose them, and to encourage people to go into them so that we keep them open and keep the criminals out.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): What is the Church of England doing to keep historic church bells ringing in historic church buildings?

**Dame Caroline Spelman:** The Church of England succeeded in producing a magnificent peal of bells to mark the centenary of the Armistice, and I am sure that churches in the constituencies of many hon. Members took part. Grants are available to restore belfries and bells, and a great effort was made to make churches ready for that historic moment in our nation's history.

## ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

*The hon. Member for Houghton and Sunderland South, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, was asked—*

### Electoral Commission: Investigatory Powers

2. **Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): What recent discussions the Electoral Commission has had with the Minister for the Cabinet Office on the Electoral Commission's investigatory powers. [908607]

5. **Gavin Newlands** (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): What recent discussions the Electoral Commission has had with the Minister for the Cabinet Office on the Electoral Commission's investigatory powers. [908610]

**Bridget Phillipson** (Houghton and Sunderland South): The Electoral Commission has ongoing dialogue with the Minister for the Constitution, and it has raised the need for a significant increase to its current maximum fine of £20,000. That will ensure that sanctions are proportionate and provide a genuine deterrent.

**Alan Brown:** We have heard about dark money being involved in elections and the Brexit vote, including the controversial £435,000 donation channelled via the Scottish Tory candidate, Richard Cook, and the Constitutional Research Council to the Democratic Unionist party. The source of that donation is still unclear. My hon. Friend the Member for Argyll and Bute (Brendan O'Hara) has written to the Electoral Commission to ask for due diligence on that case to be published. Can the hon. Lady advise when that will happen?

**Bridget Phillipson:** In its recent report on digital campaigning, the Electoral Commission recommended greater transparency around the source of such donations, and proposals have been set out. I am sure that officials from the commission will be happy to discuss the matter further with the hon. Gentleman or his hon. Friend.

**Gavin Newlands:** With respect to the hon. Lady, the Labour party was fined a record amount for failing to declare donations during the 2017 general election. The current shambolic state of affairs in this place means that even if an election is not probable, it is at least possible. I heard the hon. Lady's answer about increasing fines, but may we have a debate about increasing such fines much higher than £20,000? In that way, political parties would be generally dissuaded from taking such action as it would exceed the cost of doing business.

**Bridget Phillipson:** The Electoral Commission has repeatedly warned that the ability to fine campaigners a maximum of only £20,000 could increasingly be seen as the cost of doing business, and it continues to urge the Government to introduce legislation to strengthen its sanctioning powers for future electoral events.

**Matt Warman** (Boston and Skegness) (Con): Transparency in printed literature is partly ensured by the necessity of having an imprint. In my recent report for the Centre for Policy Studies, I argue that digital literature should also have an imprint. Does the Electoral Commission agree?

**Bridget Phillipson:** The Electoral Commission has called for imprints to follow for digital material as they would for printed material. I am sure that officials from the commission will be happy to discuss the matter further with the hon. Gentleman, and we welcome any steps that he can take to urge the Government to take further action in that area.

**Neil Parish** (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): Our electoral integrity is so important: when people vote we must ensure that they are exactly who they say they are. Since 2003 Northern Ireland has had photographic identification. What does the Electoral Commission feel about strengthening the situation as regards voter integrity?

**Bridget Phillipson:** The commission completed independent evaluation of the May 2018 voter ID pilot trials, and it published details on that analysis and the background data in July 2018. It found that the trials worked well, but it highlighted the need for more evidence in that area. As 3.5 million electors may not have the type of identification required, the commission continues to recommend that electors should be able to apply for a voter card free of charge, as is the case in Northern Ireland.

11. [908616] **Mr Ben Bradshaw** (Exeter) (Lab): What preparatory work is the Electoral Commission doing for the growing possibility of another EU referendum? What action is it undertaking to ensure that another referendum will not be so vulnerable to the law breaking and subversion that was suffered in 2016?

**Bridget Phillipson:** The commission has the expertise, experience and a proven track record of delivering well-run elections and referendums at short notice. It maintains contingency plans to ensure it has made all appropriate preparations to deliver a referendum, should there be one.

## CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

*The right hon. Member for Meriden, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—*

### Persecution of Christians

3. **Jeremy Lefroy** (Stafford) (Con): What (a) steps the Church of England is taking and (b) recent discussions the Church of England has had with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on tackling the persecution of Christians throughout the world. [908608]

4. **Henry Smith** (Crawley) (Con): What (a) steps the Church of England is taking and (b) recent discussions the Church of England has had with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on tackling the persecution of Christians throughout the world. [908609]

6. **Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): What recent discussions the Church of England has had with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on the persecution of Christians overseas. [908611]

8. **Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): What (a) steps the Church of England is taking and (b) recent discussions the Church of England has had with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on tackling the persecution of Christians throughout the world. [908613]

9. **Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): What (a) steps the Church of England is taking and (b) recent discussions the Church of England has had with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on tackling the persecution of Christians throughout the world. [908614]

12. **Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): What (a) steps the Church of England is taking and (b) recent discussions the Church of England has had with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on tackling the persecution of Christians throughout the world. [908617]

**The Second Church Estates Commissioner (Dame Caroline Spelman):** I do realise that the grouping will make this sound rather like Foreign Office questions for Christianity—but then, the Anglican Communion is the third largest global organisation in the world, after the United Nations and the Catholic Church.

The Church of England has regular discussions with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on freedom of religion and belief. I am pleased to announce to the House that my right hon. Friend Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, invited the Bishop of Truro, before Christmas, to lead an independent review of UK Government support for persecuted Christians.

**Jeremy Lefroy:** The number of Members who attended the meeting in the House yesterday about the Open Doors report shows just what huge interest there is in this issue. It was very disturbing to hear about the significant increase in the persecution of Christians, and indeed of people of other faiths, in the past year or two. Will my right hon. Friend ensure that as the report is compiled, the bishop will talk with as many Members as possible? We hear from our constituents and from around the world about individual cases of persecution.

**Dame Caroline Spelman:** I am delighted to give my hon. Friend that assurance. I, too, was really shocked by the report presented in Parliament yesterday, which shows that 40 countries out of the 50 on the Open Doors watch list are places where Christians experience very high or extreme levels of persecution. I shall go from this place to a meeting at the Foreign Office with the Foreign Secretary, as well as the bishop, and I will make that request directly to him.

**Henry Smith:** I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. I echo the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) in welcoming the Open Doors “World Watch List” report, launched here in Parliament yesterday.

With regard to Commonwealth countries on the list, we heard, for example, some very harrowing reports of abuse against Christian communities in Nigeria. What effort can the Commonwealth side of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office make in helping to mitigate such persecution?

**Dame Caroline Spelman:** Nigeria is high up the Open Doors watch list of countries where Christians suffer persecution. I am sorry to say that in the past year 3,731 Christians were reported killed by the activity of extremists in Nigeria. As it is a former dependency of the United Kingdom, the Government ought to have some way of having greater influence. I know that the Archbishop of Canterbury, who is knowledgeable about Nigeria, uses every endeavour to bring pressure on the Government of Nigeria to better protect the Christians in their country.

**Sir Desmond Swayne:** What estimate has my right hon. Friend made of the willingness of International Development and Foreign Office Ministers to actually do something about the persecution of Christians and put it at the top of their priorities?

**Dame Caroline Spelman:** I am delighted to be able to tell the House that since the last set of Church Commissioners questions, the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman) and I have paid a joint visit to a Minister of State at the Foreign Office to impress on him the importance of officials in the Foreign Office, the Department for International Development and other Government Departments, such as the Home Office, taking up the course for a better understanding of religious literacy. We were given assurances by the Minister that this would be impressed on officials.

**Bob Blackman:** I thank my right hon. Friend for her answers thus far. One area of the world where persecution is at its highest is Pakistan, where there have been a number of high-profile cases. What is the Church doing to combat these terrible attacks on Christians, who just want to celebrate their religion?

**Dame Caroline Spelman:** Pakistan is very high up on the Open Doors watch list of countries where Christians suffer persecution. I am sure that like me, my hon. Friend will have heard the case of Asia Bibi raised with the Prime Minister yesterday in the House. It is important not only that we look for a solution for her and her family that assures her protection, but that we remember that what we do on behalf of Christians in other

countries can impact others around the world in the same way. The persecution of Christians in Pakistan is high on our agenda.

**Kevin Foster:** As has already been mentioned, yesterday saw the launch of the Open Doors “World Watch List 2019” here in Parliament. Can my right hon. Friend advise me of what use the Church of England makes of the analysis of the trends in the persecution of Christians across the globe in its discussions with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office?

**Dame Caroline Spelman:** Obviously the watch list is a useful guide to where the focus needs to be. The bishops take special interest in particular countries that are high up on that watch list. Bishops regularly pay visits to countries where Christians are persecuted. In fact, the bishop responsible for the plight of Christians in the middle east and Palestine is currently paying his regular annual visit to look at the decimation of the Christians in that region.

**Diana Johnson:** I was interested to hear that the right hon. Lady is about to meet the Secretary of State. He wrote over Christmas in *The Daily Telegraph*:

“It is not in our national character to turn a blind eye to suffering”,

and that the issue is about

“our deeds as well as our words.”

Will the right hon. Lady say something about the deeds she would like to see from the Foreign Secretary?

**Dame Caroline Spelman:** The Foreign Secretary has acted by bringing in a bishop—an independent person—to review the work of the Foreign Office in relation to the persecution of Christians abroad. Three areas will be assessed: the level of interaction between Churches and organisations overseas with British or foreign diplomatic missions in the protection of Christians; the experience of staff at the FCO, the Department for International Development and the Home Office, who may have been on the receiving end of approaches from Churches and other organisations seeking help for persecuted Christians; and the feedback of international organisations on British activities and an assessment of the approaches of other countries’ diplomatic missions to the persecution of Christians.

## HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

*The right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington, representing the House of Commons Commission, was asked—*

### House of Commons Chamber: Electronic Voting System

7. **Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): What recent discussions the Commission has had on the potential costs of installing an electronic voting system in the House of Commons Chamber. [908612]



**Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington): The Commission has had no discussions on the costs of installing an electronic voting system in the Chamber. Its responsibility in this matter is limited to the financial or staffing implications of any change to the present system, were a change agreed by the House. If the House agreed to pursue electronic working, further work by the House service in conjunction with the digital service would be needed to accurately identify the investment, planning and development required to deliver electronic voting.

**Patrick Grady:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for the answer. I accept that a change has to be a decision of the House, but the reality is that this is not just about democracy anymore; it is about health and safety. Six hundred Members trying to get through the Lobby the other night was an incredibly worrying situation; if Mr Speaker had called for the doors to be closed, it would not have been physically possible for the Doorkeepers to do so. There was claustrophobia, and we know the issues of Members with health challenges and Members who are pregnant. The House of Commons Commission needs to consider the issue from the perspective of safety in the workplace environment, with democratic considerations to one side.

**Tom Brake:** I thank the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues for their questions—I think electronic voting will be my specialist subject on “Mastermind”. He has come up with a new angle, and I support the point he makes. Members in the packed Division Lobby when the Government were defeated very heavily will have noticed that the congestion was significant, and there were risks associated with that.

On the back of the hon. Gentleman’s question, I will ask the authorities to look at doing a health and safety risk assessment. As he will know, and as I have stated previously, if he wants to pursue the matter—I understand that he has perhaps not yet done so—he needs to ask the Procedure Committee to look at the whole subject of electronic voting.

## CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

*The right hon. Member for Meriden, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—*

### Promotion of Marriage

10. **Fiona Bruce** (Congleton) (Con): What steps the Church of England is taking to promote marriage.

[908615]

**The Second Church Estates Commissioner (Dame Caroline Spelman):** The most recent figures published by the Church of England show that in 2017 the Church conducted 41,000 marriages and services of prayer and dedication. The church wedding is affordable: at less than £500, the cost of a wedding in church is not the main part of what it costs to get married. Free of charge, the clergy offer advice to help tailor the ceremony for the couple and, perhaps most importantly, to prepare them for their lives together.

**Fiona Bruce:** Church wedding fees can put some couples off marrying in church. Will the right hon. my Friend commend the excellent initiative led by my own minister, Mike Smith, vicar of St John’s, Hartford? Along with volunteers from the church, he has put together a wedding package for three couples consisting of a church wedding, a photographer, flowers, cake, a reception, and even wedding dress alterations, all for £1,000. Is that not a model that other churches could follow?

**Dame Caroline Spelman:** I think it is an excellent model. As one with children of marriageable age, I only wish we lived in the diocese that is making the offer, but perhaps it will catch on. I sincerely hope it will.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): We availed ourselves of the opportunity to have our children baptised in St Mary’s Undercroft, and our daughters were married at St Margaret’s, Westminster. Are those facilities well known, and are they well used? It is a great tradition. Are Members of Parliament aware of the facilities available to them, and do they use them?

**Dame Caroline Spelman:** The hon. Gentleman has done the House a service in reminding all colleagues that that opportunity is open to them. I know that many Members have experienced wonderful family occasions. However, in my capacity as Chairman of the Joint Committee on the draft Parliamentary Buildings (Restoration and Renewal) Bill, I should warn colleagues that we shall need to look very carefully at what facilities will remain available while the House is being restored.

## Business of the House

10.36 am

**Valerie Vaz** (Walsall South) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House please give us the forthcoming business?

**The Leader of the House of Commons (Andrea Leadsom):** The business for next week will be as follows:

**MONDAY 21 JANUARY**—Remaining stages of the Healthcare (International) Arrangements Bill.

**TUESDAY 22 JANUARY**—Consideration of Lords amendments to the Counter-Terrorism and Border Security Bill.

**WEDNESDAY 23 JANUARY**—Consideration of Lords amendments to the Tenant Fees Bill, followed by a motion relating to private Members' Bills.

**THURSDAY 24 JANUARY**—A general debate on Holocaust Memorial Day 2019, followed by a debate on a motion relating to appropriate ME treatment. The subjects for these debates were determined by the Backbench Business Committee.

**FRIDAY 25 JANUARY**—The House will not be sitting.

I can confirm to the House that a statement and a motion on the Government's next steps under section 13 of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 will be tabled on Monday. A full day's debate on the motion will take place on Tuesday 29 January, subject to the agreement of the House.

Mr Speaker,

"Yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery, but today is a gift. That's why we call it the present."

Let me say, on the eve of A.A. Milne's birthday, that that is one of my favourite quotes from "Winnie-the-Pooh"—and, as Eeyore said:

"It never hurts to keep looking for sunshine."

May I wish you, Mr Speaker, a very happy birthday for Saturday?

Finally, I leave the House with an uplifting and rather wise thought from "Winnie-the-Pooh":

"If the person you are talking to doesn't appear to be listening, be patient. It may simply be that he has a small piece of fluff in his ear."

**Mr Speaker:** I thank the Leader of the House for her birthday wishes. I am looking forward to the occasion, although probably not quite as much as when I was about to be 15 rather than 56—but there you go.

**Valerie Vaz:** May I associate myself with the Leader of the House's good wishes to you, Mr Speaker? I am not quite sure about the bit about the fluff in the ear. I do not know whether she suspects that you are not listening to what she says.

I thank the Leader of the House for giving us the business for next week. I am pleased that she said that the Prime Minister would make a statement on Monday. The Prime Minister said that the motion would be amendable. Can the Leader of the House confirm that it will be, and can she also confirm what the Government Chief Whip said when he jumped up to the Dispatch Box—he said that 90 minutes was not enough to debate

such an important issue and that the Government would provide reasonable time to hold the debate and vote by 30 January?

This is the first Government to be held in contempt of Parliament. The Prime Minister has had a vote of no confidence from within her own party. There was a vote of no confidence in the Government yesterday, which the Government won because they have a confidence and supply agreement. Yet again, however, a record was broken: 432 hon. and right hon. Members voted against the Prime Minister's deal. That was the biggest defeat of a Government in history.

The Leader of the House said in an interview on BBC Radio 4:

"The Government has been collaborating across the House ever since the beginning of this Parliament."

Can she say with whom? The Leader of the House also said that the Prime Minister will be "speaking with senior parliamentarians". Can she say with whom—can she publish a list of those favoured ones, or is this another case of divide and rule? The Leader of the House will note that the House voted against a no-deal scenario. That must be off the table, so could she confirm that that is off the table in any starting point for discussions?

This Opposition and Parliament have been working on behalf of the people. Pressure from Her Majesty's Opposition led to a meaningful vote, a term coined by the shadow Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), and it took a Humble Address for Parliament to be given the impact assessments.

How can we have confidence in the referendum when the donor of the largest political donation in history is being investigated by the National Crime Agency? The leave campaign has been found to have broken electoral law, whistleblowers and journalists have raised alarms about the legality of the campaign, and the previous Government said no analysis of the impact should be given out by our independent civil service.

Yes, the people have voted, but it is our job as elected representatives to look at the evidence of the impact on the country, and not rely on the campaign rhetoric, which we now know to be based on falsehoods. We must rely on the evidence and the facts. So can the Leader of the House confirm whether she will move the business motion to extend article 50 in time? I know friends of the Leader of the House have said she might resign if she had to do that.

The hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) has asked the DExEU Minister to explain why the Government thought it appropriate as a matter of law to proceed under regulation 32, for reasons of urgency, extreme urgency and unforeseeable events, when they handed the contract of £14 million to Seaborne Freight, a company with no ships, no ports and no employees. Can the Leader of the House publish a list of all the contracts that have been awarded under this regulation by any Government Department?

As of last Friday, 73% of the time available for the Government to lay their Brexit statutory instruments has elapsed, but only 51% of SIs have been laid. A previous shadow Leader of the House of Commons, the right hon. Lord Cunningham, said in the House of

[Valerie Vaz]

Lords that there is a Brexit SI that is 630 pages long, 2.54 kg in weight and includes 11 disparate subjects. The Government are clearly doing all they can to avoid proper scrutiny. Baroness Smith, shadow Leader of the Lords, says that she holds both of them in both hands so she does not have to go to the gym. Can the Leader of the House update the House on the progress of the Brexit SIs that need to be laid before the UK exits the EU?

In yesterday's confidence vote debate the Prime Minister said:

"when you have worked hard all your life, you will get a good pension and security and dignity in your old age".

Not if you are a WASPI woman, and not if you are a couple where only one of you is over pensionable age, because a written statement on Monday showed that there would be a £7,000 pension cut for the poorest elderly couples. The Prime Minister said:

"where growing up you will get the best possible education, not because your parents can afford to pay for it but because that is what every local school provides".

Not according to new analysis by the House of Commons Library, showing that total education spending, including spending on schools and colleges, in the UK has fallen by over £7 billion in real terms since 2010. The Prime Minister said:

"where, when you have children of your own, you will be able to rely on our world-class NHS".—[*Official Report*, 16 January 2019; Vol. 652, c. 1185.]

But not if you are on NHS waiting lists, which have grown to 4.3 million. The number of people waiting longer than two months for cancer treatment has almost doubled since 2010 and £7 billion has been cut from adult social care since 2010, leaving 1.4 million elderly and vulnerable people without care and support. The Prime Minister needs to come to the House and correct the record. It is no wonder that, in his speech, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs focused on the Leader of the Opposition rather than on confidence in his own Government.

May I also ask the Leader of the House if she will in principle talk to the usual channels about proxy voting? I do not want to discuss individual cases, just the principle of proxy voting. What is the timetable for coming back to the House and ensuring that is put in place?

The Leader of the House mentioned the Holocaust Memorial Day debate. The book will be available to sign next week; it was opened this week. On Monday, it is Martin Luther King Day, whose words we must remember:

"We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all".

I hope that we all heed those words as we work towards tolerance, mutual respect, justice and opportunity and as we work to find a solution.

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her various comments. I can confirm that the debate on Tuesday 29 January will not be limited to 90 minutes. The Government will ensure that sufficient time is available so the House can fully consider the matter for

the whole day. The arrangements for the debate are subject to the House agreeing those arrangements, and it will be brought forward as a business of the House motion, which will be amendable and debatable.

The hon. Lady asks about my claim that there have been discussions across the House. She will appreciate that the Government have brought forward 46 Bills, 33 of which have received Royal Assent, and that in a hung Parliament there is considerable collaboration. Nearly 1,500 amendments were tabled to the EU withdrawal Bill, and on many of them the Government sought to do cross-party deals to ensure we could get the business through. By definition, given that 33 Bills have received Royal Assent, there has been a great deal of cross-party collaboration. It is important that she accepts that. Those are the facts. That is the truth of the matter.

The hon. Lady asks what the position is on a no-deal Brexit. She will be aware that, Parliament having passed the EU withdrawal Act, the legal default is that the UK will leave the EU on 29 March and, if a deal has not been voted for, it will be with no deal, unless alternative arrangements are put in place.

The hon. Lady says that the people have spoken and she is absolutely right—the people did speak. She then suggested it is up to Members of Parliament to decide what we do in response. I would slightly disagree with her. The people have spoken and it is our job to fulfil that, in line with the requirements of the people. This House is a servant of the people of this country—the entire United Kingdom.

The hon. Lady asks about progress on Brexit SIs. She will appreciate we have gone further than any previous Government in being open and transparent about the plans for secondary legislation. I remain confident that all required statutory instruments that need to be will be brought forward in time for exit day. I have recently exchanged letters with the Chairman of the sifting Committee to clarify some of the affirmative SIs that need to be brought forward in Committee. More than 300 Brexit SIs have now been laid, which is more than half the SIs we anticipate will be required by exit day and, as I say, we remain confident.

The hon. Lady makes various assertions about what the Prime Minister said. I gently say that from the Dispatch Box the hon. Lady could welcome, as I do, the fact that the economy is 18% bigger than it was in 2010 and has grown for eight consecutive years, that wages have outstripped inflation for eight consecutive months, and that median household incomes are up by £1,400 in real terms since 2010. She should celebrate the fact that more people are in work than ever before, that wages are growing at their fastest rate for a decade, that 1.9 million more children are being taught in good or outstanding schools than in 2010 and that this Government have committed a bigger investment in the NHS than ever before in its entire history. She should celebrate those things, but I fear she does not.

The hon. Lady made a point about proxy voting. It is a serious point, and the whole House knows my view. It is vital that families get the opportunity to spend time with their new babies. I will be bringing forward a motion as soon as I can on this subject. As all hon. Members will appreciate, there are no clear-cut views—for example, on how far it should extend and to what sort



of motions it should apply—but I have been consulting broadly on the matter, and I hope to bring that forward as soon as possible.

**Sir David Amess** (Southend West) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on laws governing local authority employees standing in parliamentary elections? At the moment, they are banned from standing for the authority for which they work but can stand in parliamentary elections. That may not be a problem for the House, but personally I think the law rather strange.

**Andrea Leadsom:** My hon. Friend makes an interesting point. The present law excludes local council employees who hold a politically restricted post, as defined in the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, from standing in both parliamentary and local authority elections. He may like to raise the matter with Cabinet Office Ministers, perhaps in an Adjournment debate, so that he can seek further information.

**Mr Speaker:** I call Pete Wishart.

**Pete Wishart** (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): Thank you, Mr Speaker, and may I wish you a happy birthday for Saturday from everyone on the SNP Benches? Perhaps you can get a game of tennis in if you get the chance. I also thank the Leader of the House for announcing the business for next week.

Well, we are all still here! I congratulate the Leader of the House and her Government on winning the no-confidence vote last night. At least they can still win one vote, and the nation is grateful—or perhaps not. Amazingly, this is a Government who treat the biggest defeat in parliamentary history as a mere flesh wound. Like Monty Python's Black Knight, they fight on, armless and legless, prepared to bite the nation into submission. With similar delusion, they fight on as though nothing has happened. The red lines remain in place, there is no sense that other options are being considered seriously, and the Government still believe that a little bit of tinkering around the edges of their deal will be enough to make everything all right. The Government need to start to get real about their position and demonstrate that they are prepared to take Tuesday's defeat seriously. May we have a statement, to show good will towards the House, to say that the Government will stop the clock and ensure that no deal is taken off the table? That would be the best way to engage with the other parties in this House.

I am grateful to the Leader of the House for clarifying the situation around the Prime Minister's statement on Monday and the debate a week on Tuesday. However, the business statement did not cover the fact that, according to the amended business motion approved by the House relating to the meaningful vote, the Government have three days to bring forward that debate, so why is the debate coming seven days after the statement? Next week's business is important, but the debate could be held next week. The clock is ticking, and we do not need to wait until Tuesday week. The Leader of the House did not quite confirm this to the shadow Leader of the House, so will she ensure that any motion is fully debatable and amendable and that all options will be considered?

Lastly, this has been raised previously, but we need to review the House's appalling voting arrangements. Tuesday night was awful, with cramped conditions no better than a cattle wagon while Members of Parliament vote. What will have to happen before we decide to do something? Does somebody have to give birth in a Lobby before the matter is tackled seriously? This is the 21st century, and our voting arrangements should match the times in which we live. Get shot of these ridiculous voting arrangements.

**Andrea Leadsom:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his insight and for his encouragement of electronic voting. I fear that there is no clear view on that and that it may even prove more controversial in this House than leaving the European Union, which is one of the extraordinary things about the Houses of Parliament. Nevertheless, I am always willing to talk to him about such things. Of course, when we decant from this place into temporary arrangements, it might be possible to trial different alternatives if the House wants to do so—[HON. MEMBERS: "No!"] As the hon. Gentleman can hear, it is a controversial thought.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether no deal can be taken off the table, but he must surely appreciate that doing that and then stopping preparations for no deal would be a totally incompetent thing for a sensible Government to do. The Government must continue to prepare for all eventualities, including no deal. It is not possible to remove no deal from the table and still abide by the will of the people, as expressed in the referendum.

The hon. Gentleman asks about next week's motion. I again confirm, as I thought I already had, that it is debatable, amendable and subject to agreement by this House, on a motion that will be tabled on Monday; the statement and motion will be tabled on Monday. I offer the hon. Gentleman a bit of advice from "Winnie-the-Pooh" that I have been dying to give him:

"You can't stay in your corner of the Forest waiting for others to come to you. You have to go to them sometimes."

**Sir Christopher Chope** (Christchurch) (Con): May we have an early debate on collective Cabinet responsibility and what it means in the current circumstances? Will my right hon. Friend undertake to lead that debate, so that she can explain to the House the frustration that we all feel on her behalf at having the 2017 Conservative party manifesto, which she supported on the "Today" programme this week, undermined by treacherous comments from our own Cabinet colleagues?

**Andrea Leadsom:** My hon. Friend is really tempting me, but I shall resist. All my Cabinet colleagues are absolutely in agreement that we will deliver on the will of the people as expressed in the referendum of 2016. We will be leaving the European Union on 29 March. That remains Government policy and we will continue to prepare for all eventualities.

**Ian Mearns** (Gateshead) (Lab): I add my personal good wishes to you, Mr Speaker, and wish you a happy birthday on Saturday. I hope Saturday also brings you three points from your game with Chelsea at the Emirates.

I thank the Leader of the House for the business statement and for announcing that next Thursday will be Backbench Business Committee business, with the

[*Ian Mearns*]

Holocaust Memorial Day debate and a debate on appropriate treatment for myalgic encephalomyelitis—ME. That will free up the time in Westminster Hall that we had put aside for the Holocaust Memorial Day debate, and Westminster Hall will now host a debate on Home Office resourcing for policing and tackling knife crime, particularly in London, on that Thursday afternoon.

I really welcome the House's debating Holocaust Memorial Day. Members might not be aware that I represent and live in the midst of a large orthodox Haredi Jewish community in Gateshead. They are my neighbours and friends. Many of them come from families that fled to Gateshead in the 1920s and the 1930s, and that is obviously something that hits home when we remember the Holocaust on that day. I also remind the Government that the Haredi Jewish community, being very orthodox and having its own particular way of living within its culture and creed, has been hit rather hard by the two-child limit on benefits. That is something that we should be aware of across this House, because that limit is having an impact on culturally religious communities.

The Leader of the House talks about the many things she believes the Government have done well, but I am afraid that in my constituency unemployment in December was 1,060 higher than in the same month in the previous year. Everything in the garden is not rosy everywhere.

**Andrea Leadsom:** I totally respect the hon. Gentleman, and I thank him for his remarks about the Jewish community in his constituency. I think all hon. Members appreciate the contribution that they make to our society. I would certainly encourage him to seek an Adjournment debate so that he can discuss the specific issues and problems.

**Sir Oliver Letwin** (West Dorset) (Con): I am grateful to the Leader of the House for explaining when the Government's motion will be debated. Will she be arranging the business of the House on that occasion in such a way that there will be an opportunity, if Mr Speaker selects a large number of amendments and if they are pressed to a vote, to vote on each of them sequentially?

**Andrea Leadsom:** My right hon. Friend will be aware that the motion to agree how we proceed on the motion will itself be amendable and debatable, and what will take place will require the House's agreement.

**Margaret Beckett** (Derby South) (Lab): I should like to declare an interest. Some years ago, when we were in a minority Government, I was in our Whips Office. Since then, for some five years, I was either shadow Leader of the House or Leader of the House. I feel an old-fashioned sense of unease when I hear people exploring options that might lead to the Government reducing or losing their control of the business of the House. However, that is of course entirely unnecessary. It is within the remit of the Government, using their access to the Order Paper, to facilitate exploration of where the will of the House lies. I strongly urge the Leader of the House to consider and explore, in consultation with colleagues, ways in which the Government might do that in order to facilitate the House's expression of its

wishes—the Prime Minister says she wants it to come to a decision—rather than, as has perhaps inadvertently happened in the past, almost obstructing the expression of the will of the House.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. When the right hon. Member for Derby South (Margaret Beckett) served as Leader of the House, she was such a good Leader of the House and so popular and respected on both sides that I recall from 20 years ago that when we feared from press reports that her role as Leader of the House was at risk, the right hon. Members for New Forest West (Sir Desmond Swayne), for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) and for Buckingham (John Bercow) all sprang to our feet during business questions to insist that she must remain in her place.

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am grateful to the right hon. Member for Derby South (Margaret Beckett) for her suggestion. She will equally appreciate that when, under her Government, indicative voting was attempted on House of Lords reform, it did not come up with a clear solution—that is the other side of the argument. Nevertheless, I am grateful for her remarks and suggestions.

**Sir Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough) (Con): Following on from the previous question, the Procedure Committee met yesterday and we are holding an urgent inquiry on these issues and on the recent rulings from the Chair. May I encourage the Leader of the House, the shadow Leader of the House and you, Mr Speaker, to come to our Committee, if you are invited?

As the right hon. Member for Derby South (Margaret Beckett) just said, there is a point about such precedents. The shadow Leader of the House hopes soon to be in government, and it would be quite a dangerous precedent if Back Benchers were given precedence over the Government in introducing business. These are major constitutional issues, and we should not play this on the hoof or approach it from our being pro-Brexit or anti-Brexit. We should try to come to some sort of consensus.

**Andrea Leadsom:** My right hon. Friend's final point is exactly right. There are some very serious issues about the way the House conducts its business and, indeed, about the way our democracy is managed, and we need to consider those very carefully and soberly, although I agree with you, Mr Speaker. I would not storm the Procedure Committee's meeting uninvited but, if invited, I would of course be available to come along.

**John Cryer** (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): Transport for London is in the process of phasing out existing rolling stock on the Barking-Gospel Oak line, which runs through my constituency, but TfL has done it without making sure that new trains will be in place. That means we will have a few weeks, perhaps longer, in which there will not be any trains on one of the big commuter lines across north London. Even for TfL this is incompetence of a pretty high order. Can we have a debate on transport, and particularly trains, so I can get a few more things off my chest?

**Andrea Leadsom:** There will be many hon. and right hon. Members who completely sympathise with the hon. Gentleman. The situation sounds appalling, and

he might want to seek an urgent Adjournment debate or a Westminster Hall debate, because many colleagues are frustrated about issues with rolling stock.

**Kirstene Hair** (Angus) (Con): Many charities across the United Kingdom benefit from national lottery funding, including charities in my Angus constituency such as the Forfar Musical Society and the Brechin Photographic Society. I am hosting an event in my constituency on 22 February to show other charities the funding that is available. Can we have a debate in this place on the outstanding contribution of charities in our constituencies and on how they can access further support?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am sure many hon. Members would agree with my hon. Friend that many charities benefit from national lottery grants, and I commend her for suggesting a public meeting to spread the news about what is available. Last year, the Big Lottery Fund distributed more than 11,000 grants across the UK including, in her constituency of Angus, to charities as diverse as HOPE organic garden, Keptie Friends, the Brechin Photographic Society, the Forfar Musical Society and Strathmore rugby football club. Congratulations to all of them. I encourage my hon. Friend to seek a Westminster Hall debate at least, because I am sure many Members would like to participate in such a debate.

**Kate Hoey** (Vauxhall) (Lab): The Leader of the House will be aware of the deteriorating and serious situation in Zimbabwe: the internet was deliberately stopped by the Government for three days; roads, schools and banks are closed; hundreds of people have been arrested; and there is complete silence, as people cannot communicate with each other. Will she ask the Foreign Secretary to make a statement? I have tried to get an Adjournment debate or a Westminster Hall debate, and I will continue to do so, but this is serious and we must not forget what is happening in that wonderful country.

**Andrea Leadsom:** I absolutely share the hon. Lady's concern. We all had such high hopes for Zimbabwe's recovery, and what is happening is very concerning. We have Foreign Office questions next Tuesday, and I encourage her to raise this directly with the Secretary of State then.

**Sir John Hayes** (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): Every day, crime blights lives. Those just about managing in hard-pressed communities particularly suffer, as burglars steal prized possessions and trash homes; small shops are regularly burgled, with thieves making life a misery for the shopkeepers; and neighbours, through disorder and threats, spoil people's peace. Yet we hear that the Government now plan to send fewer thieves and thugs to prison. That might appeal to bleeding-heart liberals who live gated lives in leafy enclaves and see things through the prism of privilege, but it will disadvantage the police, disempower magistrates and disappoint the public. A visit from Ministers will allow them to defend this perverse plan, say why they will not defend those who suffer and give Members a chance to give a voice to victims.

**Andrea Leadsom:** My right hon. Friend raises an incredibly serious issue. He will be aware that the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee has just announced a debate in Westminster Hall next Thursday afternoon

in which my right hon. Friend might like to take part. I agree with him that prisons are there to punish offenders and keep the public safe, but they must also help people to turn their lives around. There is a balance to be struck, but I am sure that the Government will continue to consider the issue carefully.

**Marion Fellows** (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): Many happy returns for when your birthday comes, Mr Speaker.

I make no apology for raising this issue yet again. I had long and successful treatment for claustrophobia shortly after I joined this House. On Tuesday night, I had to be assisted through the Lobby by a right hon. Member—he is not in his place, so I will not name him—because although I did not have a panic attack, I felt very uncomfortable. I know what a claustrophobia panic attack is like, because I have suffered such attacks in the past. I assure Members that I would have caused havoc in the Lobby had I had an attack on Tuesday night. I plead with the authorities, with the Chair of the Procedure Committee and anyone else who is listening to consider having a debate in which we can put forward these points, so that the House can really look at the health and safety issues involved in the nonsense that happened in the Lobby on Tuesday evening.

**Andrea Leadsom:** First, I am really sorry to hear about the experience that the hon. Lady had; that is not acceptable and I am happy to meet her to discuss what more we might be able to do. I do not think it necessarily means changing procedures, but there certainly could be other ways to facilitate her particular situation.

**Sir Greg Knight** (East Yorkshire) (Con): May we have a debate on reducing waiting times? Is the Leader of the House aware that during a lifetime the average motorist will spend approximately six months waiting at red traffic lights? May we have a national audit of our use of traffic lights in this country to see how many of them can be safely turned off?

**Andrea Leadsom:** That could be a very popular debate indeed, and my right hon. Friend raises an important issue. Traffic is not only frustrating for motorists, but harmful to our economic prosperity. I can tell him that we have seen more than a quarter of a trillion pounds of infrastructure investment, public and private, since 2010. A huge amount of money is going into new road building, and trying to re-work towns and cities so that the traffic keeps flowing better. There is a long way to go. He might well want to seek a Backbench Business Committee debate on this subject.

**Ruth Smeeth** (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): Happy birthday, Mr Speaker. This week I received correspondence from Cardtronics, which is ending free-to-access ATMs in my and another three constituencies. We have had a Backbench Business debate and my hon. Friend the Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Ged Killen) has a ten-minute rule Bill. May I urge the Leader of the House to work with the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and to allow a debate in Government time on the subject of the ten-minute rule Bill, so that we can tackle the scourge of paid-for money?



**Andrea Leadsom:** I am extremely sympathetic to the hon. Lady's point. It is really problematic that people are not able to access their own money because of charges that they simply cannot afford. This House has looked at the issue a number of times and I encourage her to raise it directly with Ministers at Treasury questions on 29 January.

**Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con):** Happy birthday, Mr Speaker. May we have an urgent statement on changes by Barclays bank to its charges for community groups? Previously, anyone with assets worth more than £100,000 would have free banking, but the bank is now going to subject charities and community groups with assets worth more than £100,000 to very expensive charges. That will have a devastating effect on charities in Harlow, such as the Harlow food bank and the Michael Roberts Charitable Trust. May we have an urgent statement from the Government and can we take action to deal with the issue?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am pleased that my right hon. Friend has raised this point. Charities should not be placed on the same commercial playing field as businesses, and it is right that the money they raise can be spent on their charitable work. The decision taken by the bank is disappointing. I am a big fan of bank account number portability and have campaigned for it in the past. I would, therefore, make a suggestion to charities in Harlow that are concerned about this: vote with your feet and switch your account to a provider that will provide free banking. I hope that the bank concerned will have heard my right hon. Friend's question, and I suggest that he raises the issue again in an Adjournment debate.

**Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP):** International Christian Concern has reported that Vietnamese Government officials arrested and threatened 33 Christians in Phú Lóm village last November. Police reportedly tried to force the Christians to abandon their faith and worship a statue of the Buddha instead. Four of the group were arrested and beaten after they refused to do so, and Government officials continued to harass Christians in several other raids throughout November and December. Will the Leader of the House agree to a statement or a debate on this very important issue?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Gentleman raises a matter of great concern regarding the abuse of people for their faith, and he is right to do so. I encourage him to raise it directly at Foreign Office questions next week.

**Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con):** I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) about the issue of making up this House's rules on the hoof. There is a very strong case for a business of the House committee, which my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House supported in a Conservative manifesto some time ago.

The Leader of the House has referred to next week's motion on private Members' Bills. She, my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope) and I signed a motion that would have provided extra days—one of which would have been this Friday—but it was blocked by the Labour Chief Whip. Does the Leader of the House still plan to give us those extra days, or is there going to be a reduction in their number?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I have announced that the House will have an opportunity next Wednesday to debate additional days for private Members' Bills. I have listened carefully to representations made by colleagues, and I will table a motion ahead of that debate so that we can continue to make good progress on private Members' Bills in this Session.

**Ellie Reeves (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab):** On Sunday evening, 23-year-old Nicole Newman was killed crossing the road in Penge, and her eight-month-old baby remains in a critical condition in hospital. I am sure that the Leader of the House will want to join me in offering condolences to her family, including her partner Charlie. While there has been no suggestion that the driver was speeding, our council in Bromley has failed to implement 20 mph speed limits in residential areas, despite pressure from Labour councillors to do so. Can we please therefore have a debate in Government time on speed limits in residential areas?

**Andrea Leadsom:** May I first say that that is an absolute tragedy? I am sure that all hon. Members will want to send their deep condolences to the family. The hon. Lady raises a very important point about speed limits. She will be aware that it is possible for local authorities to lower or indeed raise limits where that is felt suitable. I encourage her to seek an Adjournment debate so that she can discuss the details of this tragic case.

**Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con):** Staffordshire police, in order better to investigate and prosecute online child sexual exploitation, has taken on some world-leading software from Semantics 21, which was developed in my own Stafford constituency. This software has been sold around the world—in the United States, Canada, and Australia, and to police forces in Europe as well—yet it seems very difficult to get police forces in the UK, even those that would like to do it, to take it up. Will she see how we can have a debate or a statement on whether we can use world-leading software developed in the United Kingdom in UK police forces?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I commend my hon. Friend for raising the possibility of this software, and I absolutely agree that something that is created in the United Kingdom that saves police officers having to spend their time trawling through horrific images is a very good idea indeed. I encourage him to take it up directly with Home Office Ministers so that he can discuss with them what more can be done.

**Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab):** Yesterday, Ofsted Chief Inspector Amanda Spielman launched new guidelines for Ofsted. If adopted, the new proposals would mean that schools practising off-rolling would be punished by inspectors. I am glad to see that the proposals were welcomed by the Government, but will they provide a statement on how they intend to support schools with more resources to meet the new criteria?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am very pleased to see that the hon. Lady has an Adjournment debate scheduled soon to discuss this directly with Ministers. She is extremely diligent in the way that she tackles this issue and she is right to do that. She will appreciate that Ofsted plays a critical role in our system and its inspection of schools,

colleges and early-years providers has helped to drive up education standards right across the country. The Government are working closely with Ofsted as it develops its new framework, and will continue to do so to make sure that we keep raising standards while ensuring that the balance is right between improving school standards and protecting against exclusions.

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): May I join others, Mr Speaker, in wishing you a happy birthday for tomorrow, and, unusually for me, in hoping that you watch Arsenal win, particularly as they are playing Chelsea?

Across the country, a spate of local authorities is embarking on very dodgy financial deals. In particular, Harrow Council has wasted £25 million on a failed regeneration scheme and is trying to hush it up. Can we therefore have a debate in Government time on the limits on local authorities to borrow and invest in regeneration schemes?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am sorry to hear of my hon. Friend's concern about this particular investment by his local council. I encourage him to take it up either in an Adjournment debate or, indeed, at Housing, Communities and Local Government questions on Monday 28 January.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate the Leader of the House on her note of whimsy as she opened proceedings today. It was much appreciated. A new harmony seems to be breaking out, which many of us, on all Benches, will welcome.

On a very serious point, as a Member of Parliament for West Yorkshire, I was deeply disappointed to see, yet again, police arrests of gangs suspected of grooming young girls and children. This is possibly the 14th town, city or urban area with such a case. Can we not have a debate on the need to look at the causes and what has been happening in our towns and cities so that we can really understand what has been going on and how we stop it?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I understand that the hon. Gentleman works with my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis) on a cross-party group that is looking into the issue. It is right that we do that and I commend him on trying to find a way forward. I encourage him to seek a Backbench Business Committee debate so that that discussion can take place directly with Ministers. It is incredibly important that we do all we can to find out what is causing this problem of grooming young children and that we put a stop to it as soon as possible.

**Henry Smith** (Crawley) (Con): An NCP car park in the centre of Crawley has been sending motorists fines, even though it has not obtained the correct planning permission for signage. I seek assurances from the Government that the Parking (Code of Practice) Bill of my right hon. Friend the Member for East Yorkshire (Sir Greg Knight) that is currently in the other place will receive Royal Assent at the earliest possible opportunity.

**Andrea Leadsom:** My hon. Friend raises a point that concerns not just his constituents in Crawley, but many others around the country. Drivers expect NCP to play by the rules and erect clear signage, making them aware

of any charges. The private Member's Bill of my right hon. Friend the Member for East Yorkshire (Sir Greg Knight) has gathered support across the House and with industry trade bodies, creating a single code of practice that applies to all private parking operators. This will be a significant step towards greater fairness, and I look forward to its swift passage through the Lords.

**Ian C. Lucas** (Wrexham) (Lab): Can we have an urgent statement on the north Wales growth deal that was announced in the autumn Budget? This morning's announcement by Hitachi concerning Wylfa power station takes away a £20 billion investment in north Wales and completely alters the premise on which the growth deal was introduced. We urgently need to discuss this, as it is a major infrastructure project not just for north Wales and north-west England, but right across the UK.

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Gentleman is right to raise this issue. I was a big fan of that project and am disappointed to see what is happening now. He will appreciate that there is a statement following business questions and I encourage him to take this up with Ministers then.

**Anne-Marie Trevelyan** (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con): Will the Leader of the House bring forward a debate in Government time for the House to discuss enshrining in law the rights of the 3.2 million EU nationals living in the UK now so that, regardless of whether or not a deal can be finalised by 29 March, our great nation's commitment to these EU citizens—our friends and neighbours—is absolute?

**Andrea Leadsom:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise this important issue. All EU citizens who have come to the UK to make their lives here and contribute to our economy and society are very welcome, and they will remain welcome under all circumstances, whether we leave the European Union with or without a deal.

**Alex Norris** (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): The outstanding Roy Castle Lung Cancer Foundation, in conjunction with our local health services and my own Rebalancing charity, are bringing lung scans to Aspley, Bilborough and Strelley this month, following our very successful roll-out in Bulwell last year that detected cancers and saved lives. Might we have a debate in Government time about the importance of lung health and the benefits of rolling out lung health screening across the country?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I congratulate the hon. Gentleman and his constituents on their excellent and incredibly important work in lung screening. I agree with him about the importance of such screening. He will be pleased to know that the new NHS 10-year plan includes a much greater focus on early detection and prevention, with the aspiration of many more people surviving cancers in the future. I encourage him to seek an Adjournment debate so that he can raise these issues directly with Ministers.

**Douglas Ross** (Moray) (Con): Could we have a debate about local hospitals? This year is the 200th anniversary of Dr Gray's Hospital in Elgin. Despite being the

[Douglas Ross]

smallest district general hospital anywhere in Scotland, the 550 staff provide outstanding care for local constituents. Would the Leader of the House accept my invitation to visit Dr Gray's to meet the local staff, who provide outstanding care in the hospital?

**Andrea Leadsom:** As ever, my hon. Friend is a strong voice for his constituents, and I congratulate Dr Gray's hospital on its anniversary. I know that he has been working hard to support the "Keep MUM" campaign to reverse the downgrading of the maternity unit at the hospital—an issue that he has raised at business questions previously. I would love to visit my hon. Friend's constituency if I can find a slot in my diary; he has raised so many fascinating stories about his constituency that I think it would be a truly interesting visit.

**Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): I have been shocked at times by the attitudes that are displayed in this House. When I was a Government Whip, I remember being particularly shocked by a Tory Opposition Whip who refused to nod through the Lobby a recently delivered mother—a nursing mother. I think that this week many of us in this House are ashamed of the position that one of our colleagues has been put in simply to register her vote on the most important thing that probably any of us will be voting on during our time in this place, whereby she had to put her health into second place in order to do that. I think that many of us feel ashamed. That is not the way, in 2019, that we should treat each other in any workplace. Because we will now be having a series of other very important votes, may I ask the Leader of the House when we will actually see the proposal for proxy voting implemented so that Members are not put in that position ever again?

**Andrea Leadsom:** May I say that I have the greatest regard for the hon. Lady? She raises very important issues in this place and she is right to do so. She is raising the issue of one of our colleagues who chose to come to the House to vote. The usual channels will all confirm, and indeed the Speaker confirmed yesterday, that a pair was offered. That is the normal arrangement for somebody who cannot be present. It was offered well in advance and that offer remains open to her. I myself am extremely concerned about the hon. Lady's welfare and wish her all health and happiness with her new baby. I do personally wish that she would follow the advice of her doctors. I genuinely do not believe that any of her constituents would possibly require her to turn up here in a wheelchair when it was perfectly possible to have received what is the normal arrangement in this place for people with conditions—and there were others, with long-term health conditions, who were paired on that same day. I really do wish that she would accept that offer.

**Mr Speaker:** I thank the hon. Lady for her question and the Leader of the House for what she has said. Of course, as we discovered last summer, it is possible for the credibility of the pairing system to be damaged, perhaps irreparably, when it is abused or dishonoured. Moreover, as hon. and right hon. Members are aware, the House has twice debated the matter of proxy voting in circumstances of baby leave, and on both occasions the will of the House in support of such a system was

made clear. Therefore, it is imperative, following those two debates in February and September of last year, that effect is given to the will of the House. It would of course be intolerable—literally intolerable—if, for example, a Whips Office, because of its own opposition to such a change, were to frustrate the will of the House. That simply cannot happen, and I very much doubt that Members will be tolerant of it for any length of time. The House has spoken and change must happen. It is a lamentable failure of leadership thus far that it has not done so.

**Hannah Bardell** (Livingston) (SNP): I do not mean to labour the point, Mr Speaker, but I think it utterly incredible that in our employment as Members of Parliament we are treated differently from anybody else across the UK or beyond. There is no other job anywhere where someone would be asked to, and put in the position where they have to, choose to come to work the day before they give birth or to delay the birth of their child. I am sorry, but I am fed up with hearing excuses from the Leader of the House and ridiculous arguments about not putting in place proxy voting, baby leave, and, frankly, electronic voting. We only need to look to Wales and Scotland, where we have Parliaments that have seats for every Member and electronic voting. For goodness' sake, this is the 21st century—what are this Government doing? It is about time they sorted this out so that we can enjoy a proper status and be able to consider having children. I do not have any children but I may consider having some at some point, and I do not know how that would be manageable in the current circumstance.

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her comments, and I am listening very carefully. She will appreciate that what happens in this place is a matter for Members. A number of Members have raised with me the need for those with long-term illnesses, family emergencies and so on to be accommodated, but I have heard from other Members that that would not command the support of the House. I am seeking to provide a solution that can command the support of the House.

The hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) was able to be nodded through. If it was a matter of having her vote recorded—[*Interruption.*] Members are shaking their heads. The usual channels agreed that she could come to this place at any moment on that day and be nodded through, to have her vote recorded. On this occasion, until we have finalised the way forward, that is my strong recommendation. I hope that the hon. Lady will take medical advice and not come into the House unnecessarily.

**Mr Speaker:** I am very sorry that the hon. Member for Livingston (Hannah Bardell) has had to raise this and that the Government Whips Office is blocking progress on this matter, but let us hope that some progress will be made before too long. [*Interruption.*] Well, that is the situation—that is the reality, and that is the evidence. It is very clear; there is no doubt about it.

**Chris Ruane** (Vale of Clwyd) (Lab): Penblwydd hapus, Mr Speaker, as we say in Wales.

In 1991, 9 million prescriptions were written for antidepressants. By 2016, that figure had gone up to 65 million. In 2004, the National Institute for Clinical



Excellence recommended and approved the science of mindfulness for the treatment of repeat episodes of depression. Can the Leader of the House guarantee a debate in Government time on why the use of antidepressants has shot up over that period, while mindfulness has just bubbled along?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Gentleman raises an incredibly important point. I certainly was not aware of the shocking rise in the use of antidepressants. He will be aware that mindfulness courses are offered in this place. I have tried to attend one, but due to the busyness of this place, I have not managed to get there yet. I certainly agree that we could all do with some mindfulness at this time.

The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the Government are investing significant sums in improving mental health and making good on the pledge for parity of esteem between physical and mental health. We will see many more people able to access talking therapies and the kind of support he is talking about, but I encourage him to seek a Backbench Business Committee debate, because I am sure that many Members would want to contribute to it.

**Tonia Antoniazzi** (Gower) (Lab): There is a great deal of ambiguity about state pensions for 1950s women, now that the legal challenge by the campaign group BackTo60 is in the High Court. Can the Leader of the House advise whether parliamentarians can continue to discuss and make representations in the House about this very important issue and, more importantly, whether the Government will respond?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I can assure the hon. Lady that Members can always continue to raise issues and concerns in this place. She will be aware that the Government do not comment on judicial reviews that are under way, due to the separation of powers. I encourage her to seek an Adjournment debate or a Westminster Hall debate, so that she and other Members can discuss, as we have on many an occasion, the real concerns about the WASPI women.

**Martin Whitfield** (East Lothian) (Lab): I echo the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Tonia Antoniazzi). On a slightly different point, I have a constituent who entered into two contracts relating to machinery for cosmetic laser treatment. The contract for the training and asset, neither of which were particularly effective, cost my constituent a great deal of money. In addition, great concern was expressed after the training about the value of it and whether it was in fact safe to carry out the procedure. Can we have a debate in Government time on the use of health equipment for cosmetic purposes and companies' use of dual contracts to, in essence, entrap people to spend money on a product that does not appear to be worth it?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Gentleman raises a very important point. We are all aware of stories of unnecessary procedures and the inappropriate use of so-called medical interventions. He is absolutely right to raise that, and I encourage him to seek either an Adjournment debate on the specific case he wants to raise, or perhaps a Westminster Hall debate so that hon. Members can contribute with their own experiences.

**Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab): The Leader of the House does not need mindfulness; she should just carry on reading "Winnie-the-Pooh". For when she sends her card—signed, "Love, Andrea"—to you, Mr Speaker, I would remind her that when Piglet asked Pooh:

"How do you spell 'love'?",

he replied:

"You don't spell it...you feel it."

Even a bear of very little brain knows that this House wants to rule out a no-deal Brexit. When is the Leader of the House going to give us an opportunity to do just that?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am just too tempted, Mr Speaker; you are going to love this. I say in response to the hon. Gentleman:

"Rivers know this: there is no hurry. We shall get there some day."

On the hon. Gentleman's point, a competent Government have to continue to prepare for all eventualities. That is just the reality.

**Colleen Fletcher** (Coventry North East) (Lab): Coventry's year-long reign as the European city of sport is officially under way. Our city will use the year not only to promote and celebrate the benefits of sport and physical activity, but to act as a catalyst for a fitter, healthier and happier Coventry. Will the Leader of the House join me in congratulating my city on securing European city of sport status, and will she also arrange a debate in Government time on the positive impact that sport can have on individuals and the wider society?

**Andrea Leadsom:** First, I thoroughly congratulate all in Coventry on the fantastic start to their year as city of sport. We all wish them well. It is a brilliant role model for all of us who want to see more activity in schools. In our own lives, we should all get out there and do sporting activities when we can. I congratulate the hon. Lady on raising that in the Chamber, and I will certainly look at whether we can facilitate Government time for such a debate.

**Gavin Newlands** (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): The Bridge of Weir village post office in my constituency is run by the community for the community, but it is not recognised as a community post office. It is therefore unable to access the funds set aside to secure the future of village post offices, due to rules set by the Government on distance to retailers and other post offices. However, no other retailer is interested in taking on the franchise, and there is very limited public transport to the next village post office. May we have a debate on the importance of community post offices and the rules surrounding them, particularly in the light of many bank branches closing and people relying on post offices?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising the issue of community post offices. They do a fantastic job, and they are often the only retail outlet as well as the only financial services outlet. As he knows, the post office network has agreed to provide basic banking services for communities, which is absolutely vital. I encourage him to seek an Adjournment debate, so that he can raise his thoughts directly with a Minister.

**Carolyn Harris** (Swansea East) (Lab): Last April, the Prime Minister announced the establishment of a children's funeral fund in memory of my son, Martin. Nine months later, we have still not seen it. That means that nearly 3,000 families have had to pay to bury their children. In November, I and other Members from across this House wrote to the Prime Minister and asked for an update. We have not received a response. Will the Leader of the House advise me where else I can go to make sure that Martin's fund becomes a reality?

**Andrea Leadsom:** May I once again commend the hon. Lady for her fantastic campaign, which has had such widespread support across the House? I will be very happy to chase up a response as soon as possible on her behalf.

**Matt Western** (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): May we please have an urgent debate on the disposal of local authority public assets? We are seeing an industrial-scale sell-off. It is clear that certain local councils, such as local Warwick District Council, are entering into deals with private companies, such as Public Sector plc, without even going out to tender. Those companies are profiting greatly, as are the Guernsey-based private equity companies that are helping to finance the deals. I am extremely concerned that we are on the verge of a Carillion-style risk, given the concentration of these deals with one company such as PSP.

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Gentleman is right to raise that concerning issue. Questions to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government are on Monday 28 January, and I encourage him to raise the matter directly with Ministers.

**Dr David Drew** (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): Before 29 March, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs must get through something like 80 statutory instruments, and the Agriculture Bill and the Fisheries Bill will come back on Report and Third Reading. The Leader of the House might be Superwoman, but how will she do that?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am absolutely not Superwoman, but I consider the matter carefully on a regular basis—indeed, I consider daily the priorities for legislation and the time available. Obviously we are not flush with time, but I believe we have enough to get all our secondary legislation through, as well as the primary legislation that needs Royal Assent by departure date. I will continue to keep such matters under review, and they will require the co-operation and support of the House.

**Melanie Onn** (Great Grimsby) (Lab): The National Police Air Service helicopter has been called out 1,044 times by Humberside police in the past year, and deployed only 593 times. May we have a debate in Government time about the need for and availability of shared policing resources, to ensure that areas such as Grimsby get the community safety they deserve?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Lady raises an important point, and it is vital that resources are shared appropriately when they can be, to ensure that all our citizens receive appropriate levels of support from our police and other

emergency services. I encourage her to seek an Adjournment debate so that she can raise the matter directly with Ministers.

**Gareth Snell** (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): The Leader of the House's responsibilities for the restoration and renewal project mean that she has a great opportunity to shape one of the biggest public sector procurement exercises over the next generation. With that in mind, how will she ensure that once this palace is renewed, it is stuffed to the rafters with the best of British manufacturing? When it comes to ceramics—[*Laughter.*] Yes, I am predictable, but my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Ruth Smeeth) and I would be more than happy to facilitate conversations between the ceramics industry and architects here to ensure that, whether for pipes, plates, teapots or tiles, Stoke-on-Trent has its place in the new palace.

**Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Gentleman got a resoundingly popular response to that. Of course, there is a long way to go with the restoration and renewal of the palace. We have made good progress, and the legislation is now under joint scrutiny under the chairmanship of my right hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Dame Caroline Spelman). Once that has taken place, we can start considering procurement procedures. There is already a commitment to look carefully at maximising the use of UK producers as far as possible, and there will be plenty of opportunities for all sorts of small and medium-sized enterprises in our constituencies.

**Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Ellis, who is the grandson of my constituent Eleanor Haining, has a rare and life-threatening brain disease—indeed, he has the only known case in the world with such early symptoms. As can be imagined, he needs a lot of specialist equipment to get him from home to hospital, and his family urgently need a larger car. The disability living allowance mobility component cannot be accessed until a child reaches three years of age, so may we have a Government statement to address that anomaly and say whether specific exemptions could be applied in such circumstances?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Gentleman rightly raises a serious constituency issue, and if he would like to write to me with the details I will take it up with the Department for Work and Pensions on his behalf. I am sure that if he raises it with Ministers they will also be happy to deal with him directly.

**Vernon Coaker** (Gedling) (Lab): I thank the Leader of the House and everybody who has made it possible to debate knife crime next Thursday. This is a serious issue, and I believe that last week, on 9 January, there was a meeting of the serious violence taskforce. I will not stop saying that the Home Secretary should come to the Chamber to make a regular statement to the House about what is happening with respect to knife crime and other serious violence on our streets. Debates are fine, but we need regular statements. Will the Leader of the House speak to the Home Secretary about that so that we get regular updates? I think all Members of the House would appreciate that enormously.

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Gentleman has raised this very serious issue on a number of occasions at business questions, and he is absolutely right to do so. He knows that I share his grave concern about what is happening on our streets. He is also aware that the serious violence strategy and taskforce, the Offensive Weapons Bill, and the various community projects to encourage young people away from an appalling life of crime, pain and death are a real focus for the Government. I can assure him that I will write to the Home Secretary following our exchange today and pass on his concerns.

**Liz McInnes** (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): May we have a debate on the UK's most common genetic disorder, haemochromatosis, following today's report that it may be 20 times more common than was previously thought?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I too heard about that report, which was very concerning. The hon. Lady is absolutely right to raise this matter in the House. I encourage her to seek an Adjournment debate so that she can discuss it directly with Ministers.

**Mr Paul Sweeney** (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): All the best for your birthday on Saturday, Mr Speaker. I do not know about you, but in my experience it is a very fine week to have a birthday, and this year has been more memorable than most.

It was a great pleasure last week to visit Members of the 277th Boys' Brigade in my constituency, who attend each week at St Monica's primary school in Milton. I presented them with badges for all their work during UK Parliament Week on the centenary of the Representation of the People Act 1918, which led to women's suffrage. They did a lot of work on that, so it was great to present them with the badges.

Will the Leader of the House consider holding a debate in Government time on the excellent work of youth organisations such as the Boys' Brigade, which was founded in Glasgow by William Alexander Smith in 1883 at Woodside hall, just a small distance away from where the Boys' Brigade in my constituency meets today? Today, the Boys' Brigade has over 750,000 members in more than 60 countries around the world. That is a huge achievement and a huge opportunity. Will the Leader of the House consider calling a debate in Government time on that wonderful achievement?

**Andrea Leadsom:** First, may I congratulate the Boys' Brigade in the hon. Gentleman's constituency? It is the most amazing youth movement right across the world and it really is an example of what can be done to encourage young people to engage with the world around them, particularly during Parliament Week. Just last year, we celebrated 100 years since some women got the vote. Congratulations to everyone on their work. I do think there would be popular calls from hon. Members to discuss this issue, and I encourage the hon. Gentleman to talk to the Chairman of the Backbench Business Committee to see whether it could facilitate such a debate.

**Jim McMahon** (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab/Co-op): The Greater Manchester spatial framework is causing a great deal of anxiety in my constituency. The plan, with

a Government-imposed housing target, will mean a net loss of green-belt land. At the same time, insufficient funding is in place to redevelop brownfield sites that the community is desperate to see redeveloped. How can it be right that landowners, through no positive action on their part, can be made millionaires overnight through a simple change in land use policy, when brownfield sites, which are desperate for funding from the Government, are being left to rot? How can that be a fair settlement for the community?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Gentleman raises a very serious point. We all recognise the urgent need for much, much more house building, so that more people can meet the aspiration of owning their own home or being in secure living accommodation. It is vital that we do that, but the way in which we do it is incredibly important. Local Government questions are on Monday 28 January, and I encourage him to raise that with Ministers then.

**Chris Elmore** (Ogmore) (Lab): Mr Speaker, may I, too, wish you a happy birthday on Saturday? It seems that all the best people are born in January, especially my mum. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] That's on the record now.

**Mr Speaker:** David Bowie was as well.

**Chris Elmore:** Indeed, Mr Speaker.

The Leader of the House will be aware of my ongoing work to try to tackle the impact of social media, especially cyber-bullying, on the mental health of young people. The inquiry I chaired has recently concluded and we hope to bring a report forward this spring. What is clear from the early findings, including from young people who have given reams of oral and written evidence, is that the Government need to do more to start to tackle the problems relating to the effect of social media on young people's mental health. May we have a debate soon, so that we can debate these important issues and the Government can start responding to the very real problems that young people are facing across social media platforms?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I have something in common with the hon. Gentleman, as my mum also has her birthday in January—as of course does A. A. Milne, who has been the theme of today's business questions. Indeed, A. A. Milne's birthday is tomorrow.

The hon. Gentleman is raising a very serious point about the harm being done to young people's mental health, not necessarily only by cyber-bullying and online trolling and abuse, but also by the overuse of social media, which militates against them having an outdoor life whereby people say, "Go outside and play if you're bored." A lot needs to be done not only by the social media giants, which have to come to the table and sort out some of the problems we have, but by society generally to make it less acceptable to spend hours and hours online instead of doing other things. The hon. Gentleman raises an important point, and I pay tribute to him for doing so. I encourage him perhaps to seek a Westminster Hall debate so that all Members can share their experiences.



**Neil Gray** (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): May we have a debate on pension credit and universal credit? Will the Leader of the House say what justification there can be for forcing some older couples to claim universal credit instead of pension credit, thus cutting £7,000 from those low-income households?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Gentleman will be aware that we have had quite a lot of urgent questions and statements on universal credit, and I hope he has taken the opportunity to raise the issue then. I reassure him that the Government are committed to ensuring that the roll-out of universal credit is fair. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions has already put in place some changes. If the hon. Gentleman wants to raise a further issue, I encourage him perhaps to seek an Adjournment debate so that he can raise it directly with Ministers.

## Nuclear Update

11.52 am

**The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Greg Clark):** With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement following Hitachi's announcement this morning that it intends to suspend development of the proposed Wylfa nuclear power project, as well as work relating to Oldbury.

The economics of the energy market have changed significantly in recent years. The cost of renewable technologies such as offshore wind has fallen dramatically, to the point where they now require very little public subsidy and will soon require none. We have also seen a strengthening in the pipeline of projects coming forward, meaning that renewable energy may now be just as cheap, but also readily available.

As a result of the developments over the last eight years, we have a well-supplied electricity market. Our electricity margin forecast is more than 11% for this winter, having grown for each of the last five years. While that is good news for consumers as we strive to reduce carbon emissions at the lowest cost, that positive trend has not been true when it comes to new nuclear. Across the world, a combination of factors, including tighter safety regulations, has seen the cost of most new nuclear projects increase as the cost of alternatives has fallen and the cost of construction has risen. That has made the challenge of attracting private finance into projects more difficult than ever, with investors favouring other technologies that are less capital-intensive up front, quicker to build and less exposed to cost overruns.

As I made clear to the House in June, the Government continue to believe that a diversity of energy sources is the best way of delivering secure supply at the lowest cost and that nuclear has an important role to play in our future energy mix. In my June statement, I therefore reaffirmed the Government's commitment to nuclear. I also announced that we would be entering into negotiations with Hitachi over its project at Wylfa. Given the financing challenges facing new nuclear projects, I made clear to the House that we would be considering a new approach to supporting Wylfa that included the potential for significant direct investment from the Government.

As I am sure the House will understand, while negotiations were ongoing the details were commercially sensitive, but following Hitachi's announcement I can set out in more candid terms the support for the project that the Government were willing to offer. First, they were willing to consider taking a one-third equity stake in it, alongside investment from Hitachi, agencies of the Government of Japan, and other strategic partners. Secondly, they were willing to consider providing all the debt financing required for the completion of construction. Thirdly, they agreed to consider providing a contract for difference, with a strike price expected to be no more than £75 per MWh. I hope the House will agree that that is a significant and generous package of potential support, which goes beyond what any Government have been willing to consider in the past.

Despite that potential investment, and strong support from the Government of Japan, Hitachi reached the view that the project still posed too great a commercial

challenge, particularly given its desire to deconsolidate it from its balance sheet and the likely level of return on its investment.

The Government continue to believe that nuclear has an important role to play, but, critically, it must represent good value for the taxpayer and the consumer. I believe that the package of support that we were prepared to consider was the limit of what could be justified in this instance. I was not prepared to ask the taxpayer to take on a larger share of the equity, as that would have meant taxpayers' taking on the majority of construction risk, and the Government's becoming the largest shareholder with responsibility for the delivery of a nuclear project. I also could not justify a strike price above £75 per MWh for this financing structure, given the declining costs of alternative technologies and the financial support and risk-sharing already on offer from the Government, which were not available for Hinkley Point C.

Let me reassure the House that Hitachi's decision to suspend the current negotiations on the project was reached amicably between all parties once it became plain that it was not possible to agree a way forward. Hitachi has made clear that while it is suspending project development at this stage, it wishes to continue discussions with the Government on bringing forward new nuclear projects at both Wylfa and Oldbury, and we intend to work closely with it in the weeks and months ahead. We will also continue to strengthen our long-standing partnership with the Government of Japan on a range of civil nuclear matters; and, importantly, we will continue to champion the nuclear sector in north Wales, which is home to world-leading expertise in areas such as nuclear innovation and decommissioning and which offers ideal sites for the deployment of small modular reactors.

If new nuclear is to be successful in a more competitive energy market—I very much believe that it can be—it is clear that we need to consider a new approach to financing future projects, including those at Sizewell and Bradwell. Therefore, as I said initially in June, we are reviewing the viability of a regulated asset base model and assessing whether it can offer value for money for consumers and taxpayers. I can confirm that we intend to publish our assessment of that method by the summer at the latest.

Through our nuclear sector deal, we are exploring the possibility of working with the sector to put the UK at the forefront of various forms of nuclear innovation. We are looking into whether advanced nuclear technologies such as small modular reactors could be an important source of low-carbon energy in the future, and we are considering a proposal from a UK consortium led by Rolls-Royce that would result in a significant joint investment.

I began my statement by outlining the challenges that the nuclear industry faces as the energy market changes. I will set out a new approach to financing new nuclear in the planned energy White Paper in the summer. I know that the future of the nuclear sector is of great interest to many Members, and I will ensure that those on both sides of the House, and its Select Committees, have an opportunity to consider the proposals.

I understand the disappointment that the dedicated and expert staff at Wylfa and Oldbury will feel as a result of today's announcement by Hitachi. New

commercial nuclear investments around the world are experiencing the same challenges as new sources of power become cheaper and more abundant. Nuclear has an important role to play as part of a diverse energy mix, but it must be at a price that is fair to electricity bill payers and to taxpayers. We will work closely with Hitachi and the industry to ensure that we find the best means of financing these and other new nuclear projects.

Our commitment to Anglesey—with its nuclear, renewables and deep expertise, it is a real island of energy—will not be changed by this decision. I will work with the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen), the Welsh Government and the local community to ensure that its renown is supported and strengthened, and I will do the same with my hon. Friend the Member for Thornbury and Yate (Luke Hall).

I pay tribute to the staff of Horizon and Hitachi and to my own officials, those in the Department for International Trade and our embassy in Japan, and those of the Government of Japan, who spent many months doing their utmost to support a financing package. I know that they left no stone unturned in seeking a viable commercial model for this investment, and I very much hope that their work and professionalism will lead to a successful partnership following this period of review. I commend this statement to the House.

12 noon

**Dr Alan Whitehead** (Southampton, Test) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement, but he must recognise that the Government's new nuclear strategy, adopted by the Conservatives and spearheaded by their Liberal Democrat coalition partners in 2013, is now in complete meltdown. The Government have reacted far too slowly to ongoing concerns from nuclear partners, such as Hitachi's UK nuclear arm Horizon, which have been raising concerns over funding mechanisms since purchasing the project from RWE and E.ON back in 2012. Today's decision to withdraw from the Wylfa nuclear power plant lays a significant blow on our economy.

The company's statement reads:

"Horizon Nuclear Power has today announced that it will suspend its UK nuclear development programme".

That sounds very much like not only is Wylfa on the chopping block, but so, perhaps, are plans for Hitachi's other nuclear project—the Oldbury nuclear power plant in Gloucestershire. The Secretary of State has stated that Hitachi wants to work on new projects at Wylfa and Oldbury. What does that mean in the light of the clear statement Horizon has made this morning?

Only two months ago, the Government's lack of clarity over funding for new nuclear led Toshiba to withdraw from its new nuclear project in Moorside. With the three reactors expected at Moorside and two each in Wylfa and Oldbury, that makes a total of 9.2 GW of new nuclear energy that will not now be built. Can the Secretary of State tell us where he will find this power—not only through the next winter, but over the next 10 years?

The long-term coherence of the UK capacity arrangements is now significantly disrupted. With the capacity market also falling foul of legal challenge, these elements add up to a strategic energy sector that is now being grossly mishandled by this Government.

[Dr Alan Whitehead]

Now that their nuclear plan has gone up in smoke what plan can the Secretary of State spell out to us for finding new backers for these projects? Given the apparent capacity constraint, is he intending to uprate the coming contracts for difference auction, removing the caps on capacity and funding that he has imposed to provide further opportunity to build new renewable energy capacity to replace what has been lost?

For this plant at Wylfa alone, Hitachi had planned to invest £16 billion. Does the Secretary of State have contingency plans, rather than warm words, that he can announce today for the economies of Anglesey and north Wales, where Wylfa was projected to create up to 10,000 jobs at peak periods of construction and 850 permanent jobs? For that matter, what about Moorside and the plant it lost two months ago? Government dithering leading to the cancellation of that plant has seriously undermined the UK's energy security, its decarbonisation goals and the economy of Cumbria. The people of Moorside expected the plant, and roads, infrastructure and even apartment blocks had been built in preparation, all of which will now go to waste.

I come back the issue of Wylfa. Given that it is the Welsh economy that has lost £16 billion of inward investment, will the Secretary of State think about the £1.3 billion—less than a tenth of the price—required to build the Swansea tidal lagoon?

Given that energy is one of the sectors that creates the most carbon, today's news deepens our profound concern about the Government's ability to meet their own climate targets. The Labour party is proud to have announced our goal of reaching net-zero greenhouse gas emissions before 2050 and we congratulate the Government on attempting to catch up with our green ambitions. But given that the clean growth plan was already falling short and the Government were already failing to meet those targets, can the Secretary of State give us some detail today on how he expects to meet UK carbon budgets in the light of today's developments? Can he assure us he is not intending to replace the low-carbon power that has been lost with new fossil fuel plants?

Finally, there appears to be some confusion about what was and was not said about nuclear power when the Prime Minister met Japanese Prime Minister Shinzō Abe last week. Did she raise Wylfa nuclear power station when she met the Japanese Prime Minister? It is an odd coincidence that this decision from Japan-based Hitachi has come so close to those meetings. Either they talked about the project and what was said was unsatisfactory, and the project was cancelled, or the Prime Minister did not think it worth mentioning, and it was still cancelled.

Confidence in the Government is a very live question today. The people of north Wales and Moorside have every reason to have none in this Administration.

**Greg Clark:** I will respond to the hon. Gentleman's points, but I will start by saying one thing about nuclear investment. I have been clear in maintaining my support and that of the Government for new nuclear, but, for investments of over 60 years, a degree of cross-party support is required for those commercial investments, which, as we have seen, are difficult to secure.

The hon. Gentleman expressed disappointment that the investment was being suspended, but he himself has said we do not need nuclear power. The Leader of the Opposition has said he is passionately opposed to nuclear power and nuclear weapons in equal measure, the shadow Chancellor said he would end nuclear power within the first 100 days of a Labour Government, and the new Welsh First Minister said:

"I think the attitude to nuclear power we have here in Wales is to be sceptical about it".

If we in this House want to encourage international investors to invest in new projects, it behoves us to express solidarity and consistency of purpose.

I have been very clear about why Hitachi made this decision. We understand it. It is was commercial decision. The hon. Gentleman did not say whether he would have gone further than we were willing to go. Is he proposing that we take more than one third of the equity—in effect, take Government control and all the risk attached to such an investment? He did not say whether we should be providing a contract for more than £75 per MWh, which would go straight to the bills of customers—both industrial and residential. It is hard to say how we can go beyond financing all the debts. I think, then, that fair-minded Members would accept that we have made a substantial and generous offer, but unfortunately it has not been possible to achieve the outcome that all sides wanted.

The hon. Gentleman asks how we can continue discussions and why the company has suspended, rather than cancelled, the proposals. It is for the reasons I have said. We are going to look at new financing models, including the regulatory asset base model recommended by the Public Accounts Committee. I think it makes sense to do that.

On our future energy needs, the hon. Gentleman was wrong to talk about the next 10 years, because we are talking about supplies beyond that. There is no issue with the future security of supply; National Grid itself has said that. Plans for Wylfa are long term and there is time for the market to react to this announcement. In many ways, the challenge of financing new nuclear is one of falling costs and greater abundance of alternative technologies, which means that nuclear is being out-competed. Far from there being a difficulty with future supply, those are the reasons why the competitiveness of nuclear is more difficult.

The hon. Gentleman mentions the other projects, including at Moorside in Cumbria. As I said, that decision was taken for different reasons, but in the review and the White Paper we will publish, that model will be available to all such sites. Finally, in the case of other renewables, we have seen a great expansion in renewable capacity, and that will continue. He mentioned the case of the Swansea tidal lagoon. No one is more enthusiastic than I about innovation and new technologies, but the truth is that the costs of the proposed project were three times that of Hinkley Point C, and a full programme would make a tiny contribution to our energy supply for a much greater cost.

I hope that we can work together in the weeks and months ahead. The hon. Gentleman is an expert and a dedicated student of energy policy. In considering the White Paper, I hope that we can agree an approach that will command the support of international investors, so that this country can continue to be a nuclear nation.



**Stephen Crabb** (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for his statement and for the extraordinary lengths that he was willing to go to in trying to create the right conditions for this important north Wales project to happen. However, given Hitachi's decision, given the decision on Moorside and, in fact, given the failure of a whole swathe of Japanese nuclear projects around the world, are the days of relying on mammoth nuclear power stations that make huge demands of taxpayers' cash over? Should we not be putting more energy into examining smaller nuclear reactor technology?

**Greg Clark:** My right hon. Friend is right that small modular reactors have significant potential. The nuclear sector deal that we agreed with the sector and published last year contains a substantial commitment to small modular reactors, many of which would be deployable on the sites of existing and recently decommissioned nuclear reactors. However, even large new nuclear reactors can make a useful contribution. There is a challenge in every country, and this is by no means just a feature of Japanese investors. I have described clearly and, I hope, candidly the challenges that exist given the abundant availability and falling prices of alternatives. That is why we will take forward a serious assessment of whether a different financing model might make the economics more competitive. Again, the sector deal that we struck contains a programme to reduce the build costs of new nuclear, which would of course also help its financeability.

**Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): This statement confirms that the UK Government's nuclear programme is in tatters, yet the Secretary of State comes to the House, commends this statement, and says that he will carry on regardless, which makes absolutely no sense whatsoever. The National Audit Office confirmed that the Hinkley Point C strike rate of £92.50 per MWh was a bad deal. We know that offshore wind is currently £57.50 per MWh, but that is based on a 15-year concession, as opposed to a 35-year concession for the nuclear deal.

The Secretary of State has confirmed that the Government were so desperate for Wylfa that they would take something like a £6 billion stake and provide £9 billion of debt financing, yet he pretends that they were being prudent by limiting the 35-year contract to £75 per MWh. His use of the word "generous" in the statement could not be more appropriate. When Toshiba pulled out of Moorside with the loss of £100 million, its share price increased. At the time, the Secretary of State said, "Don't worry. The circumstances are unique." With this latest setback from Hitachi, the UK Government need a proper re-evaluation of their nuclear policy; they should not look just at alternative funding mechanisms.

Four existing nuclear power stations are due to close by 2024, taking more than 4 GW of capacity out of the grid, so what is the Government's plan for replacing that capacity? New nuclear power stations are clearly not an option that could be completed by 2024. When will we know how much money is going to be thrown at Rolls-Royce for the small modular reactors that the Secretary of State mentioned? Why are the Government still blocking onshore wind in Scotland when it is clearly the cheapest mode of generation? When is the cut-off date for the ongoing discussions with Hitachi? When

will the plug finally be pulled? When did the Government first find out about Hitachi pulling out? It was already being reported in the press, so how long before coming to the House to make this statement did the Secretary of State find out? When will nuclear power be properly benchmarked against onshore and offshore wind? When will the Government wake up and end their ideological obsession with nuclear?

**Greg Clark:** Given the hon. Gentleman's suggestion that the strike price for Hinkley Point C was excessive, I would have thought he would welcome and approve of my statement, which sets a limit on what it is possible to provide to finance a private investment. He asks when the decision was made by Hitachi. My understanding is that it was made in Japan at 9 o'clock this morning, and I hope he would accept that I have come to the House as soon as possible.

The hon. Gentleman is critical of the nuclear industry, but I would have thought that he might want to pay tribute to Scotland's proud tradition in the nuclear sector and to the people that have worked and contributed to our energy supply and still do. Chapelcross, Dounreay, Hunterston and Torness have for decades provided good jobs and employment both directly and in the supply chain across Scotland and continue to do so today. My determination to continue our tradition of being a nuclear nation offers continuing opportunities to Scotland, and I would have thought that he would welcome that.

Far from being at the expense of renewable energy, our energy policies have supported Scotland to become a world leader in securing energy from renewable sources. In fact, we heard earlier this month from WWF Scotland that wind output in Scotland has broken through the barrier of 100% of demand for the first time. That comes as a result of the policies that this Government have put in place to bring down the costs of wind, which is highly competitive. As a result, that is causing some competitive challenges for other technologies, including nuclear, but I would have thought that the hon. Gentleman would welcome the progress that has been made on renewables.

**Mr David Jones** (Clwyd West) (Con): This announcement, although widely anticipated, will be greeted with dismay in north Wales, where Wylfa was and remains an important part of the vision for the future of the north Wales economy, as expressed in the north Wales growth bid. My right hon. Friend will know that the all-party parliamentary group on Mersey Dee North Wales has been working closely with both central and local government in connection with the growth bid. Will he or one of his Ministers be prepared to meet the group to discuss Wylfa, its future and the potential for other means of energy generation in north Wales?

**Greg Clark:** I pay tribute to the role that my right hon. Friend played in the earlier stages of discussions for the Wylfa site. As is evident, such matters are complex and difficult to secure, but he laid the groundwork for some of the progress that has been made, and I hope that the process might ultimately be successful. Of course, I have complete commitment to the north Wales growth deal, and I would be delighted to have a meeting

[Greg Clark]

with him and my ministerial colleagues. The Secretary of State for Wales will be in Anglesey tomorrow and will be meeting members of the local community.

As I said in my statement, we regard Anglesey and north Wales as having exceptional strengths in our energy future. Bangor University, for example, contributes exceptional world-leading innovation, and we have backed that in the sector deal. Colleagues across Government and I will work closely with colleagues in north Wales to ensure that that potential is realised.

**Albert Owen** (Ynys Môn) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for coming to the House at the earliest opportunity to give this statement. He will know the importance of this matter to my local community, to the Welsh and UK economies and, indeed, to the Government's nuclear policy. With 10 years of planning, a lot of work has gone into this project, as he rightly acknowledges. It started off under the Labour Government and was continued by the coalition Government and, indeed, the current Government. Wylfa is the best site in the United Kingdom for a new nuclear build, but Hitachi's announcement puts the jobs of 400 people at risk, many of whom are my constituents. There is the potential for some 8,000 to 10,000 construction jobs, hundreds of operational jobs and, importantly, 33 apprenticeships, so I hope that we can work to ensure that we save as much of that as possible. The supply chain and small and medium-sized enterprises are important as well, and they have been planning for this for years.

So I ask the Secretary of State: can we work together to keep this project alive and ensure that we create the momentum so that it can be ready for a future developer, or indeed this developer, with the right mechanism? We need a better mechanism for financing, not just in the nuclear sector but for all large energy construction, including the tidal lagoon. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test (Dr Whitehead) in this regard, because I feel that an opportunity for innovation has been lost with the tidal lagoon, and the Welsh economy needs it. We know that £16 billion has been taken out of the Welsh economy as a result of that announcement, and we need to redistribute that.

I echo the right hon. Member for Clwyd West (Mr Jones) in saying that we need extra help and extra resources to plug the gap following this announcement today. We have a mechanism through the north Wales growth deal whereby the Welsh Government work with the UK Government to create jobs, and I urge the Secretary of State to work with the new First Minister and the Economy Minister on this. The north Wales growth bid can be successful. I will be meeting the Secretary of State for Wales as well, but I want to ask the Secretary of State to work closely with us on this. Will he host a delegation involving myself, key stakeholders and his officials to look at a funding mechanism for the future that will work not just for new nuclear but for all large projects? North Wales is a centre of excellence for low carbon, nuclear, renewables and marine energy. It has the potential; let us work together to make this happen.

**Greg Clark:** I repeat my commendation of the hon. Gentleman. He has been a consistent and passionate campaigner not only for the interests of his constituents but for the excellence of the industry in north Wales,

and in Anglesey in particular. I can give him that wholehearted commitment. My officials will certainly meet him, but they will also come with me and my nuclear Minister and we will work together in a completely open-book way on all the options. The hon. Gentleman serves with distinction on the Select Committee, which I think will also want to scrutinise the options and the potential for financing. I repeat the commitment I gave to my right hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd West (Mr Jones) that we continue to regard the north Wales growth deal as an excellent base to reinforce the strengths of the area, and I will work very closely with him on this.

The hon. Gentleman also mentioned marine energy, which is one of the opportunities that we have in his constituency and around north Wales. Far from having closed the door to marine technologies, we want to continue to invest in innovation. When it comes to deployment, the technologies need to demonstrate value for money, but we will work with them, as we did with the offshore wind sector, to bring costs down so that they can win at auction alongside other technologies.

**Mr John Whittingdale** (Maldon) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it remains highly desirable to have a diversity of providers and technologies in civil nuclear generation? Will he therefore confirm, particularly in the light of recent concerns expressed about some Chinese investments, that the Government will remain fully supportive of the proposal from China General Nuclear to invest in a new power station at Bradwell-on-Sea in my constituency, subject of course to a generic design assessment and other permissions being obtained?

**Greg Clark:** As my right hon. Friend knows, CGN is an investor in the Hinkley Point C nuclear power station, which is being built as we speak. That is proceeding at pace. When it comes to Bradwell, CGN is again making successful strides through the approval process. All investment is subject to that process, but I can confirm that it has our full support as it goes through the regulatory approvals.

**Chris Ruane** (Vale of Clwyd) (Lab): I, too, thank the right hon. Gentleman for coming to the House today to deliver his statement. I also thank him for his openness to meeting north Wales Members on the issue of Wylfa Newydd. In his statement, he said that central Government were now relying more on renewables. May I put the north Wales picture to him? I can tell him that 1,500 wind turbines—sea turbines—were planned for the Rhiannon field off the coast of north Wales, but those plans have been cancelled by the private sector. The tidal lagoons for Wales were key to the development of the Welsh economy, yet the Government pulled their support for the Swansea Bay tidal lagoon. That had a knock-on effect for the huge lagoon planned for off the coast of north Wales, and we have heard today about the cancellation of a £16 billion investment in the north Wales economy. This will devastate the north Wales economy. The people of north Wales need to know that the Prime Minister is batting for them and for the UK. Will the right hon. Gentleman ask the Prime Minister to place in the House of Commons Library the minutes of her meeting with the Prime Minister of Japan, to ensure that we know that that is what she has been doing on behalf of the people of north Wales?

**Greg Clark:** The Prime Minister has repeatedly discussed nuclear investment with the Prime Minister of Japan, as have I with my opposite number there. In fact, in November, I flew to Tokyo to discuss the negotiations going on here, given the difficulties that the investor was having, and I met my opposite number at the Japanese Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry. This has been a substantial, and cordial, Government-to-Government relationship, and the hon. Gentleman has my assurance that we will continue that. I mentioned in my statement the work of our embassy in Tokyo, which has been an excellent and expert source of advice. That will continue to be available.

When it comes to investment in renewables, the hon. Gentleman will know that Wales is a substantial and proud leader in renewable energy. I think Gwynt y Môr is the second largest wind farm already deployed in Europe. I mentioned in my statement the rising availability of alternative technologies. To put this in context, in 2017 we procured more than 3 GW of offshore wind in a single contract for difference auction at £57.50 per MWh. That is more in a single auction than this plant was going to provide. As I have said, the challenge is the competition coming from other technologies, and Wales is a beneficiary of some aspects of that.

**Zac Goldsmith (Richmond Park) (Con):** In his statement, my right hon. Friend said that the economics of the energy market had changed significantly in recent years, meaning that renewable energy could now be not only cheap but readily available. Does he share my concern that consumers will not see all the benefits of the reduced prices, given that we are bound into these exceedingly long-term and hugely expensive contracts? An example is Hinkley, whose strike price means that it will probably be the most expensive form of energy in the history of energy generation. Can he give me an assurance or commitment that nuclear power will not result in consumer bills skyrocketing in the years to come?

**Greg Clark:** That is demonstrated in my statement today. We were talking about a strike price substantially less than that of Hinkley, and I said when I made my statement to the House on Hinkley that we would do that. I say gently to my hon. Friend, who is a lifelong environmentalist, that exactly the same arguments were advanced against the initial contracts for offshore wind—namely, that they would be burdensome and that we should not enter into them. We have now seen substantial capacity becoming available at prices that will shortly be free of subsidy entirely. That is an excellent development for consumers, for the reasons that he has given, but it is also the case that the manufacturers in the supply chain are located right across the UK, which is a further industrial benefit of the strategic policy.

**Sir Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD):** I agree with the Secretary of State that Britain has had huge success in renewables, especially with cheaper offshore wind, thanks to the Liberal Democrat policy that he has kept in place. However, I also want to express astonishment at the generosity of the offer to Hitachi. With the equity stake and the debt finance, it appears to be even greater than that offered to Hinkley Point C, yet Hitachi—like Toshiba at Moorside—is still unwilling to build new nuclear in Britain. What does the Secretary of State

blame most for this setback to his nuclear strategy? Is it the fact that renewables are becoming much cheaper than nuclear, is it Japan's fears about Brexit, or is it something else?

**Greg Clark:** I am disappointed in the right hon. Gentleman who, as a former Secretary of State, I would have thought knows the changing economics of the energy market, which I set out pretty clearly. I gently remind him that, as Secretary of State, he was responsible in his time for the negotiation of the terms of the Hinkley Point C agreement, so it is surprising to hear him being so critical of it.

The right hon. Gentleman wants to take credit for one of the policies for which he was responsible but not the other, which I might uncharitably say is characteristic of his party. As with Hinkley Point, there was a recognition that financing such significant projects—£16 billion from a private company—is hard to do through the conventional channels of private investment. It is desirable to have nuclear as part of a diverse energy mix. If I might put it this way, having a substantial mix of technologies has an insurance quality. We should recognise that, but there is a limit to what we can pay for the benefit, which is reflected in my statement.

**Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con):** Sizewell C is an important component of the world leading low-carbon energy sector emerging along the north Suffolk coast. Can the Secretary of State confirm that the Government remain committed to Sizewell C and to negotiating a value-for-money deal with EDF?

**Greg Clark:** I can confirm that to my hon. Friend.

**Ian C. Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab):** Can the Secretary of State confirm what the Prime Minister said to the Prime Minister of Japan when she raised the issue of Wylfa with him last week?

**Greg Clark:** Sadly, when the Prime Minister was meeting the Prime Minister of Japan, I was in this Chamber winding up the debate on the meaningful vote. I would otherwise have been in their company, but I was doing my duties in this House. I was not at the meeting, but I can put the hon. Gentleman's mind at rest. The involvement of the Prime Minister in this and other joint investments with Japan has been consistent and very long standing. As I said to the hon. Member for Vale of Clwyd (Chris Ruane), I have visited Japan many times to discuss this at the highest level with the Government and with the parties.

**Luke Hall (Thornbury and Yate) (Con):** I thank the Secretary of State for coming to the House to set out his discussions in such detail. He will appreciate the level of concern in south Gloucestershire this morning, especially among the people who rely on the jobs at Oldbury and its supply chain, because of the uncertainty following this announcement. There are localised issues, such as the properties bought up around Oldbury that now lie vacant. People are unsure about the future of those properties and about some of the more specific, niche issues. Will the Secretary of State come to Oldbury and meet me to discuss the issue with local councillors, workers and stakeholders to make sure we can find a route forward?



**Greg Clark:** As I said to the hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Dr. Whitehead), I recognise that this is a sad time for the staff, who are expert and well respected in their fields. This is a financing decision, and it is no reflection on the quality of their work. They are of the highest calibre.

Of course I will come to meet my hon. Friend and his constituents to discuss how we can make sure that his part of the world, as well as north Wales, continues to have the reputation for excellence in energy that it has long enjoyed.

**Mr Clive Betts** (Sheffield South East) (Lab): The Secretary of State made some very supportive comments in his statement about small modular reactors, which I welcome. I thank him for meeting me recently to discuss the ideas put forward by Professor Keith Ridgway and others at the nuclear advanced manufacturing research centre in Sheffield for ways in which we can develop capacity to produce the parts for SMRs in Sheffield. The Secretary of State has issued supportive words about that, but will he now go further and get his officials to work with Professor Ridgway and others to develop these plans, which would be good for both our energy policy and our industrial strategy?

**Greg Clark:** The hon. Gentleman is quite right. I visited the nuclear advanced manufacturing research centre, as he knows, and I was impressed with the facilities. The sector deal makes a commitment to new nuclear technologies, and a consortium has made an application to the industrial strategy challenge fund. He understands that the operation of that fund, as with all science and innovation investments, is correctly scrutinised by a panel of global experts. They have given the application a positive assessment, but it has further due diligence to complete. Of course, I will update him and the House when that process has finished.

**James Heappey** (Wells) (Con): I welcome what the Secretary of State said in his statement about the decreasing costs and increasing availability of renewables. If we are to embrace a renewables-heavy energy mix, does he agree that we need to look at what changes we must make to the capacity market to allow demand response, storage and other types of digital flexibility to play their part fully in that energy system?

**Greg Clark:** My hon. Friend is quite right, and he has great experience and expertise in energy matters. We have talked a bit about offshore wind today, but one of the big changes that is taking place in the energy market, and affecting the economics of energy, is in the technologies and ways of working such as demand-side response and storage. We have not mentioned those, but they are contributing to how our energy system can be both more resilient and lower cost than was dreamed possible even 10 years ago.

**Deidre Brock** (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): The Secretary of State rightly points to the fact that renewable energy is a Scottish success story, and such events vindicate the Scottish Government's decision not to join the UK Government's vision for the UK as a nuclear nation. Will he please outline the Government's sunk costs in terms of civil service time and any other development costs incurred as a result of this project?

**Greg Clark:** The model we have pursued is one in which these proposals are private sector-led. I place on record my respect and gratitude for the time, effort and financial investment that Hitachi has made in working with us to develop the proposal to this stage. Of course there have been discussions with my officials, but the vast majority of the costs have been with the proposed developer.

**Mr Paul Sweeney** (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): I declare an interest as a council member of the Institution of Engineers and Shipbuilders in Scotland, which recently published a report by Professor Iain MacLeod of the University of Strathclyde entitled, "Engineering for Energy: A proposal for governance of the energy system".

This is a major issue because of the risk of blackouts increasing from hours to days, particularly in Scotland. If that does occur, and we are talking about a lengthy delay in restarting the bid, there will be negative consequences for the supply of food, water, heat, money and petrol. It would be a disastrous situation for the Scottish economy and could lead to civil unrest. The root cause of that risk is the closure of large-scale coal and nuclear power stations, and the grid has not been reformulated and replanned to deal with the intermittency of renewables. That is a massive risk that the Scottish Government have not done anything to address. What will the Secretary of State do to reduce this massive existential risk to the national security of this country?

**Greg Clark:** I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman, but I note his interest and his experience in this field. National Grid is undertaking a substantial programme of transformation to make the grid smarter and able to accommodate intermittent renewables. Again, progress has been made. The amount of renewable energy being deployed is vastly in excess of what the right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Sir Edward Davey) was advised was possible when he was in office. Great strides are being made. A smarter grid is a more effective and more resilient grid.

**Dr David Drew** (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Secretary of State call together the MPs who are affected by the supply chain implications? In my case, Berkeley was predicated on both Wylfa and Oldbury. People with potential are being retrained in the nuclear industry. Does he understand the knock-on effects that that will have, and will he meet us to see how we can try to mitigate them?

**Greg Clark:** I would be delighted to do that. The Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, my hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Richard Harrington), who is responsible for the nuclear industry, and I regularly meet the representatives of the industry, including the supply chain. I emphasise that it was Hitachi's decision to suspend the development of the project but, as the hon. Member for Stroud (Dr Drew) knows, a bit further down the road from him is Hinkley Point C, one of the most significant pieces of civil engineering being constructed in the world.

People are being trained in construction and in nuclear engineering in a way that has not happened in this country for more than a generation, giving opportunities to many suppliers. Nearly two thirds of the value of the

Hinkley Point C contract goes with domestic suppliers. He knows that there is a renaissance of the suppliers of nuclear expertise, and I am happy to meet him and the companies that we regularly meet.

**Martin Whitfield** (East Lothian) (Lab): I am grateful for the speed with which this statement arrived at this House today, and I compliment the Secretary of State on that. Part of EDF's fleet is at Torness is my constituency, and Members have pointed out the many skilled jobs involved and contributions that these workers make. Some of the answers to the problems that will come in 2030, which is, unfortunately, not too far away, lie in not only bigger issues, such as the small modular reactors that have been discussed today, but with smaller, simpler decisions. I am thinking of things such as the simplicity of being able to move apprentices around the fleet in the UK, which is impossible for EDF at the moment because of the differentiation in approach taken by the Scottish Government north of the border and the Government down here. Will the Government confirm that they will continue to work with EDF in particular—I say that on behalf of my constituency—and all suppliers to try to solve all the small problems, as well as the big ones, to facilitate a better, stronger future for the nuclear industry, which we require in order to keep the lights on in the UK?

**Greg Clark:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for such a constructive contribution. He raises an excellent point, and I would be happy to meet him and EDF to solve that problem, of which I was not aware. It seems to me that if we are to benefit from the opportunities that exist across the UK to develop skilled work and make it available to residents of all parts of the UK, we should not put obstacles in the way of that.

## Point of Order

12.41 pm

**Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Along with 32 Members of Parliament from across the House, I applied to the Backbench Business Committee last autumn for a debate on the upsurge in violent antisocial behaviour, which is happening in a number of constituencies. I understand that many applications are made. Although we were successful in ours, we were told that we had to be put on a waiting list, as time had not been allocated by the Government. Just last night, a number of my constituents came to me to inform me about delinquents throwing bricks at buses in the Orchard park part of my constituency. Obviously that is very worrying for bus drivers, passengers and other road users, and I very much hope that action is taken forthwith. My point is that this House adopted the Wright reforms to allow Back Benchers to bring forward issues of concern to them and their constituents in a timely manner, but at the moment the Government do not seem to be allocating sufficient time for Backbench Business Committee debates. I know that there are two taking place today, but I am not aware of any additional days for such debates after that. I know we are very pressed because of Brexit, but is there anything you can do to put pressure on the Government to make sure that time is allocated for us to debate these issues of real importance to our constituents?

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** I thank the hon. Lady for her point of order. The business statement has just taken place, and I am not sure whether this issue was aired then. I see that next Thursday we will have another Backbench Business Committee debate, along with another business statement—there may also be one in between. Perhaps she might like to raise this issue at that point. She also might like to discuss it with the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee, because I know he has fairly regular meetings to discuss the timings. In the meantime, I am sure those on the Treasury Bench will have heard her comments and will feed them back.

## Sustainable Seas

### ENVIRONMENTAL AUDIT COMMITTEE

#### *Select Committee Statement*

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** We now come to the Select Committee statement. Mary Creagh will speak on her subject for up to 10 minutes, during which time no interventions may be taken. At the conclusion of her statement, I will call Members to put questions on the subject of the statement and call Mary Creagh to respond to these in turn. Members can expect to be called only once. Interventions should be questions and should be brief. Front Benchers may take part in the questioning, and I am sure they will indicate if they wish to do so. I call the Chair of the Environmental Audit Committee, Mary Creagh.

12.45 pm

**Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab):** I begin by thanking the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee and you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to present the Environmental Audit Committee's report on sustainable seas. I have a copy of it here, and it is our 14th report to this Parliament. We launched our inquiry last April, examining how our oceans can be protected from climate change, overfishing, resource extraction and pollution, and what more the Government should do. Human activities in both coastal and open waters have dramatically increased in recent years. The UN estimates that up to 40% of the world's oceans are impacted by humans, with dire consequences, including pollution, depleted fisheries and the loss of coastal habitats. We have treated the seas as a sewer—literally—and that has to stop.

Plastic makes up 70% of all the litter in the ocean, with most of it coming from land, being transported by rivers and draining into the sea. If no action is taken to reduce plastic pollution, it will treble in the next 10 years. The amazing "Blue Planet II" programme showed us the consequences: a turtle tangled in a plastic sack; and the death of a newborn whale calf from causes unknown. Plastic litter and chemical pollution are everywhere in the ocean. These plastics are eaten by seabirds and they suffocate coral reefs; they break down into microplastics, which are eaten by sea life, which we then eat, potentially transporting chemicals into our human food chain. The long-term harm from plastic and chemical pollution is unknown because, as the Government's chief scientific officer told us, we have not looked hard enough.

There is so much more that the Government should do to prevent our waste from reaching the ocean. We could start by not exporting our waste to countries with poor recycling infrastructure. Supporting Indonesia and Malaysia to reduce their plastic while simultaneously exporting the UK's contaminated plastics to them shows the Government's lack of a joined-up approach to reducing plastic pollution. The Government published their resources and waste strategy in December. It places much more onus on producers to pay for the cost of clearing up and treating waste, as was recommended in the Environmental Audit Committee's reports on plastic bottles and coffee cups last year. But we cannot wait

until 2042 to phase out avoidable single-use plastics, and the plastic bottle deposit return scheme, which was promised by Ministers in 2017, will not be ready until 2023.

The Government have signed up to the 14th sustainable development goal target to prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds by 2025. So here is our plan. We want to see the Government ban single-use plastic packaging that is difficult to recycle; introduce a 25p latte levy on disposable coffee cups, with all coffee cups to be recycled by 2023; and bring forward their deposit return scheme and extended producer responsibility schemes before the end of this Parliament. The Government must also set out how they will create and fund the UK's domestic recycling industry to end the export of contaminated waste to developing countries.

Climate change is causing a triple whammy of harm from ocean acidification, ocean warming and deoxygenation. This harms the entire food web and disrupts our weather systems. The recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report showed us that a 2°C rise above pre-industrial levels will significantly harm biodiversity and fish stocks, and will destroy nearly all the coral reefs in the world. If we can keep the temperature rise to 1.5°, we will still lose 90% of coral reefs. Until we did this inquiry, I did not know that the UK has a cold-water reef in the south of England.

That is why we have to redouble our actions to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions and meet the Paris agreement on climate change. The Government must set out their plans to achieve that in the first half of this year and set a net-zero emissions target by 2050 at the very latest. Species affected by climate change include krill and plankton; if they are removed from the marine food chain, that could lead to a one-third collapse in the populations of predators such as polar bears, walrus, seals, sea lions, penguins and sea birds.

Britain's overseas territories and their waters cover an area nearly 30 times the size of the UK, and nearly 90% of the UK's biodiversity is located in their waters. They have the most unique and biodiverse areas on the planet, and we have a huge responsibility to protect them. We welcome the Government's December announcement on the creation of a marine protected area for the South Sandwich Islands. We have also discussed with the Minister for Energy and Clean Growth, who is in the Chamber, how the exploitation of minerals from the deep sea could begin in the next decade. The prime sites are around the deep sea hydrothermal vents, but those habitats are unexplored and unique. We heard from scientists that in a very small-scale study they found six hitherto unknown species. This is the great last wilderness left on earth; in fact, it may be where life on earth first began. Mining those sites could have catastrophic impacts—from local extinctions of as yet unmaped ecosystems and species, to the production of sediment plumes, which can travel long distances through the water column, smothering seabed organisms. Our report urges the Government not to pursue licences at active hydrothermal vents in their own jurisdiction and internationally, and to use their experience in regulating marine industries and their influence on the International Seabed Authority to impose a moratorium on exploitation licences in those areas.



We heard how so much of the sea—58% of it—is outside national jurisdictions, has little or no protection and is suffering from the tragedy of the commons: everyone goes there to graze their sheep, but there is nothing left at the end. Everyone goes there to take their piece, but no one is protecting it. We must lead international negotiations. The Government have signed up to the UN's ambition to protect 30% of the world's oceans by 2030, but that will work only if our Government, alongside other nations, fund the satellite monitoring and enforcement mechanisms for those areas that we want to protect.

The UN is currently negotiating a high seas treaty. We call on the Government to seize this chance and push for a Paris agreement of the seas. Like the climate change agreement, it would contain legally binding targets and regular conferences of the parties to hold Governments to account, and designate marine protected areas and the funding needed to achieve them. We look forward to the publication of the Government's international ocean strategy later this year. I hope it will include and build on our Committee's cross-party ambitions.

We are an island nation. We care passionately about our seas and oceans. I commend the report to the House, and commend my Committee colleagues for such an excellent report.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): I commend the hon. Lady for her statement, and her Committee for its superb report. I hope that other Select Committees will follow her example and make statements directly to the House. Page 48 of the report recommends a 25p coffee cup levy and that all coffee cups should be recycled by 2023. All our constituents can readily identify with that issue. It does not strike me that recycling coffee cups need be that problematic, so why do we need to wait four years for them to be recycled?

**Mary Creagh:** That is an excellent question. The Government's resources and waste strategy states that they want the industry to work towards voluntary commitments and that they will introduce a deposit return scheme for plastic bottles, but that they are ruling out the latte levy, which we think would influence a very important behaviour change. We need to change the way in which we consume the planet's resources and bend the curve of our plastic use. In the time between us writing our coffee cup report and last December, despite all the warm words from the coffee cup industry and all the available discounts, the number of coffee cups used went up by 500 million. The target increases every year as more people buy and drink coffee. Industry efforts are not working. The product is difficult to deal with because it has a plastic lining and a paper outer part, and it needs specialist collection and specialist disposal. Some companies are working heroically in trying to tackle the issue, but even if we get to 30 million or 100 million, there are still 3 billion coffee cups in circulation every year.

I agree passionately with the hon. Gentleman that it should not take another four years. The Government need to regulate, but I am afraid that they are reluctant to do so. It is interesting how far ahead of policy the nation and consumers are, and I hope that Ministers are listening.

**Kerry McCarthy** (Bristol East) (Lab): This is another excellent report by the Environmental Audit Committee and I am very proud to have been a part of it. The underlying principle that such reports should always follow is that the planet's resources are precious and should be preserved, not plundered, whether they be fish or rare minerals that could be found in hydrothermal vents. That should underpin everything we do. Does the Committee Chair share my concern that while the Government are treading water, the race for deep sea mining and the rise of other environmentally damaging economic activities in the seas are going ahead untrammelled, and that there is a risk that if we do not act quickly, we will not be able to put the genie back in the bottle?

**Mary Creagh:** I thank my hon. Friend for her question. She is a fantastic member of the Committee and a real thought leader in many of the areas under discussion. As she said in Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs questions, she has been talking about the food system—"banging on" is how she put it, I think—and following the persistence principle for many years.

My hon. Friend is right about the race for deep sea mining. We are in a new wild west of exploration. The irony is that we are prepared to plunder and churn up the last great, unexplored wilderness—the equivalent of Yosemite national park and other brilliant places that people travel the world to see, such as our own Lake and Peak districts—so that we can have more "smart" phones. Those rare earth minerals are used in our smartphones and in some of our industrial applications. If we were better at recycling the rare earth elements in the 7 billion mobile phones, or however many there are, on the planet—I think there is at least one for every man, woman and child—we would not have to do that. A positive side-effect of the exploration is that we are finding out more about these unexplored areas, but the question is: what happens when we know they are there, and what will we discover? That is a problem.

**Zac Goldsmith** (Richmond Park) (Con): I thank the hon. Lady for chairing the Committee and for her brilliant précis of a brilliant report. Needless to say, as a member of the Committee I fully endorse all its recommendations and am very proud of it.

I hope the hon. Lady will allow me to highlight two of the recommendations. The Government's blue belt policy is probably our single biggest opportunity to protect a very large portion of the world's oceans. The report rightly urges the Foreign Office to back full protection of the waters around Ascension Island. It is worth saying that the Ascension Island Council, as well as DEFRA, has made very promising noises, but the blockage seems to be the Foreign Office. The first recommendation, therefore, is for the Foreign Office to get going, agree with the Ascension Island Council and DEFRA, and provide maximum protection at minimum cost to an incredibly important part of the world.

The second recommendation is to build on the recent announcement of increased no-take areas around the South Sandwich Islands, to provide full protection for those extraordinary and pristine waters, much of which featured in the "Blue Planet" series. That view is backed by an almost unprecedented alliance of scientists, experts and non-governmental organisations. The solution will

[Zac Goldsmith]

cost very little, if anything, in public money, but it will deliver huge results for nature, so will the Foreign Office get on with that as well?

**Mary Creagh:** I absolutely agree with the hon. Gentleman, who was instrumental in getting consensus around the recommendations to the Foreign Office. Ascension Island could benefit from a huge boost from tourism if it was designated. He is right that the Antarctic krill fishing industry is very heavily regulated, but, again, it is in danger of over-exploitation in order to feed our insatiable demand for farmed fish, including salmon. Increasing the no-take areas and protecting them properly is really, really important.

**Norman Lamb** (North Norfolk) (LD): I congratulate the hon. Lady and her Committee on a very good report. I was struck recently by the Simon Reeve series on the Mediterranean, which highlighted, in particular, the vast areas of plastic greenhouses around Almeria in south Spain, where they produce enormous quantities of vegetables and fruit for European supermarkets, including those in this country. I have written to all the supermarkets in this country, but I am not convinced that proper measures are in place to guarantee that the supply chains are meeting high environmental and labour standards. Those chains make use of migrant labour from Africa and have awful working conditions. Does she share my view that the supermarkets have a real responsibility here?

**Mary Creagh:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his question, and I share his concern about the plastics that come off the greenhouses where our tomatoes and cucumbers are grown, which are discarded and then literally chucked into the sea. We treat the sea as a waste disposal unit, and it is not. There is more that supermarkets can do in tackling the full carbon footprint of the fruits and vegetables that they import and making sure that they stamp out any abuse and any forced and slave labour in their fruit and picking supply chains. We know that that they is an area where forced labour and child labour are prevalent.

**Peter Aldous** (Waveney) (Con): I commend the hon. Lady and her Committee for this excellent report. May I also mention the excellent work that is done by the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science, which is based in my constituency to both identify the problems and come up with solutions? Based on its work, the UK can be a global pioneer in the sustainable stewardship of our seas?

**Mary Creagh:** I thank the hon. Gentleman, who is a former and much esteemed member of our Committee, for that question. I saw the CEFAS ship on a visit to his constituency when I was shadowing the DEFRA brief. He is right that we have world-leading marine biologists and marine scientists. The world looks to the UK for our brilliance and thought leadership on the subject. One criticism that we have of Government is that they have stopped funding our long time series around ocean certification measurements. One key recommendation is that we need to measure the acidity of the ocean. We know what it was going back decades, but we need to

have more monitoring sites around the UK, so I hope that he will help us in pushing the Government on that task.

**Alex Sobel** (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the Chair of the Environmental Audit Committee for her leadership on this report, which built on our report on plastics. Does she agree that Foreign and Commonwealth Office officials did a great job in trying to make the Weddell sea a marine protected area, but that they need to redouble their efforts with the Chinese, Russian and Norwegian Governments? However, our work on plastics is well behind. We do not have a compulsory deposit return scheme guaranteed, and the target for eliminating single-use plastic is not until 2042. We need to have both those things in place much quicker.

**Mary Creagh:** Again, I appreciate the input of my hon. Friend and neighbour into the Committee and this report. He is right: we need to speed up our ambition. The scientists have warned us that we have 12 years to tackle climate change. It is no good putting targets in place for 2042—that is far too little, far too late. We heard about some of the interesting foreign policy discussions that are going on around Antarctica, particularly some of the negotiations with the Norwegians and the Russians. Clearly a lot of politics is involved in the oceans, and we have to be mindful of that.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): May I also add my thanks to the Chair, the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mary Creagh), and the Committee for bringing this report forward? You were very clear that these must be quick questions, Madam Deputy Speaker, so I will be succinct.

I live on the edge of Strangford lough in my constituency. Ards and North Down Borough Council has managed to get a grant to carry out an environmental project at the mouth of the narrows of Strangford lough, where the ebb and flow of the tide is, to harvest the litter and plastic that flow through there. That might be a small project in the bigger picture of what we are talking about today, but small projects collectively make an immense difference in the long run. What assistance is there for councils across the whole of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to involve themselves in projects that, singularly, do not do a terrible lot, but collectively make a big difference? Can the hon. Lady tell me whether grants are available?

**Mary Creagh:** That sounds like an absolutely brilliant initiative from Ards and North Down Borough Council. I think that the hon. Gentleman also has an oyster fishery in Strangford lough, the produce of which I have enjoyed on several occasions. I am not aware of what funding is available, but I am sure that officials will write to him on that issue.

**Sandy Martin** (Ipswich) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend and congratulate her Committee on its excellent and challenging report. It is likely that much of the plastic entering the oceans has been collected supposedly for recycling. Does she agree that, at the very least, this country needs to institute comprehensive and rigorous checks of all recyclable materials exported for processing? We need to put our own house in order as well as demanding an international agreement to protect our seas from the dumping of supposedly recycled material.

**Mary Creagh:** My hon. Friend the shadow Minister is absolutely right. We do have to put our own house in order. We know that most of the plastics enter the ocean from, I think, five rivers in Africa and Asia. There is no point in our carrying out heroic clean-up work here at home if we are then going to export the material to far-away countries such as Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand that do not have the right infrastructure in place and whose own populations are now rebelling against being consumed in a mountain of our contaminated plastics. We need to do more, and there is much more that we can do. The Government can start by carrying out better enforcement. There are some great waste exporters, but there are also some criminals in the waste sector. The Environment Agency carried out just three unannounced inspections in 2017. That is not enough. When we sent in the National Audit Office, it found that the audit systems and processes for waste export did not tally, so someone somewhere is playing the system, and we need to crack down on it here at home.

**The Minister for Energy and Clean Growth (Claire Perry):** I do have a question, but, with your indulgence, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to genuinely thank the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mary Creagh) and her Committee for once again producing what I really feel is an excellent piece of work. She has heard me speak before about the work that this Committee does in looking across Government and across boundaries. We saw it with the “Greening Finance” report, which had some superb recommendations around understanding risk from a regulatory perspective, particularly for pension regulators, and she will know that the Government have responded to that. I genuinely thank her and her Committee for their work. It is an extremely high-quality Committee, with some very talented and able colleagues and very good Committee staff.

It is ironic, is it not, that this House is almost empty, but that it was packed when we were debating the next three years in Europe? There are very few of us here today to understand what is happening to 70% of our planet. This report joins up the challenge of climate and environmental sustainability across land, sea, air, and, of course, the very important littoral zones. That is what we need to do and are doing, and this is a superb report.

The Government, of course, are listening. The hon. Lady will know that she has made a number of recommendations that are relevant to my Department, as well as to the Foreign Office and DEFRA. I am off after this to have a meeting with one of the DEFRA Ministers. The hon. Lady knows, I think, that she is pushing at an open door with this Government, and we will continue to do whatever we can to support these recommendations.

Finally, I do have a question for the hon. Lady. So much of what she says is relevant to both our overseas territories and our Commonwealth partners, which, in many cases, are small island states facing down a barrel of disruption—literally—from climate change and ocean pollution. Has she communicated the findings of this report to those countries and organisations? If not, how can we as a Government facilitate her in doing so?

**Mary Creagh:** I thank the Minister for her kind words and for her many appearances before our Committee, giving evidence on a variety of different subjects. I have also been neglectful in not thanking our brilliant Committee staff, who have worked so hard on the various Committee reports that we have produced, and on this one in particular.

The Minister is right; here we are in an almost empty Chamber, with people at home saying “Why is nobody talking about this?” Obviously Brexit is taking up so much time because it is urgent, but this is also urgent and important. We debated whether or not to launch the report on this date, but we decided that we needed to talk about the other important stuff as well as Brexit.

The Minister is also right that our Commonwealth territories are on the frontline of illegal activities, including illegal fishing, which is depleting their domestic, more sustainable fishing practices. They are at all sorts of risk, not least from the changes in weather systems that come from ocean warming, which made the hurricanes that sadly hit them last September much more powerful, slow-moving and damaging.

We have not communicated this report to anyone in the overseas territories, although the Committee has met representatives of some countries, including parliamentarians from Belize in October. Perhaps I could meet the Minister at the back of the Chair to discuss how we can get the report out to a much wider audience in the Commonwealth and overseas territories.



## Backbench Business

### Mental Health First Aid in the Workplace

1.11 pm

**Luciana Berger** (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move,

That this House notes that the UK is facing a mental health crisis; further notes that, according to the Independent Review into Mental Health in the Workplace 2017 commissioned by the Prime Minister, each year 300,000 people with long-term mental health conditions lose their job; recognises that Centre for Mental Health research shows presenteeism from mental health is estimated to cost the economy £15.1 billion per annum; acknowledges this same research shows it costs the economy £8.4 billion per annum for mental health absenteeism; considers that a recent poll by OnePoll found that 38 per cent of people reported being stressed about work; observes that the Health and Safety Act 1974 made it a legal necessity for workplaces to train someone in medical first aid; and calls on the Government to change this law via secondary legislation to provide clarity that an employer's first aid responsibilities cover both physical and mental health and to add a requirement for workplaces to train mental health first aiders.

It really is a pleasure to speak in support of this motion, alongside its co-sponsors the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) and the hon. Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer). The application for this debate was supported by more 60 Members from all parts of the House, and we are very grateful to the Backbench Business Committee for allocating time for our discussion today.

Following the particularly challenging moments that this House has experienced over the last few days, today's debate is a salutary reminder that the work of this Parliament goes on, and that we are capable of debating in a constructive and collegiate fashion. Our motion addresses a real and pressing need to support people affected by mental ill health. Our argument is simple. The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 ensured that every large workplace has someone trained in medical first aid, and that is now an accepted and established part of every office, factory, warehouse, hotel and anywhere else that people work; so why not a trained mental health first aider in every workplace? We want to change the Health and Safety Act via secondary legislation so that an employer's responsibility explicitly covers the mental health as well as the physical health of their employees. This debate is a true cross-party initiative, calling on the Government to make a small change to the law that would constitute a step towards establishing parity of esteem—real equality between physical and mental health.

**Sir Greg Knight** (East Yorkshire) (Con): This is an excellent motion. Does the hon. Lady agree that when workplace training on first aid—including mental health first aid—takes place outside the workplace, the employer should be required to give the employee time off during working hours to attend?

**Luciana Berger**: There are many different ways in which this could be implemented. I myself have attended mental health first aid training at the workplace, but I certainly would not be averse to employers giving their staff time off for such training. I will later come to

many examples showing that this is already the case with a number of employers, particularly large employers, across the country.

This debate was born out of the “Where's Your Head At?” campaign, which was launched by campaigner Natasha Devon and supported by Mental Health First Aid England and Bauer Media, which have together collected over 200,000 names on a petition that a number of us delivered to No. 10 Downing Street. I commend those organisations for all their hard work, and pay tribute to their commitment and determination to see this positive change introduced. It really is admirable. Bauer Media—an organisation with radio stations and a number of magazines, such as *Grazia*—has really taken the idea forward, paying for billboards across the country to promote the campaign. I commend its social action on a matter that, as an employer, it knows would make a difference in its own workplaces.

This really would be a simple shift, but one with a huge beneficial impact on the lives of millions of British workers. No one can seriously contend that there is not a need for such a measure. Hon. Members only have to look at some of the statistics. NHS Digital suggests that one in six adults experience mental ill health, including depression, anxiety and stress-related illnesses. There are around 28 million people in work in our country, so it is not unreasonable to assume that 5 million people in work today are affected. In a recent poll, 38% of people reported being stressed about work. It is a tragedy that, according to the Stevenson-Farmer “Thriving at Work” report—a review commissioned by the Government and published just over a year ago—some 300,000 people with a long-term mental health condition are losing their jobs every single year.

**Mary Creagh** (Wakefield) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. She is making a powerful case and is describing an epidemic of mental ill health that has many different sources. The Environmental Audit Committee is looking into this as part of our planetary health inquiry. When I met my local Wakefield UK Youth Parliament, I was struck by how concerned the young people were about mental health in schools, and I discovered that South West Yorkshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust has provided mental health first aid training in schools for teachers. Does my hon. Friend agree that that needs to be rolled out across all schools so that teachers or trusted adults in schools can deal with young people and children in crisis?

**Luciana Berger**: I thank my hon. Friend for her important intervention. Of course, today we are talking about what happens in the workplace, but what happens with young people in places of education is equally critical. I sit on the Health and Social Care Committee, and we have interrogated the Government's plans for the next generation and young people. There are plans in place to have a designated mental health senior lead in every school, and we should ensure that at least one person has that training. We could be doing better than that, but at least it is a start. I support the idea, and it is great to hear what is happening in my hon. Friend's constituency.

Let me be very clear that we are talking about a huge number of people affected in our country every single day—our friends, colleagues and workmates who surround

us. There is, of course, a huge economic cost as well as a very significant human cost. The Centre for Mental Health estimates that people with mental health conditions staying at work longer than they should costs our economy over £15 billion every single year, and that people being absent from work because of mental ill health costs our economy £8 billion a year. These are not insignificant sums. I reiterate that 300,000 people with a long-term mental health condition are losing their jobs every single year because they find themselves in an acute state, have to leave work, are not supported and get to a critical state, rather than having experienced early intervention or prevention, which might have helped them in the first place.

The Health and Safety Executive says that 15.4 million working days were lost in the last year alone because of stress, depression and anxiety, and the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy—I declare an interest, as I was recently appointed one of its vice-presidents—has calculated that stress is costing British businesses £1,000 per employee per year in sick pay and associated costs. That is very significant for the national economy, and for individual organisations and businesses. I do not think I need to set out any more statistics to evidence the fact that there is a clear need. Mental illness is having a significant impact on millions of workers across the country and costing our economy billions of pounds.

**Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op):** My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. As we have all heard in our constituency surgeries, one of the real costs is that people who suffer from mental illness find it very difficult to get back into employment because of the stigma, and I have to say that the public sector is among the worst at having a bias against people with mental health problems. Does she accept that?

**Luciana Berger:** I thank my hon. Friend for making that important point. I am going to move on to talk about tackling the stigma and discrimination that we know still exist in our country. We have made some progress in the national conversation about tackling mental ill health, particularly with the younger generations, but in too many workplaces and too many communities, there is still the discrimination and taboo connected with mental ill health. As a constituency MP, I see that almost weekly. Men of an older generation feel that they are able to talk to me because I campaign on this issue and am very open about it, but they are perhaps unable to speak to their work colleagues—sometimes not even to their close family—because of the discrimination that they feel still exists. We are certainly on a journey as a country.

One objection to this proposal might be that mental health requires highly specialist medical intervention, not someone in the workplace with only a few days' training—and of course that is absolutely true. Mental health conditions do require specialist diagnosis and treatment. That is why many of us, on both sides of the House, have been calling for more investment in this area to ensure that we have the clinicians within our NHS to address the mental health crisis in this country. But let us be very clear that this motion, with this specific initiative, is not seeking to substitute mental professionals with mental health first aiders. Mental

health first aid training gives people the knowledge, the skills and the confidence to intervene early if someone is struggling with their mental health. It is not in any way intended to be a replacement for trained mental health professionals, either in the NHS or in our workplaces; rather it offers an early warning system and an opportunity for employee support. It is also, in response to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Dr Drew), aimed at tackling the taboo that we often see. Raising awareness of mental ill health and placing it on an equal footing with physical ill health tackles some of the stigma and discrimination that we still have to break down.

If any colleagues would like a clearer explanation, let me say this. All of us here present would know where to go for assistance if we had a physical injury. If we had perhaps slipped, or had a burn or a cut, we could go to the officers just down there through the Chamber. Perhaps, either in this place or in a previous role, we were that first aider. But how many colleagues, or their staff would know where to go if they were struggling with their mental health? How many would have known who that person was, or if they existed at all, in their previous job? Training people in our workplaces in mental health first aid would mean that employees in workplaces right across our country had an instant answer to that question.

No one should assume that a mental health first aider is the same as a mental health professional, any more than anyone assumes that a current workplace first aider is the same as a heart surgeon, an A&E doctor or a cancer specialist. The point is that a mental health first aider provides early intervention and a critical and important signpost. They would be able to answer questions about how and where to go to get treatment. They can help to change the culture in an office or on a shop floor so that someone with a mental illness has support. They can provoke a conversation about mental health that can break down some of the stigma and prejudice. They can be a valuable first point of contact for someone struggling with their mental health in what might otherwise feel like a very lonely environment.

We do not need to talk in purely hypothetical terms. At the end of last year, the *Where's Your Head At?* campaign sent a letter to the Prime Minister in support of statutory mental health first aiders. It was supported by over 40 businesses, including WHSmith, Standard Chartered and Thames Water. I am particularly proud to say that a friend of mine and good Labour colleague, Sadiq Khan, the Mayor of London, has, in the capital, done so much on mental health first aid training at City Hall and in London's schools as part of his public health strategy. St John's Ambulance will have trained 10,000 people by the end of this last period. Mental Health First Aid England has now trained over 350,000 people in mental health first aid. Councils are investing in this and other providers are making similar strides forward. Those who have completed the training say it is hugely beneficial to them and their co-workers. It gives people the skills, knowledge, confidence and language to spot the signs of mental ill health, provide support and make early interventions. But most critically, it is helping the people affected. It really can make a difference.

One of the elements of the mental health first aid training that I completed was about what to do if someone you work with is experiencing suicidal ideation and might be considering taking their own life. Some

[Luciana Berger]

6,000 people in our country have taken their own life in the past year and this particularly impacts on young men. This is an area where quite often people do not know what to say or do, but training such as this, and training from the Zero Suicide Alliance, which offers a free online half-an-hour session, are the tools that can really make a difference. In some cases, it really is a life or death situation.

A number of unions have come out in support of the change to the law we are seeking to make today. Community, The Teacher's Union and Unite were all signatories to the letter to the Prime Minister I just mentioned, and the Communications Workers Union and the GMB have since joined calls for this change to the law.

The costs of training—another question that is often raised—are very clearly outweighed by the benefits of better mental health in our workplaces. Training can typically take place over a number of days, but it can also take place over one day—or half a day, providing opportunities particularly for small businesses and organisations to train people in mental health first aid, too. The training that I did was with the Liverpool city region Mayor, Steve Rotherham, and the senior leadership of Merseytravel in Liverpool. I have half a day left to do, but I have done almost the whole course and seen what the benefits can be. So we do not need to gaze into a crystal ball. We can talk to people who have been trained. But again, in particular, we can reflect and engage with the people who have been helped.

I would like to share some of the thoughts of organisations that have gotten in touch in recent days to share their experience of training mental health first aiders, the value they place on this important initiative and why they are supporting our call today. The insurance company AXA has trained over 100 of its staff to become mental health first aiders, so now each of its UK offices has one. It has also trained as mental health first aiders the staff of the companies that it provides insurance to, helping other businesses across the country to improve mental health in their organisations.

Another success story is that of Thames Water, where 350 employees across the organisation are trained in mental health first aid. They wear green lanyards so that they can be easily identified by the wider workforce. A further 250 employees have joined the company's mental health online engagement forum. Thames Water has calculated that there has been a 75% reduction in work-related stress, anxiety and depression among its employees—a not insignificant impact.

Colleagues may not know—I was certainly not aware of this—that the construction industry is the sector where workers are most affected by mental ill health. In response to that, the Construction Industry Training Board has now committed £500,000 to the Building Mental Health initiative, which will train 156 construction workers as mental health first aiders. Further to this, Mates in Mind is a fantastic charity that works to address the stigma around poor mental health and improve positive mental wellbeing in the UK construction industry. It aims to have reached 75% of the construction industry by 2025.

I give these examples as evidence to colleagues that a number of businesses across the country have been proactive in their approach to mental health and are

reaping the rewards. There are many more I could have shared, but I am conscious that many Members want to contribute to the debate.

This is an idea whose time has come. In a decade from now, when mental health first aiders are an established part of the workplace, we will wonder why we did not start sooner. It is good to have the Minister here today. As I am sure she recognises, this is a measure that can bring us together across party lines. The Minister and the Government have the chance to do a really important thing in supporting this motion. I should say that that is in line with their own pledges in the Conservative party manifesto in 2017. The Government have the opportunity to amend the 1974 Act and to take a clear step towards achieving real equality.

The term, “parity of esteem”, may seem meaningless, but it means real equality between physical and mental health. We legislated for that principle in the Health and Social Care Act 2012. We are now seven years down the road and still waiting to realise that ambition. The Minister will also know that the Prime Minister has been clear on this from the start of her premiership, when she made the commitment to address the inequality between physical and mental health one of the key “burning injustices” that she wanted to erase. This motion, and the policy that it seeks to implement, gives the Prime Minister and her Government the opportunity to solidify her commitment to this mission.

Unlike certain other matters that we are discussing in the House this week and over the weeks ahead, this initiative has cross-party support. It has the support of businesses and of our constituents—over 200,000 people have signed the petition. It has the support of so many mental health campaigners across the country. I sincerely hope that all Members on both sides of the House will support it here this afternoon.

1.29 pm

**Johnny Mercer** (Plymouth, Moor View) (Con): I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger). She is right that it is wonderful to be in this place today with the noise dialled down, so that we can work on and think carefully about one of the most important issues in this country. Mental health is the No. 1 challenge for millions of people in this country every day. If we can meet that challenge in some way by working in the collaborative way that she talked about, that is wonderful. I am really pleased that she has secured this debate and that the Minister is here to listen to it. I also pay tribute to the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb). The three of us have worked together on a number of issues. Like in any team, there are those who lead from the front and do all the heavy lifting and hard work, and that is definitely not me. I want to say a massive thanks to them for their efforts in getting us here today.

When I came into this place in 2015, I talked about how I wanted to end in this Parliament the stigma around mental health. I have found since then that there is still this—it is hard to understand—air around suicide that people do not want to talk about or address, but it remains the biggest killer of men under 44 in this country. Unless we talk about it, we will not come up with ways that interdict and meet the challenge.



**Liz Twist** (Blaydon) (Lab): I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way and congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Wavertree on securing the debate. Does he agree that we need not only to encourage people to talk through industry schemes such as Mates in Mind; we also need to listen? That is why the move towards mental health first aid workers is so important.

**Johnny Mercer:** The hon. Lady is right. There is no point in getting people to come forward and talk about mental health, which can be very difficult, if we do not have the services or access to them to help them, after they have made themselves vulnerable in that way. That is why I am so keen to keep our foot to the gas and ensure that we start delivering on this. We have made progress—that is undeniable—but clearly there is a long way to go, and I will come on to that.

I want to address the point about legislation. As someone who does a lot of work in the armed forces community and on the armed forces covenant, I know that people will say, “Why legislate?” I have learnt in this place that we can have a number of good ideas and initiatives that we can encourage people to do but, ultimately, this is too big a challenge to be left to personalities involved in companies at different times. Sometimes we have to legislate for it. This is not a problem for the companies that already do this, but sometimes the most vulnerable people in our communities deserve the Government legislating and letting them know that we are on side.

**Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I am sorry that I was not here for the beginning of the speech by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger). I was having my own health and wellbeing check with our excellent service here. The practice nurse was particularly keen to know about my stress levels, given the experience we have all had in the last week, but I am good for another few years.

My hon. Friend may know that I am the co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on mindfulness, which is a simple way of looking after employees’ mental health. Before Christmas, we held a seminar here involving military figures. He knows, from his experience, the high level of mental health issues among that group. I am glad to say that the Army is now seriously looking at how this measure can be introduced, and why wouldn’t it? This is a win-win situation: if an employer looks after its employees and its workforce, they tend to do a better job, and they look after the company or Army unit better as well.

**Johnny Mercer:** I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. He is right; the military has come a long way. It gets a hard time, but the Army in particular has come a long way on the importance of mindfulness and how much easier it is to keep a healthy mind than get better from a mental illness. I thank him for all the work he does on that. We all come to this place for different reasons, but there is no doubt that the mental health challenge of a decade and a half of combat operations has ripped apart the circle of friends that I grew up with, so I have a real passion for getting this right.

As the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree says, we need to look at this in a slightly different way in this country. We are very good in this place at talking from the Front Bench about what we are putting into services in terms of money and priority, and that is extremely

important, but we need to turn the telescope around and ask what it actually feels like to be in the community waiting for access to child and adolescent mental health services or mental health treatment. That is the true metric of what we do in this place. I strongly encourage the Government to look at that approach.

Why am I so interested in this? As everybody now knows, I have had OCD for a long time. Obviously, I like to pretend that it is some sort of distant memory, but my close friends and family know that it is not. It is much better, but there is no doubt that, if there had been mental health first aid when I was a boy, growing up and going into the military, my life would have been completely changed. We cannot underestimate how important it is to intervene early, when someone is so much more likely to get better. I will never forget the Saturday afternoon when I ended up in the Maudsley, thinking, “How did I end up here? How did this all start?” If policies like this had been talked about 20 years ago, millions of lives would have been very different.

I talk about this because it sends a powerful message: you can get better. People think that they are managing their mental health for the rest of their life, they reach their zenith and that is it. I cannot over-emphasise how wrong that is. Clearly managing a mental health challenge is a difficulty, but it can absolutely be done, and the chances of doing that are exponentially increased by early intervention. If we can get into workplaces and say to people, “We take mental health as seriously as physical health,” we will affect millions of lives, which is ultimately what we come to this place every week to do.

I pay tribute again to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree and the right hon. Member for North Norfolk, who have done a lot of the heavy lifting on this. There are not many people here today, but in some ways, that does not matter. There will be people following this intensely because they have a mental health challenge. They may be 15, 16 or 17-year-old young boys, like I was, who never talk about it and who learn about what is going on through their phone but do not even talk to their parents. When I spoke about my OCD in the *Evening Standard*, I had loads of phone calls the next day, but the best one was from a 16-year-old boy who said he had never spoken to his parents or anyone about it.

There will be a lot of people watching this debate who were devastated when it was cancelled before Christmas. They are the people we are here for, and that is why people like me speak out. It is not easy to speak about individual issues in this House, but I want to say to boys and girls who are watching this now and may be struggling: don’t think for a minute that because there are not lots of people here, and there is not the raucous shouting that we have seen in the last few days, this is in any way less important to many of us in this place. Just because we are quieter, it does not mean that we do not hear you.

There is a mental health revolution going on in this country—we have seen it start and people are talking about it. The Government have committed to parity of esteem. We are flicking over from meeting one in four mental health needs at the moment to one in three. Clearly there is a big unmet need and we have further to go, but it is an unstoppable direction of travel, and today is another point on that march.

[Johnny Mercer]

I sincerely hope that the Government can take forward these recommendations. I slightly disagree with the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree only on one point: parity of esteem does mean something. However, she is right: it does not if people in our communities do not feel it. It is not good enough here to say, "Parity of esteem is a wonderful thing. Haven't we done well? We've put it into Government legislation." It is meaningless unless the people who use the services actually feel like they are treated in the same way and have the same access to treatments as those with physical health problems. I commend the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree and the right hon. Member for North Norfolk for the march we are taking on this, together with the stuff we have done on money and mental health. In this Parliament of immense turbulence, for those who are watching—the quieter ones, whom I have spoken about—this march will continue. They have some wonderful advocates in this place and we keep going.

1.40 pm

**Jon Cruddas** (Dagenham and Rainham) (Lab): It is good to see the subject of mental health in the workplace being discussed this afternoon, and I obviously congratulate colleagues from all parties who have secured the debate. To echo the point made in both speeches so far, given the recent discussions here, it is good that Members can come together and discuss subjects of national significance in a spirit of fraternity.

It seems to me that there are two basic elements to today's debate: first, how to implore employers to accept their responsibilities to do more; and, secondly, to take the opportunity to showcase good practice in our communities, where employers are stepping up to the challenges in offering mental health first aid.

As we know, the backdrop is that we are increasingly aware of the scale of the mental health challenges we face. For example, one in four of us will experience a mental health issue at some point in our lives, according to the World Health Organisation. As has been mentioned, the report by Lord Dennis Stevenson and Paul Farmer, "Thriving at work", has highlighted the costs of poor mental health provisions in the workplace. They suggest that some 300,000 people with long-term mental health issues lose their jobs every year, that poor mental health costs employers billions of pounds each year and that the economy in turn loses billions per year as a result.

The numbers are staggering and quite extraordinary, but the subject of our discussion is not really a question of overall economic utility; it is the suffering of our fellow citizens, and what a good society and what good employers should be doing about these profound challenges. We should think of it this way: a Business in the Community publication, "Mental Health at Work", has found that 15% of employees face dismissal, demotion or disciplinary action after disclosing a mental health issue at work, which could mean that this reality applies to some 1.2 million people of working age in the UK. It has also told us that just 11% of employees felt able to disclose mental health issues to their line manager. These figures are appalling, so things have to change. That is why employers must do more to address these issues.

On the other hand, as I said, we should use this debate to highlight new initiatives where employers are stepping up to meet their responsibilities. I therefore

want to reference the workplace mental health work of a company at the heart of my constituency—the Ford Motor Company.

Throughout last year, many Members may have seen or caught sight of the "Elephant in the Transit" film, which the Ford Motor Company put out, which was aired in TV ad breaks, in cinemas and, more generally, across social media in order to raise awareness of mental health issues. It is a short film—I would guess of only 30 seconds—and contains a pretty simple but very smart message. Basically, there are two young, working class lads in a Transit, and between them sits this massive elephant as the lads chat about their plans for the weekend. One clocks that his mate is not quite right—he has learned to see the signs—so he pulls over the truck to talk to him about it all. It is spot-on, and it really is aimed at a key demographic in this area—young, working-class males. In this instance, Ford has teamed up with Time to Change. It has sought to cut through the stigma, especially among young, working-class males, so that we can more openly discuss mental health issues.

This is not an isolated initiative on Ford's behalf. It has also been working with Mental Health First Aid England to launch a training programme to reduce stigma, to encourage people to speak out more about mental health and to find safe, non-confrontational spaces to talk. The idea is that, through this training, Ford dealers and managers will understand how to act as a first point of contact for a colleague developing or experiencing a mental health issue.

The training is to teach people to spot the signs of mental health issues, offer initial first aid help and guide a person towards the appropriate support, as well as about how to listen non-judgmentally, reassure and respond, even in a crisis. The training can also help stop preventable issues arising by building a supportive culture around mental health. It is to equip Ford's key people in these roles with the skills to talk about mental health with confidence and without judgment. The way the company want to normalise the topic of mental health among their workers has impressed me, so today we should acknowledge such initiatives.

Ford has also backed the "Where's Your Head At?" campaign—it was mentioned earlier—which is calling for change in workplace health and safety laws to protect mental health in the same way as physical health. If successful, it will ensure that every workplace provides mental health first aid as well as physical first aid, helping those in need at the earliest possible opportunity. Again, Ford has been working with Mental Health First Aid England for the training. Overall, I think we can agree that it is the responsibility of British employers to ensure that provision for mental health issues in the workplace meets the necessary standards.

I have to admit that I have many times taken chunks out of employers for what they have not done, and that includes the Ford Motor Company many times, compared with what they should be doing. Given that tendency, it is up to me to highlight good practice by the self-same employers. It seems to me that these initiatives by Ford should be acknowledged and put on the record in the debate today. More generally and simply put, it is good that we have time to talk about this subject this afternoon. Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for giving me a few minutes to make a few points.

1.46 pm

**Peter Aldous** (Waveney) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger), the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) and my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer) on securing this debate, and the Backbench Business Committee on granting it.

For many, first aid in the workplace has too often in the past been a green box that is kept in the corner and which, if we are lucky, is opened very occasionally when someone cuts a finger or scalds themselves when making a cup of tea. However, it is much more than that: not only can there be more serious physical illnesses to which we have to attend, such as a broken limb or a heart attack, but there are mental health challenges of which we need to be increasingly aware.

Very often, workplaces are highly stressful settings, which can accentuate mental health challenges. It is important that we put in place measures to reduce stress, to help pick up those first signs of mental illness and to ensure that people needing treatment and support receive it as quickly as possible. This is not only vital for those who are feeling unwell, but good for their employers.

I chair the all-party group on first aid, the secretariat for which is provided by St John Ambulance. I was on its management board in Suffolk before I came to this place. Mental health first aid training is increasingly being provided by St John Ambulance, which by the end of 2018 had provided 5,000 people with the skills to become mental health first aiders in their workplace, and this figure is due to rise to 10,000 this year. This is a good start, but it needs to be put in the context of 1 million physical first aiders in the workplace, requalifying on a three-year cycle. There is clearly a lot of work still to do.

I shall first highlight the research carried out by St John Ambulance, which shows clearly why we need to step up our game, and then I will move on to outline some cases that illustrate the benefits of embedding mental health support in the workplace. St John Ambulance carried out two surveys in 2018—one of 1,000 employees responsible for booking general first aid courses, and the other of 800 people who attended general first aid courses. The findings of the first survey prompted a variety of conclusions.

First, one in four people in work have left a job due to mental health problems. A further 43% of people considered leaving a job due to stress or mental ill health, yet fewer than one fifth of the organisations in which they worked had mental health policies in place. Conditions including depression and stress had caused nearly a quarter of respondents to miss work for a day or longer, and six out of 10 people asserted that their employer should do more to address mental health issues.

Individual responses from employees who took part in the research included a variety of comments:

“The company I work for are pretty archaic;”

“I believe my manager would mock me;”

“They recognise it as a valid condition but see it as an inconvenience.”

Nearly two thirds of people said that they would feel uncomfortable asking for a mental health sick day. On a more positive note, more than a third of people said that their employer recognised stress as a valid condition

and worked to help, but more than a quarter said that bosses did little or nothing to help. In the second survey, more than half the respondents were unaware that employees have rights if treated unfairly by their bosses on mental health grounds, and nine out of 10 felt that organisations should have a mental health policy.

Both items of research indicate why the recent initiative by the Health and Safety Executive is so important. It has long been assumed that an employer’s responsibility for supporting mental health is covered by a standard risk assessment that takes into account all health and safety needs. In practice, however, due to the stigma attached to mental health, that simply has not been happening, and 44% of people do not feel able to tell their employer when they are feeling anxious or depressed at work, with most citing “embarrassment” as the main barrier.

There is overwhelming evidence of the need to embed a culture of mental health aid and support in the workplace. Last month St John Ambulance hosted a national conference with speakers and delegates drawn from such diverse sectors as construction, banking, retail, education, local government and the armed forces. Case studies included wellness programmes, a universal approach to mental health first-aid training, sleep training, talking groups for people as they tackled changing life circumstances, and the development of positive mental health champions. In one organisation, referrals to counselling by health professionals have fallen by 48% as a result of its initiatives, while another cited a 75% drop in absence due to work-related illness. The obvious impact on the bottom line has enabled senior leadership to buy into those programmes, which are now regarded as crucial to its success.

Having provided physical first-aid training for employers over many years, it is the experience of St John Ambulance that mandatory regulation will be necessary if every organisation is to give mental ill health the attention it deserves. It believes that further work is needed, especially among SMEs, to establish the right framework for such regulation. Extensive consultation will be required, and progress must be made in recognising the necessary impact on employees and employers. The Government must set out a firm timetable through which to consider proposals from experts, employees and employers, and they must consult on proposals for regulations to deliver parity of esteem, as called for by the Health and Social Care Act 2012, and implied by the Stevenson and Farmer report, “Thriving at Work”.

1.54 pm

**Norman Lamb** (North Norfolk) (LD): After yet another week of fractious and angry political discourse, what a pleasure it is to work with two honourable friends—I use that term advisedly—the hon. Members for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer) and for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) on an issue of incredible importance. It is important that those watching or reading about this debate recognise that it is possible for right hon. and hon. Members to focus on important issues such as mental ill health, as well as fractious arguments over Brexit.

I thank the hon. Member for Plymouth, Moor View for what he said about his experience of OCD. Interestingly, OCD has also affected my family as our oldest son was



[Norman Lamb]

diagnosed with it as a teenager. He has since spoken about his experience, and I speak with his authority and approval. What the hon. Gentleman said about the importance of people in his position speaking out about such conditions is important. I remember the moment when, as a teenager, Archie said to me, “Why I am the only person who is going mad?” For a parent to hear that from their child is awful and incredibly distressing, and it makes one realise what a teenager must be going through if that is how they feel about their situation. Of course that is an entirely false perspective, because one then realises that so many others are experiencing their own challenges, and when that realisation dawns, it makes it much easier for individuals to speak out. I thank the hon. Gentleman for what he said and for talking to the press about this issue, because cumulatively that makes a difference.

The Time to Change campaign has been incredibly powerful in helping to normalise mental ill health, and every time someone in a public position speaks out, it becomes a little easier for another teenager to seek help and not be frightened about opening up. I join the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree in acknowledging the work of Natasha Devon, who is a great campaigner for mental health issues, and I thank Bauer Media and Mental Health First Aid England for championing this important cause.

On the cost of mental ill health, I wish to focus first on the cost to the individual, because it is often not recognised by those who do not experience it just how painful and disabling mental ill health can be. If someone is experiencing anxiety, depression or a condition such as OCD, their life is completely dominated by that. They often cannot enjoy life or be happy, and whenever we speak about the economic cost of mental ill health, we must focus on the most important thing, which is the cost to individuals of the ill health that so many experience.

Alongside that, however, there is a significant cost to employers—not just private sector employers, but the public sector, charities and so forth. Health and Safety Executive data show that 57% of days off work through ill health are due to mental ill health of one sort or another, and not confronting that represents an enormous cost to employers. This is not just about time off work, because many people end up falling out of work and on to benefits, and others turn up to work but underperform—the concept of presenteeism—because they are not feeling on top of their game, or because they are obsessed by anxieties or concerns that prevent them from performing their work responsibilities effectively.

Addressing mental ill health is a win-win-win for everybody, because this issue affects not just individuals, but employers and even the Government, who gain as a result of us taking it more seriously. If someone falls out of work because of mental ill health, they end up claiming benefits, and that is an enormous cost to the Government and also impacts on the NHS. Everybody benefits by us taking this issue more seriously. The question then is how best to achieve an advance. The hon. Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous) made a very important point when he said that we need to think carefully about how we frame that.

Under existing law, employers are under duties to protect the mental health and wellbeing of their workforce. The Institution of Occupational Safety and Health makes

that point very strongly in its brief for this debate. It makes the point that under the Health and Safety at Work Act etc. 1974 and associated regulations, employers are under a duty to manage the psycho-social risk to their employees at work. There is also the duty under the Equality Act 2010 to make reasonable adjustments where people are suffering from some sort of disability, including mental ill health. I also applaud the Health and Safety Executive for the new guidance it issued in November 2018. For the first time, it includes a section on mental health. That is important. These are all advances worth acknowledging. I would also like to acknowledge the work of Paul Farmer and Lord Stevenson, which was commissioned by the Government. Their report “Thriving at Work” recommends mental health core standards for every employer.

None the less, the first aid legislation is very much framed in terms of physical health. It is very important to establish clearly in legislation—just as we did in the coalition Government, where we legislated for parity of esteem in the NHS—a very important principle for the workplace: an equality in the importance of both physical and mental health in the workplace. I want to stress that it is about much more than just mental health first aid, vital though that is—I totally endorse all the comments made by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree.

I want to highlight the potential risks, as the hon. Member for Waveney made clear, of not getting this right. There is a risk of the tick-box exercise, where an employer can just say, “Yes, we have trained someone up in mental health first aid. We’ve done nothing else, but we have ticked the box and therefore we have met the regulation.” That would be a failure for all of us if that was the outcome of this exercise.

The more fundamental point is that the approach we should be taking is about preventing ill health in the workplace. The whole focus should be on creating healthy workplaces, where people are treated with dignity and respect. It is vital that employees across the workforce have the opportunity to raise their awareness and understanding of mental health. Alongside that, however, we have to think about the causes of stress and anxiety in the workplace. Often, it is due to unhealthy workplaces, where people are not respected and where there is a bullying culture. Depressingly, we see that quite often in the NHS. That has to be confronted, because that is the cause of so many people feeling anxious, distressed and depressed as a result of what happens at work.

**Mr Kevan Jones** (North Durham) (Lab): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that there are very simple things companies can do—BT and quite a few others do this—to improve work-life balance? For example, they can ensure that people do not have to answer emails late at night or over weekends, or, when people have bereavements, they have a sensible bereavement policy that supports the individual, rather than just allows for a number of days for an individual to get over it.

**Norman Lamb:** That is an incredibly helpful intervention. I totally agree with the right hon. Gentleman. It is about getting the whole culture in the workplace right on flexible working, understanding that parents sometimes have responsibilities to their children and carers have responsibility for an elderly loved one. Not working

ludicrous hours of the day and night is also incredibly important. How we achieve the legislative change is very important. It is vital that we raise awareness through mental health first aid, but we also need a fundamental focus on the prevention of mental ill health in the workplace.

In the remaining minutes, I want to focus on some of the things we did in the west midlands. After I was chucked out of the Department of Health by the electorate in 2015, I was asked to chair a commission on mental health in the west midlands. Our whole focus was on how to prevent mental ill health and take a more public mental health approach. We focused particularly on the workplace. We first focused on how to get people who had experienced mental ill health and had been out of work—often for years and years—back into work. Work is actually good for people. Meaningful work, where we gain a sense of dignity and self-respect, is really important. We are undertaking—with £8.5 million of Government support, I should say—a randomised control trial, applying a strong evidence-based approach called individual placement and support. We give people intensive support to get them ready for employment, get them into a proper job and then support them in that job. We are looking at how we can apply that in primary care, so we capture people earlier, and give them access to someone who can train them and support them for employment. We want to change the mind set of GPs, so they are not just thinking about the sickness of their patient but how they can help them to recover and get back into work—that is critical.

I hope that as a result of the randomised control trial, we will be able to learn lessons which we can then apply across the country. If we can get lots of people with severe and enduring mental ill health back into work, we will achieve something very significant. Sadly, at the moment this extraordinarily strong, evidence-based approach is the exception rather than the rule. Most people across the country do not get access to it. The Government have made a commitment to double the numbers, but that is still a very small proportion of the total. It needs to be expanded rapidly.

**Mr Kevan Jones:** Is the problem that mental wellbeing is not hardwired into Government policy? Some policies, for example Department for Work and Pensions work capability tests and others, actually work against individuals. Voluntary work is very useful in getting people back into work, but at the moment there are limits around what people can do while they are still on benefits. Does the right hon. Gentleman think that some flexibility on that would help this process?

**Norman Lamb:** I absolutely do. I was going to say, “Don’t talk to me about the work capability assessment, because it will get me very angry.” We need reform of the welfare system to help to facilitate people returning to work, rather than just treating them as second-class citizens, as it often does.

**Luciana Berger:** I am listening very carefully to the right hon. Gentleman’s remarks, which are very pertinent. On people being in work or not in work if they are affected by a mental health condition, I was struck to learn that for my local mental health trust, Mersey Care, which provides services for the whole of Merseyside,

the latest available figures—not the most recent financial year, but the previous one—show that just 3% of the patients under its care, in both the community and in in-patient services, were in any form of work. That figure is similar for patients under the care of many mental health trusts across our country. Does he believe that people outside this place might not be aware of that fact, but it is staggering and should concern us all? We should be doing everything possible to support people with mental ill health conditions into the workplace.

**Norman Lamb:** I totally agree. My plea to the Government is that, as we hopefully commit to spending more on mental health, we spend at least part of that on preventive measures. If we can get someone into work, it makes a whole difference to their lives. The evidence shows that many people who are helped back into work are then able to stay in work; reducing the burden on the NHS and the benefits system, but giving people dignity and self-respect.

Another initiative we are undertaking in the west midlands is the wellbeing premium. It was my idea, which again is being supported by the Government and I am grateful to them. The idea, which we are trialling over a year, is to give an incentive to employers to improve the way in which they support people in work by training their line managers—the most critical thing one can do—and see whether we can reduce the number of people who end up on sickness absence. The idea is to give them a temporary incentive for one or two years, for example by a reduction in the business rate or a reduction in national insurance payments. If by that we can reduce sickness absence, the number of people falling out of work through ill health and the problem of presenteeism, everyone benefits. It will be interesting to see how that succeeds.

In the west midlands, we are also pursuing the thrive at work commitment, which is trying to build a social movement of companies that all sign up to a commitment to up the level of support that they provide people, changing the culture in workplaces. A toolkit is provided to companies, and that could make a substantial difference across the region.

The action plan also has a commitment to train up 500,000 people across the west midlands in mental health first aid. That is a totally different approach to what we have been used to, which is an NHS very much focused on sickness and providing treatment for sickness after what is often a very long wait, as the hon. Member for Plymouth, Moor View pointed out. Instead, the whole focus of the system should be on prevention. If we do that, we can achieve a real breakthrough.

To conclude, let us amend the legislation and get mental health first aid to become the standard in every workplace. Critically, that should be part of a much wider programme that is focused on prevention and on building good healthy workplaces with the right culture, where people have respect, are engaged in the work they are doing and are treated with dignity. With that commitment is a dedication to the work they are doing and a commitment to raise awareness of mental ill health among all staff and to train managers properly. Through a combination of regulation and incentives, we can make a real difference for people.

2.11 pm

**Gerald Jones** (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab): I rise to speak briefly in support of the motion. In doing so, I congratulate the three Members who brought the application for the debate to the Backbench Business Committee. In particular, I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) for the work she has done over a long period on this important issue.

As we know, poor mental health impacts on so many people across our country at various points in their lives. As we have heard, it will likely impact on one in four of us to a varying degree at some point in our lives. We know that more support is required to help people suffering from mental ill health in the workplace—support to halt people from deteriorating and to help them back to better mental health. I took part in a mental health first aid training course in a previous employment. It was a worthwhile experience that opened my eyes to the things to look out for and put me in a better position to provide help and support to colleagues. I recommend it to anybody.

I fully appreciate—it was the reason for this debate—that not all employers across the UK offer this training to employees, and that should change. Evidence suggests that 83% of employees in workplaces where mental health first aid is offered have seen an improvement in signposting to mental health support. That is significant. We also know that it helps anyone experiencing a period of poor mental health to talk. From speaking to organisations such as Merthyr and the Valleys Mind in my constituency, I know how important it is to have that opportunity to talk to someone. That is hugely important in the context of work colleagues, so for employers to treat support for mental health on a parity with physical health would be a big step forward. As we have heard a number of times during the debate, talking would also help raise awareness across society and help in some way to end the stigmas of the past.

We know that periods of mental ill health can affect anyone, regardless of age, gender or background. We know that there are serious issues with post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental health issues in our armed forces. We know that the issue affects a lot of men, particularly young men. Suicide is still the biggest cause of death for men under 45. If there was more awareness, particularly in workplaces, and especially those that are male-dominated, it would do much to support those suffering from mental ill health and provide an opportunity to intervene at an early stage.

Having more support for mental health in the workplace makes sense from a financial perspective, as workplace mental health issues cost the UK economy billions of pounds a year. However, while the financial position is of concern, the cost to individuals, their families and their quality of life is much more concerning. We know that some 300,000 people with long-term mental health conditions lose their jobs every year. Left untreated, mental ill health impacts on a person's relationships with friends and family and ultimately their quality of life. As I have highlighted, many have said in recent years that mental health should have the same focus as physical health, although for a variety of reasons that does not yet appear to be happening.

As we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Wavertree, the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 made it a legal necessity for workplaces to train someone in medical first aid. If we are to have parity of mental and physical health, we need to make changes. As the motion states, the Government should change the law to provide a clear direction to employers regarding their responsibility not only for physical health but for mental health.

Workplaces would benefit from having trained mental health first aiders. It would provide not only a financial benefit to the economy, but a positive impact on many people's wellbeing. I hope the Government will take note and act quickly.

2.16 pm

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) on securing this debate, and I thank her for setting the scene so well. I thank right hon. and hon. Members from all parts of the Chamber for their valuable contributions. I echo the comments of others in the Chamber about what a joy it is to have a debate on a subject on which we can all agree. We agree on the strategy and the way forward. I am reminded of the programme I watch on a Sunday night—"Call the Midwife". Perhaps others watch it, too. There is always a real tragedy at the beginning of the programme, but at the end, things always turn out well. I hope that Brexit turns out the same. We will see how it goes.

Most of us in the Chamber have a good understanding of the impact that mental health issues have on people's emotional and physical state. In the short term, mental health problems alter personality traits and the behaviour of individuals. In the long term, they can lead to suicidal thoughts. In the worst-case scenario, they can eventually drive a person to commit suicide. There were 318 suicides registered in Northern Ireland in 2015, which was the highest since records began in 1970. People often have trouble coping with mental health issues, which of course will translate into their work life. Mental health cannot be compartmentalised. That is not the key to working and living with mental health problems.

**Mr Kevan Jones:** It is too tempting not to intervene on the hon. Gentleman. Is he aware—I am sure he is—that Northern Ireland has a particular issue? When I was a Minister in the Ministry of Defence, I was shocked to see that even though the violence of the troubles was 20 or 30 years ago, there is still a legacy of mental illness from those times.

**Jim Shannon:** The right hon. Gentleman has obviously had sight of my notes, because I was going to refer to that point later. He is absolutely right. The 30-year terrorist campaign has a legacy, and it affects us. I will mention that in my comments.

When I was first elected in 2010, I took in a new part of my constituency, Ballynahinch, which I very quickly found out had some serious problems in relation to suicides. They were mostly among young people, and unfortunately they seemed to be cluster suicides, if I can use that terminology. A number of young people took their lives, but the community very quickly reacted in Killyleagh and Ballynahinch. Church groups, community groups and interested individuals came together and



addressed those issues. With Government Departments, they helped to reduce the level of suicides. It was particularly stressful to be confronted with that as an MP so early in his parliamentary term.

One in six workers suffer from anxiety, depression and unmanageable stress each year, causing 74% of people with a mental health problem to take more than a year out of work. In 2015, 18 million days were lost to sickness absence caused by mental health conditions. Mental health issues affect both the work and the lifestyle of countless people. Urgent action must be taken to educate employers about the difficulties that result from mental illnesses, mainly to help those who are struggling in the workplace but also to benefit those employers, for whom that may mean cost outlays. It follows that not only is a happier worker a more productive worker, but there should be a natural decrease in sickness periods. Other Members have mentioned that.

If employers are to take steps to promote and improve people's wellbeing in their workplaces, they need to be able to identify an instance in which someone may be struggling with mental health problems, but it is not always easy to do so. I understand that, because I have talked to many people who seem to be smiley, jokey and happy, and may be the life and soul of the party, but when they go home they are very different. Sometimes we do not really know what is happening. In the workplace, there needs to be someone who can see through the façade to the real person underneath.

Some 49% of workers said that they would not be comfortable disclosing a mental health issue at work. Others in the workplace should be educated to ensure that they can recognise individuals who are dealing with such problems. They should be trained in mental health issues—and that should include mental health first aid—so that the workplace can become a positive environment.

Given that two in five employers admit that they have seen a rise in mental health problems, it is important for workplaces to foster a culture of support and openness for those needing help, making them feel reassured about seeking assistance from fellow employees. The Scottish Association for Mental Health, backed by the Scottish Government, has adopted a programme on physical activity. I can say with all honesty and sincerity that the Scottish Government, and their Health Department in particular, lead on health issues in general, including mental health issues. I know that the hon. Member for Glasgow South West (Chris Stephens) will probably mention this, but I think it important for us to recognise good practice wherever it may be, and I hope that we can replicate it in other parts of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Better together, that is what I always say.

I believe that the Department for Work and Pensions must take the lead, and that all workplaces should be supplied with a mental health toolkit as standard practice. It should be issued not just to those who request it, but to all who are paying tax for a business. That could be modelled on the content of the current publications by Public Health England, Business in the Community and the Samaritans—what a good job they do to address these issues. Every one of us will know what really tremendous work they do in our constituencies, and I cannot praise the volunteers highly enough. To engage employers to participate in initiatives such as “Time to

Change” and be educated further on the subject of mental health, there must be a move from the Department, and help must be garnered from it.

It has been suggested that as well as becoming involved with mental health organisations, companies should review their absence policies and make keeping-in-touch arrangements, as evidence suggests that 12.7% of all sickness absence days in the UK can be attributed to mental health conditions. There must be tools to enable employers to create an employee assistance programme. I have read research indicating that in the few businesses that use such a programme, 25% of employees say that their organisation encourages staff to talk openly about their mental health issues. Research shows that the more people do that, the easier it becomes to deal with their problems. We are always hearing that “it's good to talk”, and that is so true, but many of the people we meet may not have anyone to talk to.

Such programmes not only help the individuals who are suffering with mental health problems, but benefit companies. Better mental health support in the workplace can save UK businesses up to £8 billion per year. If we do the job right we can save money, and so can the businesses, because they will have a happier and more productive workforce.

Three quarters of all mental health problems are established by the age of 24, when people are entering long-term careers. That is another factor that we should recognise at that early stage. As many as 300,000 people a year lose their jobs because companies are not sure how to provide the help and support that they need. In the past year, 74% of people have felt stressed as they have been overwhelmed or unable to cope owing to the demands of their career. Managers should be able to spot the signs of common mental health conditions, but that happens only when they receive dedicated training. Others have referred to the need for such knowledge of what is happening. Many managers are blind to, or uneducated about, the symptoms of mental illnesses, and it is all too easy in the busy working world to be consumed by a goal and not to see the elements that are in play around us. We would never send an engineer into a dangerous environment without the necessary training, so why should we assume that companies can automatically notice when an employee's health is plummeting?

I am sure that you, Mr Deputy Speaker, are like the rest of us in this regard: we often eat at our desks. However, that does not mean that everyone else has to do it. We have to recognise that sometimes it is good to get away from our desks and go for a walk, and have our minds on other things for a time. The benefits of regular breaks and eating lunch away from desks, and creating a positive workplace state of mind, should be promoted to those who have a busy life and seek to cram things into every second at the risk of their mental health.

As we heard a moment ago from the right hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones), Northern Ireland in particular is struggling with the issue of mental health owing to a lack of resources. When compared with 17 other countries, Northern Ireland was shown to have the second highest rates of mental health illness, 25% higher than those in England. That is certainly largely due to 30 years of the troubles and the legacy of the terrorist campaign, but it is more than that. We

[*Jim Shannon*]

must address those issues and do better in enabling people to lead high-quality lives with the tools to handle stress and daily life. A massive step in that regard would be creating mental first aid as standard in workplaces.

Workplace mental ill health costs employers about £26 billion a year, and many places are struggling to find the large amount of money that is needed to improve their awareness of mental health. A report for the NHS found that mental illness accounts for nearly half of all ill health in people younger than 65, and that only a quarter of people in need of treatment currently get it.

This is a health issue, but it is important for four Departments to come together with a strategy, because it is not just about health. It should also involve the DWP, the Department for Education and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. Companies need to be given more support and funds, as does the NHS to help those who are suffering in the long term, as it is currently unable to provide the materials needed. Action needs to be taken, because the number of sick days due to mental health issues is increasing rapidly owing to negative work environments: 89% of employees with mental health problems say that it affects their work lives hugely. That needs to change, for the betterment not only of business and the economy but of those who are struggling with mental health issues.

I look forward to the comments of both the Minister and the shadow Minister. I am convinced—as, I think, is everyone in the Chamber—that we shall hear a positive and helpful response from the Minister.

2.27 pm

**Chris Stephens** (Glasgow South West) (SNP): Let me first praise the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) for securing the debate and for making an excellent speech. Let me also congratulate her, because she may well be the first person to have a motion passed in the House this week: every other motion seems to have been voted down.

I want to talk about some of my personal experiences. Before I came to this place, I was a trade union activist. When dealing with mental health issues, I had to remind employers of the provisions of the Equality Act 2010 and reasonable adjustments, and to make them understand the nature of a particular condition and what can happen as a result of it. I used to encourage managers to ensure that first aiders were aware that someone might have such a condition. In particular, they needed to know if an employee was taking a specific medication because of the possible side effects. Medication can have an impact on behaviour and performance.

The hon. Member for Dagenham and Rainham (Jon Cruddas) produced some shocking statistics on issues such as dismissal. In my view, much of that is due to aggressive management policies on attendance, not just in the private sector but in the public sector. When someone has been absent for a certain number of days, that can trigger an interview leading to the removal of sick pay or other forms of disciplinary action. That makes people go into what has been referred to as presenteeism. People also feel that, because they have been off for a certain number of days, if they are off

another day, they will get the treatment. If we are going to have attendance management policies, they should be based on facts; they should not be aggressive and done just on the basis of trigger points.

I associate myself with the remarks by the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) about bullying. Bullying and harassment in the workplace is an issue and impacts on people's mental health. So I strongly support the motion's proposals to ensure that first aiders have adequate training. That is very much encouraged in trade unionised workplaces. I know hon. Members across the House will agree with me that trade unions play a vital role in trade unionised workplaces, ensuring that an employee with a mental health condition is looked after and given the proper support and that employers understand their conditions. This reminds me that one of the favourite books in the Glasgow Unison office was the "MIMS" book, which explained every piece of medication and their side effects. It was used as a tool to explain to employers the behaviour of those on medication or with a mental health condition and other problems that can arise, and to explain how to address those in a way that was fair and appropriate.

The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) encouraged me to promote the health service in Scotland and the 10-year mental health strategy, and I will talk briefly about that. Between January and June last year, there were a number of courses. There were 43 one-day courses on healthy workplaces for NHS managers, and 552 people were trained. There was training for trainers; 28 people are now delivering more courses. There were eight workshops on resilience and wellbeing; 97 people were trained on that. There were also three managers' competency workshops; 36 people were trained on that.

In Scotland there is a 10-year mental health strategy. It seems to be working. Out of 40 actions, 13 are complete and 26 are progressing and ongoing. These training programmes are vital, as the hon. Gentleman said. The workplace training programmes deal with topics such as surviving the pressures of work-related stress, managing organisational stress and getting the Health and Safety Executive on board with those arrangements.

There is an opportunity for the UK Government to look at their good work plan as well in relation to ensuring that mental health issues in the workplace are dealt with appropriately. Issues to do with insecure work are not yet being tackled by the Government. That can have a real impact on someone's mental health and wellbeing. There are issues about how the DWP deals with some of these issues, which I hope the Government will look at. For example, someone who refuses a zero-hours contract job could be sanctioned under universal credit, but if someone is on a legacy benefit they would not be sanctioned. The pressures of the DWP system of benefit conditionality can often be punitive.

**Karen Lee** (Lincoln) (Lab): I often get letters from people on zero-hours contracts. They might, for argument's sake, get up at 5 o'clock in the morning and spend an hour cycling to a job only to find out there is not a day's work for them. That puts them under such stress and causes so much more anxiety, and pressures their mental health. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that this is just one of the drawbacks of zero-hours contracts? We hear

such a lot about how wonderful it is that everybody is in work, but if we scratch the surface we see it is not actually quite that simple.

**Chris Stephens:** I strongly agree. I do not know if the hon. Lady has had the opportunity to look at the Workers (Definition and Rights) Bill, which I have introduced and deals with some of those issues. People on zero-hours contracts or working parents turn up at work with an expectation that they are going to be working for a certain amount of hours—four, perhaps—and are told they will instead be working for eight hours and then have to deal with childcare; or they turn up and, as the hon. Lady said, find they are not required that day. That must have an impact on someone’s mental health and wellbeing.

I ask the Government to look at the punitive measures in terms of benefit conditionality. That is also a recipe for people to be recycled into unsuitable, potentially exploitative work just to avoid a sanction.

I support the motion. I ask the Government to look at these issues about the clear and direct impact on the mental health of workers and possibly changing some policies in that regard. I thank all Members who have spoken so far for their excellent contributions.

2.35 pm

**Julie Cooper (Burnley) (Lab):** I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) on securing this debate and pay tribute to her for the excellent work she does in this area. I also thank the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) and the hon. Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer) for helping to secure this important debate, and particularly pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman for sharing his personal experiences, which are very powerful. My mother suffered with OCD all her life and regularly said to me, “If I had a damaged leg I would have got help and sympathy, and there would have been no stigma attached.” So I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising this issue.

Debates such as this with a particular end in sight—to raise awareness and end stigma—are important. I join with Members, in this wonderful spirit of co-operation in all corners of the House, in saying to anyone out there suffering with mental ill health and to their family members that many of us in this place are sincerely dedicated to effecting good change.

We have heard powerful contributions from all sides of the House on the impact that mental health issues can have on people’s lives, and indeed on our economy. For the one in four people who will experience mental health issues, there are serious consequences in all areas of their lives, including at work. It is estimated that 5 million workers, nearly one in seven, are experiencing a mental health condition. Women in full-time employment are twice as likely to have a common mental health problem as full-time employed men, and 300,000 people with a long-term mental health condition lose their job every year. The human cost of this is hard to calculate; these are people who have lost their livelihoods because they cannot get the support they need.

While the human cost is difficult to quantify, we do know that there is an enormous economic cost overall. For the whole of the UK it costs up to £99 billion a

year. The Mental Health Foundation found that over 12% of sick days in the UK can be attributed to mental health conditions. The Health and Safety Executive reported that 15.4 million working days are lost each year to work-related stress, anxiety and depression—more than are lost to physical ill health. Mental ill health hits smaller businesses hard, and research from the insurance sector found that it costs small and medium-sized enterprises £30,000 in recruitment costs, training time and lost productivity to replace a staff member. There is another side to presenteeism. As the TUC points out, UK workers with mental health problems also contribute to the economy, adding £226 billion to the UK’s GDP in 2016 alone. They are contributing despite living with mental ill health, so it is only right, at the very least, that society gives something back to them. Despite them often suffering illness, their work supports our economy, so our society must support them.

Mental health does not exist in isolation. It is fundamentally bound up with how we live our lives, and the stresses and strains of modern life take their toll. In my constituency of Burnley, one in five people report feeling anxious or depressed, which is higher than the national average. As many Members have said, incidents of suicidal thoughts and outright acts of suicide have risen worryingly since 2000, with the number of people who self-harm more than doubling over the intervening period. Workplace conditions can be responsible for such strains. Indeed, three quarters of adults say that they are stressed about work. As a former employer, I say to employers out there that the best thing that they can do to improve productivity and profitability is to invest in the health and wellbeing of their workforce, including mental health, which is paramount. Sadly, mental health support is severely lacking for many workers and access to services that prevent mental health problems is getting worse.

Mental health services are still a long way from reaching the promised parity of esteem. Mental health trusts have less money to spend on patient care in real terms than they did in 2012. That underfunding is leading to delays for people who are trying to access services. In some areas of the country, people are waiting four months to access basic talking therapies—four months without the support that they need to stay in work. When it comes to mental health in the workplace, as research from MIND and others has shown, we can actually put a number on the cost of failing to fund mental health services adequately. Poor mental health at work is estimated to cost the taxpayer between £24 billion and £27 billion a year, which is made up of NHS costs, benefit costs and lost tax revenue. Those costs can be avoided if our mental health services are properly funded to give people the support they need.

Just as work can be the cause of stress and, ultimately, mental ill health, work is also where mental ill health can manifest itself. Today’s discussion has shown us one way that support at work could be provided. Mental health first aid, much like physical first aid, can provide a first port of call when mental health problems arise. We have heard already today about the value of early intervention. My hon. Friends the Members for Dagenham and Rainham (Jon Cruddas) and for Liverpool, Wavertree raised specific examples of where companies have invested proactively in employing and training mental first aid



[Julie Cooper]

workers, and we heard that Thames Water has seen a three quarters reduction in sickness absence related to mental health issues.

It is clear that mental health first aid can work, but there is no duty on employers to provide it. Labour's view is that there should be. In 2012, the Government encouraged employers to offer mental health first aid, but we still have not seen it taken up as widely as it should have been. The amount of Government resources for mental health first aid training is clearly not enough to embed mental health first aid. Last year, the review of workplace mental health by Paul Farmer and Lord Stevenson recommended that all employers put in place systems to support workers with mental health conditions. As we have heard today, mental health first aid can play a key role in that. At the time, the Government accepted the recommendations of the Farmer and Stevenson review, including those about the role of employers. Will the Minister tell us what action the Government are taking to put the recommendations into practice?

The debate today has called for a change in the law, and Labour joins that call. The Government must come forward with proposals to support employers to ensure that mental health first aid is provided. This matter is too important to be left to the good will of employers. Legislation is required.

Mental health first aid alone will not be enough, however. Its role will also be to refer people on to professional mental health services when that is appropriate. Mental health first aid is not a solution when the wait for professional mental health services could be months. It must be part of a wider network of support, alongside clinical services that give people appropriate and timely support. If this Government are serious about tackling the burning injustice of mental ill health, there must be less tinkering around the edges, and a comprehensive new system of support that can intervene as soon as possible when problems emerge. The human cost and economic impact of what is becoming a mental health epidemic can no longer be ignored, and the Government must demonstrate that they take this seriously and act now.

2.45 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Jackie Doyle-Price):** I should like to thank all the contributors to the debate. It has been marked by a lot of enthusiasm and passionate advocacy in support of improved mental health. In particular, I would like to pay tribute to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger), the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) and my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer) for securing the debate and for bringing their characteristic ambitious agendas into play, alongside their well-informed and passionate advocacy on behalf of them. It can often be challenging to respond to all three of those Members, but on this occasion I have really enjoyed listening to their contributions and I agreed with much of what they said.

We all share the same objective, which is to secure support as early as possible for people who are suffering mental ill health and, more specifically, to enable more

people with mental ill health to stay in work. That is good for their health—as long as it is good work and they are well supported—but it is also good for the economy when more people are encouraged to work. That was clearly illustrated by the figures cited by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree for those receiving care from Mersey Care, which bring into stark relief the size of the challenge. They show that only 3% of those patients are in work, which is something we should all reflect on. It underlines the importance of ensuring that we get better at supporting people who are suffering mental health challenges and at encouraging them into work.

I am pleased to be joined on the Front Bench by the Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work, my hon. Friend the Member for Truro and Falmouth (Sarah Newton). She is also responsible for the Health and Safety Executive, which obviously has a big role to play in this agenda. She has been listening carefully to all Members' contributions today. She and I are united in an objective to ensure that we keep more people with all kinds of disability in work, and that we get those who are currently excluded from the workforce into it. We have a wide package of measures that we are taking forward in that regard, some of which have been referred to today.

The Government are committed to building a country that works for everyone, and that must include ensuring that disabled people and people with mental health conditions can go as far as their talents can take them. Too many people with a mental health condition are unable to do that, and that is a burning injustice that must be tackled. As the right hon. Member for North Norfolk pointed out, people who are unemployed for more than 12 weeks are between four and 10 times more likely to suffer from depression and anxiety. That statistic illustrates why it is good for society, as well as for the individual, that we tackle this issue. The good news is that staying in or returning to work after a period of mental ill health really does aid mental health recovery. It really does make perfect sense.

**Norman Lamb:** The Minister will be aware of the objective in the five year forward view to double the number of people who get access to individual placement and support. Can she indicate how that programme is going? If she cannot do so now, will she write to me?

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** I can say that we are making progress, but I would prefer to write to the right hon. Gentleman with more details, if I may. I have seen some of that individual placement and support in operation, and it is hugely inspiring. In those mental health trusts that are giving one-to-one support, people are finding that the reward and discipline of going to work really does aid their recovery, even in some of the most challenging cases. I will write to the right hon. Gentleman with more information on that.

**Mr Kevan Jones:** Will the Minister liaise with colleagues in the Department for Work and Pensions? As I said to the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb), voluntary work is a helpful access point for people who want to get back into work, and the current limitations on people being allowed to do certain voluntary work hinder some who want to take that route into work.

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** I completely agree with the right hon. Gentleman, and my hon. Friend the Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work agrees too. Employers are often risk-averse about using voluntary work, and we in government need to ensure that we are making it easy for people to apply for those routes. My hon. Friend says she will write to the right hon. Gentleman on that matter.

A number of points have been raised in this debate. On the issue of mental health first aid in schools, I can advise the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mary Creagh), who is not in her place, that the Government have a commitment to ensuring that at least one member of staff in each primary and secondary school receives mental health first aid training. We have currently reached 1,537 schools with that training.

I am delighted to hear from my constituency neighbour, the hon. Member for Dagenham and Rainham (Jon Cruddas). Like him, I am well aware of much of Ford's activity, and it is good to hear what it has been doing in this regard.

My hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous) highlighted the work of St John Ambulance in promoting mental health first aid and, again, I commend its work. The right hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) made the excellent point that this is a cross-governmental issue. I have mentioned DWP, but the five year forward view carries the message that this issue must be tackled across Government, and we remain focused on delivering exactly that.

The Prime Minister has set out an ambitious set of reforms to improve mental health. We have heard references to parity of esteem, and I reiterate to all hon. Members that the fact that parity of esteem is written into legislation is not the end; it is just the start. The truth is that, in delivering true parity of esteem, we have to manage a programme of behavioural change throughout our services and, indeed, throughout society. Frankly, none of us should ever be complacent about whether we have achieved it. Parity of esteem will take a lot of time, and it is great to see just how much energy is being applied to it.

We have heard a number of references to Time to Change, and it is clear that the cultural transformation in society has been massively aided by Time to Change and that destigmatisation is really helping with delivery. None the less, we have a big role to play in service provision. We are creating 21,000 new posts in the mental health workforce. We are implementing the first waiting time ambitions for mental health so that people have faster access to the care they need. We have recently published the first review of mental health legislation in a number of years. And, of course, we are massively improving early intervention by investing in more services in schools.

We are investing more through the 10-year plan, and the Prime Minister has announced that the NHS budget will grow by over £20 billion. In turn, in the long-term plan published last week, the NHS confirmed that there will be a comprehensive expansion of mental health services, with an additional £2.3 billion in real terms by 2023-24. The ambition is that that will give 380,000 more adults access to psychological therapies and 345,000 more children and young people greater support in the next five years.

We are ambitious, although I do not pretend that, by putting it into law, we have suddenly achieved parity of esteem. We are on a journey in how we commission and deliver services and, of course, in how we behave across society. There is still much to do, not least in the workforce. Destigmatising mental ill health is contributing to understanding and challenging the prejudice and stigma, but we still need to do more.

We have heard much reference to the Farmer-Stevenson review. The Prime Minister appointed them to advise us on how employers can better support all employees to remain and thrive in work. We set out a broad-ranging strategy further to support disabled people and people with health conditions, including mental health ones, to enter into and thrive in work. We did that through our response, where we accepted all those recommendations; indeed, the leadership council to deliver that met only this morning. The work and health unit, which I lead jointly with the Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work, will be overseeing progress on those recommendations, which range from short-term deliverables to longer-term reform. That will include looking at potential legislation in due course.

The key Thriving at Work recommendation is that all employers, regardless of size or industry, should adopt six core standards that lay the basic foundations for an approach to workplace mental health. The review also recommended that all public sector employers, and private sector companies with more than 500 employees, deliver mental health enhanced standards. Those include increasing transparency and accountability through internal and external reporting of their performance against those standards. The Prime Minister accepted those recommendations that apply across the civil service and NHS England. The civil service, as an employer of 420,000 employees, really should be leading by example on this. Equally, the NHS, as both the provider of services and as a large employer, should be leading the way.

The Government have also taken action to work with partners to develop a framework to support organisations to record and report their performance on disability and mental health in the workplace. Last November, we published that voluntary framework, which highlights transparency and reporting as the effective levers in driving the cultural change we need to develop. But we know that every line manager, supervisor and leader has a crucial role to play in supporting employees to stay well and stay in work, which is why the work and health unit is also working with partners to identify the support and skills that line managers need, across all sizes of organisation, to create inclusive and supportive workplace environments. So we are exploring how we in government can share those examples of best practice, so that all employers get better at this. Many of them will recognise that they need the tools to do the job, because no one knows what they do not know, and we in government have a role to play in spreading that good practice.

We recognise that mental health first aid has a role to play in the Government's ambitious strategy to transform workplace mental health. Mental health first aid is a helpful training resource to educate people to care not only for others, but for themselves. It also helps to improve understanding about mental health and mental illness; to build that culture and better understanding within organisations; and to encourage people to stay

[Jackie Doyle-Price]

well and get the support they need to manage any mental health symptoms and problems. I was also struck by what the right hon. Member for North Norfolk said: on its own, it is not enough. We would not want to have legislation that became a floor of service in mental health.

A number of references have been made to Thames Water and its success in delivering mental health first aid, all of which is true, but mental health first aid is just part of its embedding a supportive workplace culture for those with mental ill health; it is not the only tool that the company uses. It has introduced mental health first aiders across the business, but it has also expanded its internal clinical occupational health team to support the business in case management, health screening, health surveillance and well-being. The occupational health team now processes an average of 100 referrals a month, 98% of which are for non-work-related issues. Up to 80% of the cases referred every month are for those still in work, which shows that people are accessing longer-term care; this is about keeping them in work, rather than just their getting mental health first aid. We need to be careful about honing in on one simple measure of supporting mental health in the workplace, rather than encouraging a more holistic culture of supporting wellbeing.

I can also advise the House that the Health and Safety Executive, working together with Mental Health First Aid England, has recently published revised guidance for employers on their compliance with the Health and Safety (First-Aid) Regulations 1981. The guidance clarifies for employers the existing requirement to consider mental health alongside physical health when undertaking a first aid needs assessment. The findings from the needs assessment will help direct employers to decide what measures they need to put in place.

The advice of the Health and Safety Executive is that the Stevenson and Farmer review recommendations go way beyond the provision of mental health first aid. The Government's view is that the best way to secure employer action, to enable those experiencing mental ill health to remain and thrive in work, is to engage with employers to adopt a comprehensive approach based on the Thriving at Work mental health standards. Mental health first aid is not an exclusive way of delivering employer action, but it can form part of it.

To improve information and advice for employers, we are supporting Mind and the Royal Foundation to continue developing their mental health at work online gateway, which we launched on 11 September 2018. The online platform is aimed at employers, senior management and line managers but is accessible to anyone, and it helps them to find help and support for colleagues, to challenge stigma and to learn more about mental health in the workplace. The guided search tool helps with the development of toolkits, blogs and case studies to help everyone in their journey to improve the workplace. Mental Health at Work is a UK-wide initiative that supports people across all workplaces, in all sectors, of all backgrounds, and in all regions.

In conclusion, by working with our partners, including health professionals and employers, this Government are working to change culture and professional practice fundamentally, to tackle poor mental health and to

ensure that disabled people and people with health conditions can reach their full potential, not only in the workplace but across society as a whole.

I thank all Members for their contributions and for their interest in the subject. We need to continue to discuss the issues and to encourage good practice. We have heard many good examples today, but we need to consider debating the issues so that we genuinely foster a culture at work that supports people with disabilities and with mental ill health to get jobs and to stay in work.

3.2 pm

**Luciana Berger:** I want to thank and put on the record my gratitude to colleagues who have joined us and made contributions this afternoon. I appreciate that we are extremely busy with Brexit proceedings, so I am most grateful to everyone who has made the time to be here for this important debate. I also thank those who have made interventions. In particular, I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer) and my right hon. Friend the Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb)—I call them friends because we have worked very closely together on this and other related mental health matters—as well as my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham and Rainham (Jon Cruddas), the hon. Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous), my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Gerald Jones) and the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), and the Front Benchers, the hon. Member for Glasgow South West (Chris Stephens), my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Julie Cooper) and the Minister, for their responses.

I hope that my opening speech and the personal, passionate and informed speeches of other Members on both sides of the House have made clear that there is a robust moral, social and economic case for a change to the law to place on employers a legal obligation to make provision for employees to be trained in mental health first aid, in addition to the training they already have to provide for physical health first aid. That is the crux of the issue. If we expect and require businesses with 25 employees or more, including in the public and charitable sectors, to train at least one person in physical health first aid, an equal requirement should be extended to the provision of mental health first aid, if we are serious about the principle of equality for mental health.

Having listened closely to the remarks and representations that have been made, I appreciate that this should not be a tick-box exercise. The proposal is not going to fix the many challenges in mental health services and it is by no means a replacement for clinical professionals, who do a very important job, or the only thing that should happen in workplaces. It is an additional measure. I listened carefully to the Minister, who said that our workplaces should have a holistic culture of wellbeing; of course that should be the case, but the proposed provision should not be viewed in isolation.

I, along with the right hon. Member for North Norfolk, the hon. Member for Plymouth, Moor View, and just under 210,000 signatories to the “Where’s Your Head At” petition are asking the Government to enact this legislative change, to expand the legal responsibility of employers to make provision to train employees in mental first aid as well as physical first aid, and to make that positive and decisive step towards ensuring parity



of esteem—parity of esteem was enshrined in law seven years ago in the Health and Social Care Act 2012—between physical and mental health in this country.

I do not think that we can be seen as impatient, as it was seven years ago that that principle was put into law. I and many others see this as one step—not the only step—that we should make. It is just one of the six principles proposed in the Thriving at Work report, which was a really important piece of work that was published one year and three months ago. This is just one step in that suite of tools at the disposal of businesses and organisations to make that difference.

I say to the Minister that it was the manifesto commitment of her party to bring forward this change. Having listened carefully to what she has said today, I can say that, obviously, she has not made that commitment yet, but, going forward, I urge her to make that change in the near future as it is one thing that could really make a difference.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House notes that the UK is facing a mental health crisis; further notes that, according to the Independent Review into Mental Health in the Workplace 2017 commissioned by the Prime Minister, each year 300,000 people with long-term mental health conditions lose their job; recognises that Centre for Mental Health research shows presenteeism from mental health is estimated to cost the economy £15.1 billion per annum; acknowledges this same research shows it costs the economy £8.4 billion per annum for mental health absenteeism; considers that a recent poll by OnePoll found that 38 per cent of people reported being stressed about work; observes that the Health and Safety Act 1974 made it a legal necessity for workplaces to train someone in medical first aid; and calls on the Government to change this law via secondary legislation to provide clarity that an employer's first aid responsibilities cover both physical and mental health and to add a requirement for workplaces to train mental health first aiders.

## Children's Social Care

*[Relevant documents: First Report of the Education Committee, Fostering, HC340, and the Government Response, Cm 9662.]*

3.6 pm

**Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered children's social care in England.

First, let me declare my interest in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. Secondly, let me say how delighted I am that we are actually here to debate this issue—the debate has been delayed twice, so this is our third attempt—and that we have some people here to listen as well. It is wonderful, after the stressful week that we have had, that we have two excellent debates this afternoon on really worthwhile subjects that affect all of our constituents on a daily basis. This is the sort of bread and butter business that this House should be spending more time on, but I fear that we do not spend enough time on it, and that has been a characteristic, over many years, of children's issues in particular.

I am grateful to the Backbench Business Committee for allowing this debate. This is a wide-ranging subject, and I am sure that there will be contributions on many aspects from children in care, to safeguarding, early intervention and so on.

I am not overstating the case, having followed this issue in Parliament for now more than 18 years, when I say that children's social care services are currently approaching crisis point, if they are not already there in certain parts of the country. I am particularly concerned about the disparities and the differential outcomes between different authorities in different parts of the country. That forms the basis of the report "Storing Up Trouble", which was published last July and produced by the all-party children's group, of which I am Chair. The Minister very kindly contributed to that report and has spoken to our group in response to it. That followed on from the "No Good Options" report in March 2017, which really flagged up huge differentials in the way that our children are being looked after in the care system and beyond across the country. I thank the National Children's Bureau and its officers for the immense amount of work that went into that very commendable report.

However, it was not just that report in isolation. I am afraid that, over the past few months, there has been a plethora of reports and many worthy organisations flagging up concerns about the state of children's social care. Action for Children produced the report, "Revolving Door Part 2: Are we failing children at risk of abuse and neglect?", which revealed that some 23,000 children needed repeated referrals before receiving statutory support to help them with serious issues such as abuse, neglect and family dysfunction. It found a further 13,500 not getting statutory support despite multiple referrals.

**John Howell** (Henley) (Con): Is my hon. Friend as worried as I am about the patchy way in which children are brought into the decisions being made about themselves?

**Tim Loughton:** My hon. Friend raises a very good point. There is certainly differential practice and this is an important issue. In my time in the Department for Education, we were really keen, as subsequent Ministers

[Tim Loughton]

have been, that children in the care system should be at the heart of the considerations of what is best for them, but they actually have quite a good idea of what is best for them as well, so it is really important that they are brought into the decision-making process.

In my time as Minister, I made sure that every local authority in the country—with the exception of the City of London and the Isles of Scilly, where there were no children in care—had a children in care council, made up of children in the care system speaking directly to directors of children's services and councillors about their experiences. I am really pleased that the Government have decided not to do away with independent reviewing officers, who are that important link, consulting children face-to-face and feeding into their care plans.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Tim Loughton:** I am aware that I do not have long to speak, so I will take just two more interventions and then get on with it or else I shall be in trouble with the Chair.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle):** Let me help. I told the hon. Gentleman that he could speak for “around 15 minutes”, so I would not be too upset if he got to 20 minutes. What I am bothered about is when other Members are left with a very short time limit. Who is the hon. Gentleman giving way to, by the way?

**Tim Loughton:** I am giving way to the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon).

**Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP):** I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on bringing this issue forward. From my research on the matter, it seems that there are an additional 15,000 children in need in England since 2017, so it is clear that there is pressure on the system. Does the hon. Gentleman agree—perhaps the Minister could also respond to this point later—that the fact that Northern Ireland has the fewest children in care per capita in the United Kingdom indicates that a dialogue should take place with the devolved Administrations, particularly the Northern Ireland Assembly, to see just how those numbers have been achieved?

**Tim Loughton:** First, I am very grateful for your flexibility on timings, Mr Deputy Speaker.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** As ever.

**Tim Loughton:** Yes, as ever.

I entirely take the point made by the hon. Member for Strangford. In fact, one of the weaknesses of the system is that we do not share best practice enough. When I was the Minister, I tried to get together the children's Ministers from all four parts of the United Kingdom. Of course, we also have Children's Commissioners from all four parts of the United Kingdom, and we ought to meet them and see what they are all doing more often because there are some really good aspects of the care system in Northern Ireland that we could learn from in England, and vice versa.

**Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con):** I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. Does he agree that one of the major barriers to children and young people

exercising their rights under the UN convention on the rights of the child to be involved in decisions around their own care is difficulty in accessing the content of their personal files, and that this issue needs to be addressed across the country?

**Tim Loughton:** Gosh. I am afraid that my hon. Friend has got me on to a subject that is an issue for an entire whole-day Adjournment debate in itself, so may I say that he raises a very good point but that I have quite enough to say without straying down that important, though slightly esoteric, pathway?

There have been other reports in recent months. The Children's Society published its “Crumbling Futures” report, which highlighted that almost 60,000 children aged 16 and 17 are in receipt of support as a child in need, but that as many as 46% of those referred to children's services did not meet the threshold for support. I am particularly concerned about those who are just below that intervention threshold, who do not feature in any of these numbers and are not getting timely support when they need it.

There have been numerous reports from the Children's Commissioner, and we have had the Narey review on fostering. The Select Committee on Education has produced its own reports and we have had a Government response. My hon. Friend the Member for Telford (Lucy Allan) secured a debate on the Care Crisis Review, which was published last year and raised some concerning things about the state of the care system. In October, a report from the Education Policy Institute found that the number of referrals to specialist children's mental health services has risen by no less than 26% over the last five years, but that 24.2% of the children referred for support had been turned away.

**Ellie Reeves (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab):** The hon. Gentleman talks about the number of reports. In 2016, Bromley's children's services were judged to be “inadequate” by Ofsted. Following an inspection in November, the council has now received “good” in all areas and “outstanding” in one area. These improvements are no doubt due to tremendous hard work, particularly by frontline staff in Bromley. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, in the light of all these reports, children's social care needs to be supported by continuous and comprehensive funding to sustain the current levels of service?

**Tim Loughton:** I will come on to that. Obviously funding is a factor in this. I remember that in my time Bromley was always an exceptional council. I learned many interesting things about volunteering with children in Bromley. There was a pioneering service where volunteers worked alongside social workers helping children who were the subject of safeguarding plans, child protection plans—or whatever they were at that stage—to stay out of the care system. There has also been some very good work in Bromley by former employers in the Department for Education to help to bring that about. There is a combination of factors, but as I have clearly said and will restate in a minute, there is a problem with resources.

The Education Policy Institute also estimated that at least 55,800 children were turned away for treatment in 2017-18, but that is probably an understatement due to the shortage of data.

I am particularly disappointed by a report from the Institute of Health Visiting, headed by the excellent Dr Cheryl Adams CBE, which states that

“despite the health visiting mandate having been extended, it is apparent that universal services for children continue to bear the brunt of public health service cuts”

The health visiting workforce continues to experience significant reductions, with NHS posts falling from 10,309 in October 2015 to 7,982 by April 2018. The report—it is absolutely right—states:

“It is both astonishing and extremely worrying that the visionary work of David Cameron’s government to increase the number of health visitors across England by 50% between 2012 and 2015 could have been undone so quickly. Especially as the evidence for the importance of the very early years impacting on individuals’ future health and wellbeing is now so strong.”

Health visitors are experienced frontline early intervention professionals who often get into the houses of new parents at an early stage and gain their trust. They have been an early warning system for safeguarding problems as well as offering parenting support classes and other mechanisms that parents so often need. We have allowed their numbers to decline, and that is a false economy. I hope that the Minister might pick up on that. Obviously it is a dual responsibility along with the Department of Health.

As chair of the all-party parliamentary group on the first 1,001 days, which deals with perinatal mental health and the crucial first three years from conception to age two when a child’s brain is developing exponentially, I know how important it is to get that early support, particularly for parents who are lacking in some parenting skills. There are safeguarding issues, and it is a false economy not to be doing it. As our report, “Building Great Britons”, showed, the cost of getting perinatal mental health wrong is just over £8 billion a year, and the cost of child neglect in this country is over £15 billion a year. So we are spending £23 billion a year getting it wrong for new mothers and early-age children. That is a heck of an amount of money to be going on failure, frankly.

To put into perspective the importance of children’s services and the apparently relentless increase in demand, the County Councils Network recently reported that counties are responsible for 38% of England’s entire spend on children’s services, and that the councils in England alone overspent by £816 million on protecting vulnerable children just in the last financial year. The Local Government Association—I am grateful for the research that it has done—is predicting a £2 billion shortfall in children’s social care funding by 2020, as the hon. Member for Lewisham West and Penge (Ellie Reeves) said, and it could be as much as £3.1 billion by 2025.

There is good news. I do not want to be such a doom merchant, because the positive work by councils in helping our children and young people to have the best start in life has been illustrated by the latest Ofsted data on children’s social care. It shows that last year the proportion of council children’s services rated good or outstanding has increased, and that more children’s services departments have come out of special measures. I was delighted to hear in the past 24 hours that Birmingham, which has been problematic for so many years—I spent more of my time there than in any other local authority area—is no longer rated inadequate.

There is still a steep hill to climb but there are good signs of progress in that huge authority that has all sorts of challenges.

There is a worrying trend in a recent report from the Nuffield Foundation, “Born into care”. It found that in 2007-08 there were 1,039 babies subject to care proceedings within one week of birth, but by 2016-17 this number had more than doubled to 2,447—an increase of 136%. That suggests to me that we are failing to do enough early to prevent babies from having to be taken into care because their parents are deemed inadequate or a risk to them. If we did more earlier on, those children may be able to stay with their parents.

At this point, I want to pay tribute to the family drug and alcohol courts, which were set up by Nick Crichton, a visionary district judge who did an amazing job of providing support and sensitive intervention services to people—usually single mums—who are at risk of a child or perhaps another child going into the care system and giving them an added chance. It was a tough challenge, but the success of the FDACs more than doubled the likelihood of those children staying with their parents and, more importantly, staying permanently.

That work carries on. There are 10 FDACs around the country, and we hope the Minister will be charitable in extending some funding for the FDAC co-ordination unit at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust. He has been very helpful in discussions there. Nick Crichton sadly died just before Christmas, but his work has affected the lives of hundreds of children, and I want to put on record our tribute to him.

The Children’s Commissioner found in one of her reports that England now spends nearly half its entire children’s services budget on the 75,420 children in the care system in England, leaving the remaining half of spending for the other 11.7 million children, which includes spend on learning disability. The LGA reports that between 2006 and 2016, the number of child protection inquiries undertaken by local authorities rose by no less than 140%, while the number of children subject to a child protection plan almost doubled. More and more children are being taken into care. As I said, there were 75,420 children in care as of March last year, which is up 4% on the previous year.

Barnardo’s found in its report that 16% of the children referred to its fostering services had suffered sexual exploitation. There is increasing evidence—it is what police, teachers and social workers are saying—that there has been an increase in the number of particularly vulnerable children in the last five years. We have more children coming into the care system, often with more complex problems and requiring more intensive support, but we do not have enough going on—we have much less going on—to intervene early to try to keep them out of the care system. I do not think what I said earlier about a potentially impending crisis is an overstatement.

Barnardo’s also found that in 2010, roughly half of children’s services budgets were spent on family support and prevention, while the other half was spent on safeguarding work and children in care. Now, just under a third is spent on family support and prevention, while the remaining two thirds goes on safeguarding and children in care. We are building up problems for the future by not acting earlier.

**Jim Shannon** *rose*—



**Tim Loughton:** Mr Deputy Speaker, you are guiding me to take a further intervention, thereby extending my speech, which I will reluctantly do for the hon. Gentleman.

**Jim Shannon:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way again; he is most gracious. Does he agree that more support should be given to families who are prepared to intervene, to help a child remain cared for by family members and prevent children being taken away from their home and support networks? Does he also agree that foster carers should not have less support and financial help simply because they are not related?

**Tim Loughton:** Again, the hon. Gentleman, who knows this subject well, makes some good points. We need to support foster carers better. We have overhauled the fostering regulations to ensure that foster carers get a better and fairer deal, as well as the foster children themselves. We have also tried to get more people to adopt and take on permanent responsibility for children.

There are also many voluntary organisations. Volunteers can work alongside vulnerable families, particularly where there is an absence of extended family members such as grandparents who, in another family, might be there to support parents or single parents through difficult times. To be fair, the Department for Education's innovation fund and other funds have supported some really good work in the voluntary sector. We all need to work together on this, and it starts at home, but if some of the things that many of us take for granted are not in place at home, there are other ways of providing them before the state has to step in and become the parent. We need to be more flexible and imaginative. I am going to race through my remaining pages before you say I am out of time, Mr Deputy Speaker, but I am delighted by the extent of interest from colleagues here today.

Crucially, there is a good deal of evidence to show that funding pressures are having a disproportionate impact on some of the most deprived areas. I want to pay tribute to Professor Paul Bywaters of the University of Huddersfield, who gave a lot of evidence to our all-party group inquiry, for the work he undertook together with Professor Brid Featherstone of the University of Huddersfield and Professor Kate Morris of the University of Sheffield. If I may quote from some of his notes to the inquiry, Professor Bywaters said:

"Children in the most deprived 20% of neighbourhoods in England...were over 8 times more likely to be either on a Child Protection Plan or be Looked After in the care system...than a child in the least deprived 20%."

That absolutely concurs with the all-party group's finding. He also said that he was worried about the paucity of data to provide solid evidence for what we need to do to address this problem. He said:

"The complete absence of any systematic national data about the socio-economic and demographic circumstances of the parents of children in contact with children's services is a key problem in analysing the factors that influence demand for children's services. Collecting such data should be an urgent priority to underpin policy, service management and practice."

That is one of the key recommendations from the all-party group report.

It is a false economy not to be investing in children's social care as early on as possible. As I have said, that starts at conception, particularly when there are vulnerable parents who have mental health problems or have had

poor parenting experiences themselves. This needs to be addressed in the comprehensive spending review. It is a classic example of investing to save—to save financially, but also to save the social consequences of children growing up and not being fully contributing members of society.

Some children are at higher risk, and disproportionately so in certain parts of the country according to deprivation and, indeed, ethnicity. We need to get the data to research those differentials and start applying the proper solution. We cannot do so until we have the proper information. We need to return to a much more preventive approach. That was why we invented the early intervention fund when this Government first came to power, but I am afraid its effects have been dissipated and the amount of funds diluted.

I ask the Minister to do his best to make sure that the troubled families programme, the funding for which comes to an end in 2020, is renewed. I want to see a pre-troubled families programme that deals with the first 1,001 days, before such families get on to the radar of local authorities, because of the problems that come with that.

We need to go back to the Munro report—I am glad to see in the Chamber my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Alex Burghart), who took part in that report—and to the unfinished business around early help. We need to share better practice and share research data better. We need to work smarter and more collaboratively. We also need to look after children closer to home, in familiar environments and friends groups, and use kinship care much better than we are now.

This is not just about resources, but about changing the mindset and getting this back as a Government priority. That is why I absolutely welcome the initiative launched last night in this place by Children First to have a Cabinet-level Minister for children, bringing together all these factors.

This is not just something invented in this place. I am delighted to say that, at the G20 summit in Buenos Aires last year, there was the declaration of an initiative for early childhood development. It said:

"We therefore launch the G20 Initiative for Early Childhood Development, determined to contribute to ensuring that all children—with an emphasis on their first 1,000 days"—

one day short—

"are well nourished and healthy, receive proper care, stimulation and opportunities for early learning and education, and grow up in nurturing and enabling environments, protected from all kinds of violence, abuse, neglect and conflict."

This is an international priority. We have a great tradition of looking after the welfare of our children in this country, we just need to get back to making sure that we are doing it sooner and earlier, when we can have the most effect and the maximum benefit. I am sure the Minister will want to take up those challenges.

3.29 pm

**Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab):** I wish to raise several issues today, so I hope hon. Members will bear with me. I am afraid the list got a little longer each time this debate was delayed—it is a good job it is being held today, as who knows how long I would have gone on for otherwise.

It is a pleasure to follow the excellent speech by the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton), and the first part of my contribution will focus on the point he rightly highlighted about the lack of effective early intervention. Hon. Members who were in this place before 2015 may know that I have been a critic of the troubled families programme, but I sincerely believe in early intervention. Working closely with families and having a joined-up approach across different public services is the only way to go, and those were the principles that underlined the programme pioneered and implemented by the previous Labour Government before 2010. Those principles also lie behind the troubled families programme.

It is therefore concerning to know that funding for the troubled families programme and its work across our country—both the good and the bad—is set to end next year, with nothing to replace it in sight. I am sure the Government know that there is support across the House for early intervention if it is properly resourced, managed and measured. My only hope is that the looming disaster of Brexit does not distract from the creation of a replacement programme.

It is important to talk about early intervention, because funding for such programmes has fallen massively even as need is soaring. Some 72% of funding for children's services is now spent on firefighting because children and families are already in crisis, but that funding does not prevent such crises from happening. Early intervention and universal support services have been cut to the bone, with cuts of 60% in each area according to the Children's Commissioner for England. Those cuts include £1 billion from Sure Start and an additional £900 million from services that work with children and young people. Such massive cuts have meant that social workers find it much harder to work with vulnerable children and families early and effectively. Caseloads have undeniably and inexorably increased, leaving much less time available for regular contact and for building up relationships, trust and understanding with families. That exacerbates family problems, leading to poor child development, school exclusions, more children being taken into care, increases in antisocial behaviour and crime, and signs of abuse or neglect being missed until—sadly, sadly, sadly—it is just too late. Last month, Ofsted's national director of social care, Yvette Stanley, pointed out that the cuts are clearly a false economy, and that slashing non-statutory services is

“storing up problems for the future”.

Let me remind the Minister about practical early intervention services that are being cut. They include debt and financial advice services, parenting programmes to help families address the causes of disruptive behaviour—programmes that we know are effective—support for victims of domestic violence, and help for getting mums and children out of abusive situations and allowing them to recover. That now all comes out of the children's services budget, because funding from elsewhere has disappeared.

The list also includes mental health treatment and substance abuse programmes for parents. The Government cannot claim to be pro-family if they continue to remove those forms of support, and the absence of such programmes is driving more and more children into the care of the state. I always try to appeal to what the Government would see as common sense, so let me say

simply that it costs more money to take a child into care than it does to prevent them from going into care. Even with a balanced budget approach, the cuts are a massive mistake.

It is bad enough that resources have been cut so much, but demand has also been rising rapidly. Social security cuts and universal credit are undeniably increasing poverty, and poverty leads to more insecurity and massive stresses within families. Some 1.5 million people in the UK are utterly destitute and unable to afford essentials such as shelter, food, heating or clothing, and that includes 365,000 children. The stresses and strains on families' lives are getting worse because of the Government's failed and continuing austerity policy.

According to the Government's own statistics, 1.5 million more disabled people, 300,000 more pensioners, 400,000 more working-age adults and over half a million more children are in poverty than in 2010. The most shocking rise in poverty has been among children with parents in work. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has worked out that there are 710,000 more children in poverty in working households than in 2010. In-work poverty has actually risen faster than employment in recent years. We are talking about working families, many with lone working parents. Many are working long hours and multiple jobs to get by on low pay, constantly struggling to make ends meet. That means that parents are stressed and that they have less time to spend at home and focus on their children, making sure that everything is okay and creating a family whose health is equal to their love.

The worst consequence of child poverty—child homelessness—has also increased massively. That is a huge difference from when I was a child. My family was cleared from a slum in West Silvertown in 1963. We moved into a beautiful, brand-new two-bedroom flat overlooking the dying docks in east London. It was that flat that gave me everything. It was from that flat that everything else stemmed. My mum and dad had stability. They both worked in local factories to provide for us. That home, however small I sometimes felt it was, gave me the ability to study and to grow with my community. It gave me and my sister the opportunity to thrive.

Today's working class children in the east end have it very different. One hundred and thirty thousand children were homeless over Christmas, an increase of almost 60% in just five years. Ten thousand of those children are stuck in bed and breakfast accommodation, often with a whole family in a single room. Most of the other 120,000 are in temporary accommodation, torn from schools, family and friends, the places they recognise and the support networks they rely on. They often do not even know where their local library is, because they have not been in a place long enough to be able to work it out.

I see the effects of that in my own borough, where I grew up in that secure and safe council flat. Now, appallingly to me, it has the highest level of homelessness in the country. I hear about children having to travel hours each way to school from a different part of the city; families sleeping in dirty, cold, rat-infested rooms; families who have not had a secure, safe place to call a home for year after year after year. How is a child supposed to learn to trust others and feel safe under those conditions? How is a parent supposed to muster the time and energy to engage with a social worker over

[Lyn Brown]

weeks and months, and how is that social worker supposed to create and maintain a relationship when the family is so insecure?

I believe there is a direct relationship between the crisis in children's social care and the increase in extremely serious harm caused by criminal gang exploitation in my constituency and the east of London. If the Government want to reduce serious violence, funding children's services properly is an absolute must. We know that gangs pick on vulnerable children the most. Studies show that poor emotional health at the age of seven is the best predictor of future exploitation by gangs. That means that counselling is one of the most effective ways to prevent children from being exploited. They need to develop resilience.

We know that these children often have undiagnosed special educational needs as well. We should be supporting them, but instead the children and their families are left to struggle on, often alone. Once they reach secondary school, vulnerable children are far more likely to be excluded or off-rolled, increasing the risk of exploitation even more. As we know, exclusions have sky-rocketed by 67% over the past five years. That is the research, but it is also real life. I hear about the consequences from local mums terrified of what has happened to their children. As their MP, I am their last resort. They have already tried everywhere else. I see the same things in the serious case reviews of children who have been tragically and appallingly murdered in gang-related violence. Every review I have seen tells the same story: a vulnerable child; escalating involvement in gang violence; the failure of local agencies to intervene; and opportunities to help not taken. I have absolutely no doubt that cuts to resources are part of the cause.

The case reviews are a statutory responsibility, designed so that lessons can be learned. In summing up, I hope the Minister will tell me the lessons that he and the Department are learning. I have talked about a replacement for the troubled families programme, early intervention, universal preventive services and the cuts, but let us be clear: the crisis in children's services is systemic. It is just as much about the increased stresses and struggles that families are having to go through because this economy, this social security system and this Government frankly do not work for them.

3.41 pm

**Alex Burghart** (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): It is a real honour to be able to talk in this debate and to follow the speakers who have already contributed, particularly my very old friend, the former Children's Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton), with whom I worked between 2008 and 2010. He did not blow his own trumpet enough in his speech. While I would not want to blow his trumpet for him, I might at least acknowledge that he has a trumpet.

The work that my hon. Friend did first as shadow Children's Minister and then as Children's Minister over a long stretch, between 2004 and 2012, created a Conservative policy on children's social work where frankly one had not really existed before. During that time, children's services, particularly children's social work, were under considerable strain following the tragic death of baby P, Peter Connelly. It was clear that the systems governing children's social work were not delivering

for vulnerable families and were not enabling talented social workers on the frontline to give the care that they wanted to give to families and children in need. The work that he did exposed that and developed the idea.

My hon. Friend wrote "No More Blame Game" and, while I was working for him, he produced "Child Protection: Back to the Frontline", which introduced the idea of the Munro review of child protection. That whole-system review was brought in following the 2010 general election and was brilliantly conducted by Professor Eileen Munro from the London School of Economics. It showed how we needed to take a new approach that allowed frontline social workers to be in charge of the work they did, and not governed by central systems, such as the integrated children's system, which was put in place by the former Administration. I put on record my ongoing and continued admiration for the work that my hon. Friend did outside and inside Government. He continues with that work as chair of the all-party parliamentary group for children.

I want to focus on something slightly different from the issues my hon. Friend has run through. Having worked for him, I went to work at Barnardo's and the Office of the Children's Commissioner, the Centre for Social Justice and various places in Whitehall. I looked at fostering, children in care and the root causes of the problems that families in those situations face. It became apparent that, although a great deal of public policy had rightly focused on the needs of children who were in foster care and children who needed to be adopted—another great thing that my hon. Friend did was streamline the adoption process and rapidly increase the number of children who were going into good and loving homes—a large group of children were not in care, but were on the social services' radar. The Children Act 1989 defines them as children in need. They are numerous, they are needy and they absolutely warrant the increased attention that the Government are now giving them.

There are about 75,000 children in care at any one time, but over the course of any one year there are about 400,000 children in need. Recent work by the Department for Education has shown that in any given three-year period there will be more than 1 million children in need at one point or another. Their GCSE results and future employment prospects are extremely limited: in fact, they are often as poor as, or worse than, those of children in care, for the simple reason that children in care have been taken out of their disruptive, dysfunctional homes and—hopefully—placed in stable foster placements or stable children's homes and given a second chance, whereas children in need, many of whose families face acute problems, are left in those disruptive environments.

That group was ignored under successive Governments, which was a policy gap, but I am glad to say that this Government and this Minister have started to fill the hole. The review of children in need is starting to expose issues whose existence my preliminary research had led me to suspect, but which I had not been able to flesh out.

One of the most striking statistics is that 51% of young people who are long-term NEETs—not in education, employment or training for a year after they have left school—will have been either in care or in need at one point in their childhood. Such experiences have lasting scarring effects. If we do not deal with them effectively when we notice them, providing the early intervention services that are necessary to prevent children from



slipping into these categories, we are storing up problems for the future: problems for society, but also severe problems for those individuals.

The solutions are complex, because the reasons why children and families find themselves in such circumstances are themselves complex. The hon. Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown) made many important points, and she was right to identify the scarring effects of poverty, but there are issues besides money that are also important. Some are exacerbated by a lack of money, but some are not. Another striking statistic is that half the children in need in this country are not on free school meals.

**Lyn Brown:** Some of my constituents who are working are not entitled to free school meals for their children. They could well be poorer financially than those who are entitled to free school meals. Free school meals are no longer a proper measure of which child is in poverty. I should be happy to have a conversation with the hon. Gentleman about this over a cup of tea.

**Alex Burghart:** I should be delighted to take the hon. Lady up on that. I know that what she is saying is absolutely right. However, there are also many children in need who have one parent in work and whose other parent has severe mental health problems or an addiction. The difficulty in such families is not solely related to money; it is caused by the fact that an individual has a very severe problem that is not being adequately met by social services.

When we find a child who is in need and on the edge of care, we need to take a holistic look at that child's family. In the past, children's social care sometimes looked very narrowly at how the child was at any one time and not at the immediate environment in which they were living and what could be done to improve it. Indeed, sometimes children ended up in care without their parents being given—or even approached about—the services that were necessary in order to improve that family environment. I would much rather fix the family's problems in order to keep that family together so that the child can grow up in a stable home.

In terms of what can be done, I am glad the Minister has undertaken this work, which is starting to flush out good practice in the system and areas where more work needs to be done. I venture to suggest some things on which we need to focus. We must look at those slightly older children who are moving towards leaving school. In my experience over the years, I have found that additional professional mentoring conducted in and out of school can be highly effective. There is a wonderful programme in the east of London called ThinkForward, which gives long-term mentoring to children in disruptive homes. The presence of a stable adult to give advice, be a shoulder to cry on and be a support in a time of need is invaluable.

**Karen Lee (Lincoln) (Lab):** Child poverty levels in my constituency are really high. We have also had the impact of the full roll-out of universal credit recently. Will the hon. Gentleman acknowledge the impact that UC is having? It is exacerbating the problems that a lot of families are suffering from.

**Alex Burghart:** I am happy to acknowledge that, when families have less money, they can find themselves in debt, which adds to stress and can contribute to poor

mental health. I do not know about the cases the hon. Lady is talking about in her constituency, but I have seen the consequences of people being trapped in problem debt for a long time and not being given help to get out of it. That can certainly be a major problem. That issue is slightly off the subject I was talking about. I hope that, if the hon. Lady is unaware of the ThinkForward programme in the east end of London, she will visit it and promote it.

**Lyn Brown:** I agree that programmes like that in my constituency make a difference, but may I gently say to the hon. Gentleman that additional youth workers and adults for my children to talk to who enable my children to have options and ways out of gang-related activity is what is massively lacking? I made a speech about this just a few weeks ago, if he would like to look at it in *Hansard*.

**Alex Burghart:** I will happily look at it. I hope that Opposition Members will realise that they are agreeing with me and perhaps take a slightly different tone when coming back on me on this subject, because what we are all saying is that it is important for families to have the support they need and for vulnerable children to have the support they need, ideally in home but, if it is too late for that or that cannot be made available, in school.

So what needs to be done? I encourage the Government, local authorities and schools to look at long-term stable mentoring projects for those slightly older children. For other families, as has been raised by other Members, the Troubled Families programme is of profound importance. It got off to a slightly bumpy start but has come to be the mainstay of a lot of local authorities' earlier intervention plans.

When I was in a different job a couple of years ago, I went to see how Camden had completely integrated its Troubled Families programme as part of a spectrum of care running from health visiting all the way through to the most intensive work in children's homes. It would be terrible if those Troubled Families contracts were not renewed in some way, and I have every confidence that the Government will renew them. As we do it, it is important to consider what we mean by troubled families. I would venture to suggest that this group of young people, classified under the Children Act 1989 as children in need, and this large group of families who suffer from poor mental health, addiction and other such strains, are, by definition, troubled families. As I say, many local authorities already take this approach, but I think it would add a coherence to Government policy in this area if the work being done with troubled families in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and that being done with children's social care in the Department for Education were brought together. Some local authorities are very good at merging these approaches. Some are less good. I commend those that are.

**Lyn Brown rose—**

**Alex Burghart:** I can see the hon. Lady trying to get in again. I happily give way.

**Lyn Brown:** This is the last time. As the hon. Gentleman can hear, I am actually listening to his speech. That is why I am so engaged in it. He is absolutely right about the Troubled Families programme. Many parts of the

[Lyn Brown]

country do it very well—Manchester, for example, has totally and utterly integrated its services and done it really well—but other local authorities game the money and take it elsewhere. We need to make sure that our next programme gets proper and effective results.

**Alex Burghart:** I could not agree more. The freedoms given to the Greater Manchester Combined Authority by this Administration have allowed it to become a Petri dish for new ways of doing things, breaking down silo budgets and taking a whole-area approach. I have absolute confidence that the lessons being learned in Manchester will eventually be taken and spread elsewhere. I feel that the hon. Lady made another point other than Manchester that I wanted to come back on.

**Lyn Brown:** Getting results.

**Alex Burghart:** Yes, that was it. Getting the data we need to prove effectiveness is one of those extraordinarily valuable holy grails. Successive Governments have found it very difficult to prove the efficacy of individual programmes, but there is a way forward. In New Zealand a few years ago, the Government brought together a huge amount of personal data through what was known as the integrated data initiative. They spliced together data from social services, housing, tax and so on, and then anonymised it and established ethical rules in advance, so that the data could never be used to find out whether someone had not paid their car tax, for instance. It could never be used against people and could only be used at a community level.

As a result, the New Zealand Government are capable now of effectively performing randomised control trials on all their social impact programmes. They know which programmes to give added investment to and which to wind down. Admittedly, New Zealand is a slightly smaller jurisdiction than the United Kingdom. The combining of data on that sort of scale in the UK is a bigger project, but one that would be unbelievably valuable. I have no doubt that we have the expertise in the Office for National Statistics to do it, and do it well, and I am sure the moment we have it, it will be one of those things we wish we had had long ago.

To conclude, Mr Deputy Speaker—I mean, Madam Deputy Speaker. How very nice to see you there, Madam Deputy Speaker. I was enjoying the company of the Opposition so much I did not notice that your colleague had left and you had arrived. We must consider not just the children with the most acute needs, important though they are and must remain, but young people on the edge of the system who may come in and out of that hinterland many times during their childhoods but might not qualify for the highest level of support.

Before I conclude my remarks completely, I want to dip into one more policy area that I forgot to mention earlier, and this goes back the issue that I was debating with the hon. Member for West Ham. About half of children in need are not eligible for free school meals, which means that about half of children in need do not receive the pupil premium. That has always seemed like a crazy peculiarity. It is laudable that a child whose parents were briefly unemployed six years ago receives the pupil premium, but I would question whether their

need is greater than someone who lives in an abusive home and has been in and out of contact with social services, perhaps over a prolonged period of years. I am a full supporter of the pupil premium programme that this Government introduced in 2011, but as it reaches maturity after eight years it would be worth looking at exactly how that pot is allocated. I would always like it to be a bit bigger, but we also need to consider whether some groups have an eligibility that has not been recognised and could be brought into the system.

We have to think about children who are on the edge, we must consider the needs of their families, and we need to examine the Government programmes and local authority structures that can provide for those families and those children. I have high hopes for the local government financial settlement and for the comprehensive spending review next year, and I am pleased that the Under-Secretary of State for Education, my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi), is here to hear my concerns. I am sure that he will take them forward with the same energy that he has brought to the children in need review in his time in office so far.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** I call Karen Lee.

4.2 pm

**Karen Lee (Lincoln) (Lab):** Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I must admit that I had to look twice as well, because I did not notice the change in Chair—[*Laughter.*] My point is that I did not notice that one person had left and another had come in. [HON. MEMBERS: “Seamless!”] It was a seamless transition.

It is often said that the true measure of any society can be found in how it treats its most vulnerable members. If that is the case, this Government measure up poorly when it comes to the treatment of vulnerable children. This Tory Government have created an entirely avoidable crisis in children's social care. Last year saw the biggest annual increase in children in care since 2010, and councils are now starting 500 child protection investigations every day. Local authorities' inability to cope with the increase in service demand is a direct result of this Government's ideologically driven austerity programme. Since 2010, cuts to local authority funding have resulted in a 40% real-terms decrease in spending on early intervention in children's services. Research by the Local Government Association has found that local government will face a funding gap of almost £8 billion by 2025.

Vulnerable children should never have to suffer because of the unjust political priorities of the Tory party, but the cuts have a human cost. In Lincoln, my postbag is full of letters and emails from worried parents and carers—I get them all the time. The support system is being pushed to breaking point, and growing demand for support has led to 75% of councils in England overspending on their children's services budgets by over £815 million. As is always the case with Tory cuts to local authorities, councils have been forced to make cuts elsewhere and draw on reserves as a result. So, not only are children needlessly suffering from underfunded social care, but other services that people rely on are being squeezed as well. I think I mentioned earlier that Lincoln has a particularly high rate of child poverty, and that includes children of working parents, not just of those without jobs.

Budget cuts have also stripped away the capacity for early intervention, increasingly requiring child protection services to wait until a child is in crisis before intervening. LGA analysis again shows that Government funding for the early intervention grant has been cut by almost £500 million since 2013 and is projected to drop by a further £183 million by 2020. This Government are placing vulnerable children in dangerous situations that could have been avoided. I know we talk and talk about austerity, and sometimes people turn off, but this country would be a different place if this Government prioritised funding public services adequately over tax cuts for the rich and for big corporations.

It is particularly important that protection is provided for disabled children. Research by the Disabled Children's Partnership shows a £1.5 billion funding gap for services for disabled children, and in the past few weeks alone I have had four parents of autistic children contact my office with concerns that underfunded and overstretched services are not providing adequate support. I see that in my postbag all the time. On Monday mornings, before I come down to Westminster, I try to make special appointments at 8.30 and 9 o'clock so that I can see and talk to some of these people, because people in Lincoln really are struggling.

Across the board, we see this Government neglecting the services on which children rely so that they can give people tax cuts. Austerity has not only decimated the provision of children's social care but driven the rise in service demand. The strain put on parents and children is driving record numbers of young people into a social care service that this Government have cut to the bone.

It is not giving with one hand and taking with the other. When it comes to the vital public services on which working people and vulnerable people rely, this Government are taking with one hand and taking with the other, too.

I hope the Minister is actively listening to me, and I hope he can give me some reassurance. I stand up to say things in this Chamber and, sadly, all I get is empty words—party policy—quoted back to me. I would like to see some real action that actually changes something and makes it better.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** I do not stand to speak just so everyone can see that it is me in the Chair, and not the Chairman of Ways and Means. I have been mistaken for many people in my time, but not for the right hon. Gentleman. I suppose we have similarities—well, we both sit in the Chair.

I will try not to set a time limit, especially as the hon. Member for Lincoln (Karen Lee) was admirably brief in her remarks, but in order that there will be time for the Front Benchers to speak, it would be helpful if speeches were around eight minutes. We have four colleagues to accommodate, and around eight minutes would mean that everyone is honourable in their treatment of everyone else.

4.7 pm

**Vicky Ford** (Chelmsford) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Lincoln (Karen Lee), and it is great to see such a strong Essex presence in the Chair and in the House.

The Children's Society has been looking out for our most vulnerable children for 138 years. It has a long history in Essex, and its Essex headquarters are, of course, in Chelmsford. The Children's Society, Barnardo's and other children's organisations wrote to all MPs before this debate with a helpful briefing that particularly highlighted the importance of early intervention in helping to avoid problems for children.

Early intervention is the subject of a detailed study by the Select Committee on Science and Technology, which particularly considered the issue in relation to childhood adversity and trauma. The study shows the importance of early intervention in tackling potential long-term problems. I urge the Minister to look at the report, which particularly points out that the increasing variety of early intervention programmes have been shown to improve life outcomes for those affected by childhood trauma. However, the report says that provision is fragmented and highly variable, and it encourages the Government to identify areas that are working well.

I am delighted that one area that is working exceptionally well is Essex, which is the second largest area of the country for children's services. Essex is a significant provider of children's services, and just last week it received the fantastic news of an "outstanding" rating from Ofsted for its children's services.

The Ofsted inspectors said:

"Inspirational leaders, supported by good corporate and political support and strong partnerships, are tenaciously ambitious for children."

Ofsted praises the work of the children and families hub, and the exceptional early intervention services. Ofsted says the social workers are

"passionate about securing and sustaining improvement"

in children's lives. It mentions the joined-up approach to safeguarding, and the county-wide approach to addressing homelessness, whereby children and families who are at risk of becoming homeless are identified and problems are resolved before they become homeless. Ofsted refers to the work of the gangs intervention team; the private fostering team; the adoption managers, who work to keep families together; the support given to unaccompanied asylum seeking children; and the ongoing work to support children after they have left care and grown up, as it were. This really is an exceptional piece of work. We are very proud of this work in Essex and I wish to put on the record my huge thanks and respect to everyone involved.

**Alex Burghart:** I wish to join my hon. Friend, as a fellow Essex MP, by putting on record my admiration for everyone who is working in children's services in Essex, the extraordinary journey they have been on and the remarkable results they are now achieving.

**Vicky Ford:** I thank my hon. Friend for that.

It is important to recognise that this has not always been the position; in 2010, the council's service was rated as "inadequate". At that time, its spending was £148 million a year. The turnaround in Essex has not come as a result of pouring more money into the system—quite the opposite. The performance in Essex has been turned around despite the fact that £30 million less is being spent on children's services. The turnaround whereby the second largest authority in the country for



[Vicky Ford]

children's services has gone from "requires improvement" to "outstanding" has been done despite funding coming down from £148 million to £118 million. It has been achieved because of a continual focus on early intervention and preventing children from having to go into care in the first place. In 2010, the number of children in care was 1,615, whereas the latest figure is 1,017—so 600 fewer children are in care because we are getting them support earlier. Essex is working with other councils to improve their local children's services and I particularly wish to put on the record my thanks to Councillor Dick Madden, who co-chairs the LGA taskforce in this area.

The council has just written a lengthy submission to the Select Committee's report, not only looking at what the council has achieved, but mentioning some of the challenges ahead: there is growth in demand for services; the county, like many others close to London, has experienced migration, with the children from London boroughs being moved out towards Essex; as some colleagues have mentioned, we are facing new phenomena, such as the criminal and sexual exploitation of young people by gangs via county lines; the casework the council is seeing is increasingly more complex; and of course the national shortage of social workers puts pressure on the service and on salaries. That comes on top of the pressure that many local authorities see in their budgets, partly because of the increased number of older people and then the pressure on adult social services. I hope that the Minister will look at this report that the council submitted to the Select Committee because it outlines the problems and makes detailed suggestions.

It is not only Essex's children's services that have just got an outstanding ranking. Just before Christmas the inspectors came in to look at our probation services, particularly the multi-agency youth offending team, who have also achieved an outstanding ranking. Essex social care services have just been awarded the best social worker employer of the year award.

Our children are our future. There are issues to address in children's social services. The Government will be looking at how to plan for the future. I will leave with one plea to the Minister and to any members of the Select Committee: if they would like to learn a little more about how this works in Essex, they should just pop on the train to Chelmsford—we are only an hour away from Westminster—where they will be able to see it all for themselves.

4.14 pm

**Laura Smith** (Crewe and Nantwich) (Lab): It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford). I am not usually here on a Thursday, but I must say that the Chamber is very good tempered—it's lovely.

I am going to speak briefly on the issue of social care provision in England and, specifically, how families with disabled children in my constituency face huge battles, fighting for their children to receive the care that they should be entitled to.

Many disabled children and their families rely on support from social care, such as short breaks, personal care and adaptations to their homes. However, most disabled children receive no regular support from outside

their own close family and friends. The shift in the balance of services provided by children's social care has impacted adversely on services for disabled children and their families. There has been a reduction in the number of disabled children who receive social care, despite an increase in the past 10 years in the number of disabled children in the UK by more than one third, to about 1.1 million, and their needs becoming ever more complex.

We all know that 10 years of austerity has resulted in services for disabled children coming under increasing threat due to cuts to local government funding. In fact, the Disabled Children's Partnership has identified an annual funding gap of £434 million. As the gap has grown wider, two thirds of families have, unsurprisingly, reported a decline in the services available for their loved ones. Every week my team and I talk to families who are under enormous emotional, physical and mental pressure due to the complete failure of the system to offer their children the resources needed to enable them to live their lives with dignity.

On behalf of all of those constituents I will explain exactly what they have conveyed to me, and I hope that the Minister will respond adequately at the end of the debate. First, people are struggling to access the services. The necessary interventions that these children should be entitled to simply are not there, or the wait is too long to access them. Many parents speak of their immense frustration, as they know that investment could prevent the escalation of future problems. By the time something is done, it is often too late.

Secondly, many existing services do not meet expectations. A survey by the Disability Children's Partnership shows that two thirds of family members have experienced a decline in the quality of services in recent years. Training and development of professionals, staff shortages, increased demand and poor pay can all impact on the quality of the service that people receive. When I was teaching, a referral could take months and the support was often only available for a short amount of time and subject to availability.

Thirdly, families cannot access those services easily. I have worked with a number of families who are exhausted because of the system. They are run down and on the brink due to the constant battle they face just to get what should be a human right. I have lost count of the number of people who have said to me, "The thing is, Laura, what about those who simply can't fight or who don't know how to? What happens to them?"

Finally, services do not always work together or communicate well with each other. Fragmented systems that do not join up properly to work in the best interest of the child are more often than not exasperated by chronic underfunding and undervalued and underpaid staff. Families often speak of how their social worker changes and they go back to square one.

What does all of that result in? The quality of life of, and opportunities available to, disabled children and their families is unacceptable compared with those without disabilities. Why is that? Our Government will not provide the funding required because that is the political choice that they have made. Not only is investing in the services available to these children the right thing to do from a human rights point of view; there is also a strong argument in favour of the economic value of doing so. Support can mean that costly long-term residential care

is not required and that potential cost to the NHS is reduced. Support can help not only the child, but the parents and carers as well, as there is more opportunity for parents to work if they know that their child is being cared for adequately.

I must make it clear that there are many in my constituency who are working with children with disabilities and are doing an absolutely remarkable job. Often they are doing so through a registered charity, and are unpaid or even working at their own expense. People should not have to rely on the good will of others to receive care that should be a fundamental human right. This Government are relying on the general public to pick up the pieces of their starved system.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to draw your attention to the Cheshire Buddies and the Broad Street Project, two remarkable charities in my constituency of Crewe and Nantwich. I was lucky to spend time with them both over the Christmas period. Both go above and beyond to provide care and develop skills that these children desperately need. These organisations are largely staffed by volunteers. One thing that was made absolutely clear was that most of the children attending these charities receive no regular support from outside their own close family and friends and it is sheer fluke that a handful of good people are driving charities such as Cheshire Buddies and the Broad Street Project, so that these children at least receive some help, but that is simply not good enough.

If you do not mind, Madam Deputy Speaker, I will give you a typical example of what these people do: a child unable to walk with a number of disabilities started attending sessions run by Jane and her team at the Broad Street Project. They were told that the child would not walk. Jane being the determined woman that she is decided, as she has done with so many children, that she was not going to give up on this child. Against the odds, Jane taught this child to walk and to develop a number of other skills that will now remain with her for life. Without that intervention, that child could have spent her entire life in a wheelchair just because the support was not there to teach her how to walk. How many children do not get that opportunity because they do not come across people like Jane?

Before I conclude, I will touch on the issue of respite care for families—something that is probably top of the list for most of the families that I speak to. Everybody needs a break sometimes and nobody more so than someone who is caring for a loved one with complex needs. Briefly, I will mention Stephanie and her team at Cheshire Buddies whose scheme supports more than 95 local disabled children, 17 sibling carers, 27 disabled adults and more than 50 parent carers. The children have a range of needs, including learning disabilities, Down's syndrome, cerebral palsy, autism and a range of chromosomal conditions. Many of those children come from low-income families and families with a history of special educational needs. Cheshire Buddies runs holiday clubs and day trips to give families that much-needed break. It manages to exist thanks to volunteer support. Without those volunteers, many of these families would be completely isolated.

I pay tribute to Mick Roberts who sadly passed away on 28 December and who will be missed by our community. He was a proud railwayman, a Labour councillor and someone who dedicated so much time and effort to the

Seahorse Swimming Club charity in Crewe that helps and supports disabled children and adults to enjoy swimming.

These charities and many others in my constituency are constantly battling for essential funding. They are always in a process of bidding and fundraising and are always worried that their funds will disappear. What then happens to all of those people who rely so much on them? Families who have visited me in my surgery are often desperate. They do not know where else to turn. All that they are doing is fighting for their child—exactly what any one of us would do. They are experts in their children's conditions—even if they do not realise it—and they are exhausted and mentally drained. One parent said to me recently, "I am a warrior, but I just want to be a mum. What happens if something happens to me?"

I urge the Government to put in place an interim funding arrangement to stabilise the crisis in early intervention services and to prevent more children and families reaching breaking point. They must address, as a matter of urgency, the £3 billion shortfall in children's social care funding and put children at the heart of the forthcoming spending review.

4.24 pm

**Mohammad Yasin** (Bedford) (Lab): Bedford Borough Council is very concerned that there is no regulation of accommodation for vulnerable young people who are 16 years old and over—often referred to as semi-independent living or supported accommodation. In Bedford and nationwide, there is a significant shortfall in available placements for children in care or leaving care. This has resulted in an alarming number of 16 and 17-year-olds being placed in independent living accommodation.

An investigation earlier this month by *The Observer* and BBC Radio 5 Live established that there has been a 28% increase in the number of under-18s placed in independent living accommodation by councils in England in the last eight years. This accommodation lacks living and staff support, and includes unsupervised B&Bs and accommodation owned by private landlords, who have no obligations to offer appropriate care to looked-after children or those leaving care. In the report, we even heard from children who had been placed in tents.

I wrote to the Children's Minister about this issue recently and I am very disappointed by his response, which completely failed even to acknowledge the problem. The Independent Children's Homes Association has raised this issue for at least two years with many agencies including the Department for Education, Ofsted and the Children's Commissioner, but there has been no action at all.

This is a scandal. Vulnerable children are being abandoned by the state and, worse, are put at risk by being placed in unsuitable and unchecked accommodation with adults who have drug addictions or a history of criminal behaviour, including sexual assaults. How many times must these children be let down by those who should be caring for them? Charities such as Every Child Leaving Care Matters and Just For Kids Law say that there has been unprecedented growth in the number of unregistered, unregulated units of multiple accommodation for children aged 16-plus, but of course we cannot be sure of the scale of the problem because they are unregistered. This must change now.

[*Mohammad Yasin*]

We must measure the problem and understand why it is happening in order to tackle it and ensure that no 16 and 17-year-old vulnerable children are left to fend for themselves in risky, inappropriate and often unsanitary accommodation. I am pleased to hear the Children's Commissioner say in her interview with BBC Radio 5 Live and *The Observer* that she will finally be investigating the housing of vulnerable children this year; better late than never.

This is urgent. The Government must act now to introduce legislation that regulates such properties, and to reassure communities and local authorities that appropriate quality standards are achieved, in order to improve outcomes for vulnerable young people and give confidence to our communities.

4.27 pm

**Luke Pollard** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): I rise to speak about three matters in particular, but I first thank the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) for his dogged pursuit of this debate. Waiting for it has been like a game of pass the parcel; it has been going around and around, and I am glad that we have had it today.

Contributions from both sides of the House have helped to show the seriousness of this matter. As my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown) said, cuts to children's social care have reached crisis point. I have been asked to speak in this debate on behalf of the councillors on Plymouth City Council, who want to raise the seriousness of the crisis around children's social care—an area that has not always got the attention that it has deserved. Rightly, adult social care has taken the lion's share of headlines and funding in recent years, but the crisis in children's social care has been growing because of a mix of austerity, poverty, cuts and growing demand. It is a poisonous situation that has left some of the most vulnerable children in the country in the worst possible state.

As we have already heard today, analysis from the LGA shows that we need further funding of £3 billion if we are to keep children's services standing still by 2025. There are more looked-after children being cared for than ever before, and that number is only going to increase. Early intervention is so important, but funding for early intervention programmes is being cut. The expertise of our social workers and charities at a local level is being removed by slow attrition and cuts. People are losing faith and confidence that this system is one in which they want to play a part. But we need the system to work like never before. In Plymouth, as in many other councils across the country, councillors—of all political parties, to be fair—are putting more and more money into children's social care because there is more and more demand. There are more children in care in Plymouth than ever before, and that will only continue to eat up more and more council funding. Plymouth City Council has lost £350 million in revenue support since 2013, and losing 60p in the pound of funding means that the urgent care needs of our children are sometimes being neglected.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Bedford (*Mohammad Yasin*) said, we need to do more to care for the children, particularly 16 and 17-year-olds, who

frequently get left out of the system, being put in semi-supported situations where they are left to fend for themselves without the wraparound care and support that they really need. Many of those young kids are at a crossroads in their lives. If they receive the support that they deserve, there is the potential for them to lead full and productive lives. However, far too many young people who have been in care and looked-after children in semi-supported states will not go on to fulfil their potential, because of cuts. Far too many of them will enter the criminal justice system. We can stop that if we take serious steps to do so. I welcome the extension of local councils' responsibility for people who have been in care up to the age of 25. That is exactly the right thing to do, but it cannot happen unless the funding goes along with it, because having additional responsibilities without additional funding loads more and more pressure on to an already pressurised system.

I want to raise an issue that has not been spoken about so far—exceptionalism in our children's social care system. One reason why funding for Plymouth's social care system has been sunk in recent years is the exceptional costs of funding care packages for a very, very small number of children. I want to choose my words carefully, because it is really important that in discussing and debating these issues, at no stage is any blame attributed to the children who need multimillion-pound care packages. Plymouth City Council has lost legal cases about how those care packages are funded. I know that the Minister will be aware of that, and I would be grateful if he could agree to meet the council to discuss how the huge number of those exceptional cases is basically sinking our budget. It is exactly right that the children with the most complex and urgent care needs get that care, especially in a region like the south-west where complex care facilities are not our doorstep and children need to leave the area and the support networks in their locality. However, we cannot defund the needs of the many just to fund those of the few. That is really important. I fear that in a funding situation where there is more and more demand, difficult choices will need to be made. When local councils have lost so much of their funding, exceptional care packages risk really undermining the quality of care that can be given to every child. The Minister is nodding—I am grateful that he will meet to discuss that.

There are so many good people working so hard in children's social care, and they do not get the praise or the thanks that they deserve. Sometimes in this place it is not fashionable to praise local councils, but I want to thank them. I thank local councillors of all political hues, who are going the extra mile to support urgent children's social care issues. I thank the care workers and the charities that we heard about from my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (*Laura Smith*). I thank foster carers, who are the fundamental bedrock of this issue—I know that because my dad and my stepmother have been fostering children since I was at an early age. Since being a young boy, I have had around the house a constant stream of kids about yea high who have been beaten, abused, starved, neglected or ignored. We need to create a system where those children are given a chance to fulfil their potential. That can come only when the funding envelope for children's social care is adequate for the urgent needs that we have, and when sufficient political priority is put on all aspects of the children's social care debate.



There is an urgent need for us to continue this debate. I encourage the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham to secure another debate, because we need to keep this in the headlines and on the agenda. If we do not, it risks slipping off. Adult social care takes the headlines and the need. As we have an increasingly old population, adult social care will take up a bigger share of the pie, and we need to ensure that looked-after children—some of the most neglected in our society—are not ignored by this place in favour of other areas.

I want to thank all the people who work so hard on children's social care, including our local authorities, careworkers, charities and the individuals and families who are trying so hard, but we need to do better, and the best way is by funding this work properly.

4.35 pm

**Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck** (South Shields) (Lab): I refer the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. I thank the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) for his persistence in securing this important debate and the Backbench Business Committee for granting it.

Rarely does this House debate children's social care, but it is clear from the strength of the speeches today that not only do such debates warrant more frequency, but more importantly, Government action is needed now, before the growing number of children and families being failed by a system that does not meet their needs swells to even larger proportions.

The Minister is on record as being of the view that "good leadership", not increased resources, is the key to improving outcomes. As someone who practised as a social worker, I have to say that that is simply not true, nor does that assertion resonate with the reality that dozens of organisations, charities and trade unions and a plethora of cross-party Select Committee reports and groups across the House are repeatedly telling him about.

The scale of the neglect of our most vulnerable children is colossal: more than 400,000 children in need; the largest number of children in care since the 1980s; care proceedings up by a staggering 130% since 2008; increasingly poor outcomes for the thousands of children leaving care; falling adoption rates; social worker recruitment and retention difficulties; a falling number of foster carers; and increasingly large private sector contracts focused on profit, not care.

More than 120 national organisations wrote to the Prime Minister last year stating that this Government are ignoring children. They cited compelling evidence that the services and support that children and young people rely on are at breaking point, yet they were ignored. The Local Government Association now reports that local authorities will face a £3.1 billion funding gap in children's services by 2025, and 60% of children's social workers have said that austerity and cuts have affected their ability to do their jobs.

There is now a wealth of research that highlights the links between austerity and the rising number of children coming into contact with children's services and entering care. One study, by the Nuffield Foundation, found that deprivation was the largest contributory factor in a child's chances of being looked after. Another, by the National Children's Bureau, found that 41% of children's services are now unable to fulfil their statutory duties.

I know that the Minister is not too concerned about local authorities fulfilling their statutory duties towards children, as he recently argued that such duties are subject to local interpretation and disseminated a very dangerous myth-busting document advising local authorities to dispense with their statutory guidance in relation to the most vulnerable children.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Nadhim Zahawi)**: The hon. Lady needs to correct the record. What she said about dispensing with statutory guidance is absolutely not true, and I urge her to correct the record.

**Mrs Lewell-Buck**: I do not need to correct the record, because what I am saying is already correct.

Especially since the children's rights charity Article 39 has written to the Secretary of State threatening judicial review on the matter, I again urge the Minister to withdraw that document and cease the repeated attempts to deregulate and wipe away hard-fought-for protective legislation for children. This Government tried to do so during the passage of the Children and Social Work Act 2017, and they failed in the attempt to allow private services to take over children's services. I politely suggest to the Minister that he should instead focus on the unprecedented rate of referrals, which stand at more 1,700 children every single day. The consequence of that is a tightened threshold for intervention, meaning that, last year, 36,000 children had to be referred multiple times before they received statutory support to help them with serious issues.

Worse still, there are an estimated 140,000 further children on the fringes of social care in England who are not receiving any support at all. As my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Laura Smith) said, there will be many more, because there are those who simply do not seek help or do not know where to go to for that help. That means that children in desperate need of help are being subjected to further harm because of a lack of resources and funding.

I have etched on my brain—and I wish I did not have—every single child and family I worked with prior to entering this place. I remember vividly the little boys and girls who had been so severely abused and neglected that they gouged their own skin, the children who had fled war zones who were stoic and motionless in playgrounds and completely unable to interact with their peers, and the adolescents who would severely self-harm after being subjected to sexual exploitation. Thankfully, I also remember being able to make a positive difference to those children's lives.

However, ex-colleagues now tell me that, despite their absolute best efforts, the hollowing out of local government and the decimation of wider support services, mentioned so characteristically articulately by my hon. Friends the Members for West Ham (Lyn Brown) and for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard), have left many children waiting longer for help. Each hour these children wait, they are suffering significant and, for some, irreversible harm.

It is therefore not only misguided but dangerous that, against that backdrop, the Government have pressed ahead with slashing local authority early intervention grants, a point that was well made by my hon. Friend the Member for Lincoln (Karen Lee); closing 1,200 Sure

[Mrs Lewell-Buck]

Start centres; decreasing funding to children's centres by nearly 50%; removing funding from the very initiatives that help to keep children out of the care system, such as the family drug and alcohol court national unit; and actively implementing policies that make it almost impossible for foster carers, kinship carers and special guardians to care for children. It is little wonder that members of the Minister's own party are warning in the press that we are fast approaching another Baby P tragedy.

In the case of children in residential care, why has the Minister ignored my warnings that many homes are facing potential collapse overnight due to the overnight levy? Why has he not addressed the shameful situation whereby children in residential care are locked out of the "staying put" arrangements afforded to those in foster care? Why has he not listened to my concerns about the number of children being placed miles away from their families? Worse still, he has not acted sufficiently on the use of state-sanctioned restraint that is designed to cause physical harm to children in the secure estate. Why has he not responded sufficiently to the recent news that increasing numbers of vulnerable children are being placed on their own, with no support, in hostels, bed and breakfasts and, in some cases, tents and caravans? That point was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bedford (Mohammad Yasin).

In 2016, the National Audit Office reported that actions taken by the Minister's Department since 2010 to improve the quality of services delivered to children had not yet resulted in improvements. Just last year, the Public Accounts Committee, after its examination of child protection, stated:

"The Department lacks a credible plan for improving the system by 2020."

It is clear to everybody except this Government that their whole approach lacks any cohesive strategy and is consumed with piecemeal, misguided measures. Measures such as the What Works centres, Partners in Practice, the discredited national assessment and accreditation system and the innovation programme are not yielding any positive changes, but have so far have cost over £200 million, with at least £60 million going from taxpayers to private companies.

Labour would do things differently. We understand the holistic nature of children's social care, which is why we are committed to looking at the care system in its entirety and giving equity to all forms of care. We are committed to stemming the tide of privatisation in the sector, because there is no profit to be made in good social care. We are committed to putting into domestic legislation the United Nations convention on the rights of the child. In short, we are committed to children. We will ensure that every child matters once again, because at the moment that belief could not be further from the reality.

4.45 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Nadhim Zahawi):** I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) on securing this debate, on his expertise and on his persistence in ensuring that this debate was held—third time lucky. I also thank my hon. Friends the Members

for Brentwood and Ongar (Alex Burghart) and for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford), and the hon. Members for West Ham (Lyn Brown), for Lincoln (Karen Lee), for Bedford (Mohammad Yasin), for Crewe and Nantwich (Laura Smith), and for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard), as well as others who intervened, including my hon. Friends the Members for Henley (John Howell) and for Dudley South (Mike Wood), and the hon. Member for Lewisham West and Penge (Ellie Reeves). They brought valuable—indeed sometimes invaluable—insight to this vital issue.

Nothing is more important than our work to identify vulnerable children early and to give them the support they need to keep them safe. I applaud the all-party group for children for being vocal champions of that, and I give an assurance that the Education Secretary and I share that priority. As many colleagues pointed out, the importance of children's social care too often goes unrecognised. Many colleagues said that today. It makes headlines only when things go wrong. We should value the contribution of social workers day-in, day-out in making a difference to children's lives in sometimes very challenging circumstances.

As we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar, the challenges facing children in families, communities and beyond are many and varied. As we all know from our constituencies, there can be stark differences in the demographics, economic status and social problems faced by different communities—even between one area and its neighbour. That is why children's social care is delivered locally within a national legislative framework for safeguarding and child protection in England. That long-standing principle is enshrined in the Children Act 1989 and it places on all local authorities the same duty to take decisive action wherever a child is at risk of, or suffering significant harm.

All 50 judges in the family courts must use the same law when making decisions wherever care proceedings are under way, but local authorities remain best placed to identify, assess and respond to local priorities, setting the criteria for accessing services that reflect the needs of children in their area. As my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham rightly reminded us, thresholds play an important part in allowing local authorities to do that work. Whether those thresholds are set appropriately and properly understood is scrutinised by Ofsted as part of its inspections, and factored into its independent judgment about the quality of local services.

What Ofsted tells us about quality corroborates some of the APPG's findings, which suggest that the picture across the country is far from uniform—indeed, it has been described as a postcode lottery. Although some children and families receive good and outstanding services, the majority live in areas where those services are inadequate or require improvement. Some variation is right and necessary in responding to local needs, but such inconsistency in the quality of services is not. We must recognise that Government action is needed if all children are to receive the same quality of support that every child deserves. Addressing this inconsistency is a priority for me and my Department, through our wide-ranging national social care reforms and through strong action to drive up quality where services are less than good.

We will intervene every time Ofsted judges children's services to be inadequate. Our intervention brings results: the first children's services trust in Doncaster moved

from inadequate to good in just two years. Just last week, Ofsted published an inspection report for Bromley—the hon. Member for Lewisham West and Penge is not in her place, but she rightly praised the team and the leadership in Bromley—showing that its services are no longer inadequate, but are now judged as good. Today I am delighted to say that, as my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham reminded us, after almost a decade of deeply entrenched failure, children's services in Birmingham are no longer inadequate. Ofsted published its inspection report for Birmingham this morning. It noted that the children's services trust, which we worked with the local authority to establish, has

“enabled the re-vitalisation of both practice and working culture, and, as a result, progress has been made in improving the experiences and progress of children”.

In fact, since 2010, 44 local authorities have been lifted out of intervention and not returned. The significance of that should not be underestimated. We raised the bar for Ofsted inspection in 2013 to drive up quality for children, but by May 2017 20% of authorities had not met our new standards and had been found inadequate. That has since reduced by a third, from 30 to 19 today as a result of our reforms. This is not intervention for intervention's sake, as the Labour Front-Bench team attempted to spin it, but improving the lives of children and families.

I am not complacent about the challenges. We have seen considerable improvements in some areas, but other areas, such as Wakefield, Bradford and Blackpool, have declined this year. That is why we are investing £20 million in regional improvements to get ahead of failure. As well as supporting every local authority rated inadequate, a further 26 are receiving support from a strong Partner in Practice local authority, with work under way to broker support for many more.

The number of local authorities achieving the top judgments under the new Ofsted framework is small but growing. In December, Leeds was rated as outstanding and, just last week, as we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford, Essex received the same Ofsted judgment. I visited the hub she spoke about and I have to admire Councillor Dick Madden and his excellent director of children's services for what they have been able to achieve. That example demonstrates that this is about not just funding, but real, good practice on the frontline and strong leadership. In total, five local authorities have been rated outstanding since 2018, setting the highest ambitions and showing that even within current constraints—there are financial constraints, as the hon. Member for West Ham reminded us—local authorities can deliver outstanding children's services. My aim is that the improvements we are making continue at pace, so that by 2022 less than 10% of local authorities are rated “inadequate” by Ofsted, halving failure rates within five years and providing consistently better services for thousands of children and families across the country.

Service quality is a significant variable in what differs between local areas. Crucial to service quality is the social care workforce. The practice of staff locally, from the leadership of directors of children's services to the decision making of social workers, makes a huge difference to ensuring that the right children get the right support at the right time. That is why we have set clear professional standards for social workers, and invested significantly

in training and development to meet those standards nationally—to ensure a highly capable, highly skilled workforce that makes good decisions about what is best for children and families.

**Lyn Brown:** Will the Minister give way?

**Nadhim Zahawi:** I do not have enough time. I have a lot to get through and I am hoping to make lots of responses to colleagues.

Beyond the front door, decision making is especially critical at the high end of social care, recognising that, where children are at significant risk, these decisions can be life changing, and in both directions. Over-intervening can potentially cause as much harm as the consequences of leaving a child where they are. In most cases, children are best looked after by their families, with removal a last resort. That is paramount and it is important to strike the right balance between local support to keep families together and protecting children from dangers within their family. Where a child cannot live within their birth family, I am clear that finding the right permanent home and permanent family must be a priority, while always taking account of children's own wishes and feelings. Sometimes the best place for a child can be found within the care system. Sometimes it can be with a new family through adoption and sometimes it can be with family and friends informally or through special guardianship.

A recent sector-led review found a complexity of many overlapping factors contributing to a known rise in care proceedings and entries into care. That is why the sector, my Department, the Ministry of Justice and the recently established What Works Centre for Children's Social Care are all looking to understand better what makes a difference in supporting children to stay with their families safely and preventing them from reaching crisis point.

Some promising signs are emerging from our innovation and partners in practice programmes. We have invested almost £270 million in developing, testing and learning from new practice. From innovative projects showing real early promise, we have identified the seven features of practice that achieve impact and allow change to take hold. We continue to learn from what achieves the best outcomes for children and families and to support local authorities to adopt and adapt the programmes that successfully intervene. Early help plays a significant and important part in promoting safe and stable families. It is about intervening with the right families at the right time and, most importantly, in the right way. In doing so, the statutory guidance “Working Together to Safeguard Children” is unequivocally clear that local areas should have a comprehensive range of effective, evidence-based services in place to address needs early.

Unfortunately, I am out of time. I would just like to remind the House that my hon. Friends the Members for Brentwood and Ongar and for East Worthing and Shoreham talked about the Troubled Families programme. The three local authorities—Leeds, North Yorkshire and Hertfordshire—where we are going to scale up with the £84 million that the Chancellor backed us with at the Budget were asked how they have delivered effective children's services. They all mentioned the Troubled Families programme as being a central pillar of their work. I will leave it there. I had much to say in response to many of the contributions today. Perhaps I will write



[Nadhim Zahawi]

to colleagues on the specific points they raised. I leave a couple of minutes for my good friend, my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham, to sum up.

4.58 pm

**Tim Loughton:** Madam Deputy Speaker, I have never questioned your gender. I do not think you look remotely like the right hon. Member for Chorley (Sir Lindsay Hoyle).

I thank all Members who have made this an exceedingly valuable debate. It is quite something when we almost need a time limit imposed on contributions in the last debate on a Thursday afternoon, on a subject that does not get nearly enough attention, as Members have mentioned.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Alex Burghart). He certainly was exceedingly generous in blowing my trumpet, but he has quite a large tuba of his own in terms of his achievements—a positive cornucopia—not only in this place, but before he became a Member, as part of Barnardo's and in working for the Children's Commissioner on the Munro review. It is clear he has extensive knowledge, from the east end to New Zealand. He makes a great contribution to children's issues in this place.

I also pay tribute to the hon. Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown), who was inadvertently arguing with my hon. Friend at certain times. Actually they were agreeing over an awful lot. Many of the horrendous cases of knife crime that we have seen in her constituency can be traced back to poor attachment. The origins of those problems are exactly what we are all talking about. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Lincoln (Karen Lee) and my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford). She mentioned the fantastic work being done by Councillor Dick Madden and by Dave Hill, the director of children's services, who turned around Essex when he came in in 2009. The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Laura Smith), who is no longer in the Chamber, mentioned disabled children and the hon. Member for Bedford (Mohammad Yasin) spoke about supported accommodation for vulnerable young people.

Let me end by echoing the tribute paid by the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard) to the social workers, whose praises we do not sing enough, and to the councillors and council officers who work with them. I am proud to be a trustee of the Social Worker of the Year awards, which recognise those benefits.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered children's social care in England.

## Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder

*Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Jeremy Quin.)*

5 pm

**Bill Esterson** (Sefton Central) (Lab): It is a shame that the Children's Minister, the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi), could not stay for the debate, because I think that it follows on very naturally from the last one.

"Babies being born brain-damaged by alcohol is a national emergency". So ran the title of a piece in today's edition of *The Times* about this debate. It is justified by a recent study conducted by Bristol University, which suggests that some 79% of women say that they drank alcohol while pregnant, and that between 6% and 17% of the 14,000 or so children covered by the study have foetal alcohol spectrum disorders. Scaled up—and this is why the term "national emergency" is not misplaced—that gives a figure of between 42,000 and 120,000 children a year.

So what is foetal alcohol spectrum disorder? It is an umbrella term for a range of effects that prenatal alcohol exposure can have on an individual. FASD is the commonest non-genetic cause of learning disability in the United Kingdom, yet it is entirely preventable. It lasts a lifetime: this is not just about babies. What does it look like? People often think that they understand the syndrome. They say to me, "Yeah, we know about that. It is a really bad problem when women have drunk heavily during pregnancy." It is true that there are often facial and physical features characteristic of children with FASD, but, relatively speaking, that applies to a very small proportion of the wider spectrum.

The impact on the brain, although usually not immediately obvious from the outside, affects language, memory, attention, processing and understanding, and creates emotional, behavioural and learning difficulties. Children often struggle with complex concepts such as time, metaphor or consequences. Rewards and sanctions mean very little to children with this kind of brain damage, and consequences do not mean very much either.

A constituent of mine adopted two children. One of them, who is 16, had no idea of the consequences of his actions, and got into trouble. He has no idea that he has done anything wrong—the idea is meaningless to him—but because of a wider lack of understanding, including a lack of understanding in our criminal justice system, he very nearly went to prison. He was spared that, more by luck than by judgment. His victims did not understand—for good reason: why would they—and I think that there was very little understanding in the system.

A 17-year-old who gave evidence to the all-party parliamentary group on foetal alcohol spectrum disorders, which I chair, described the effect on her emotions. When she gets angry, she has no control whatsoever. I know that is true of many people, but controlling anger can be harder for those with this kind of brain damage. She described to our all-party group how she sees herself from the outside, as somebody else almost; it is a sort of out-of-body experience, and she has no control over it. I have heard that repeated by a number of children and young people affected by FASD, including my own adopted daughter; I have two adopted children, both of whom are affected by this, which is why I have become aware of it and taken so much interest in it.

There are implications for society as well as individuals, because this disorder does not go away when children become adults. In Canada, they have estimated that half of their prison population has FASD; I wonder whether the situation is very different here. FASD affects people's ability to get qualifications, and I wonder how many of those who are sleeping rough or are otherwise homeless have FASD. Returning to the point I made about not understanding time or consequences, I wonder how many people who are sanctioned for not attending appointments with the Department for Work and Pensions have FASD. There is likely also to be a strong link between FASD and having difficulties with holding down a job or maintaining a stable relationship.

In the United States, a study last year estimated an annual personal cost of \$24,000, before considering the cost to the criminal justice system. That is a relatively small element of the cost for some of the people with FASD in the United States. For years in the United States they have described people with FASD as million-dollar babies, often multi-million dollar babies, because of the long-term societal costs as well as that to the individual.

We have just had a very good debate on children's social care, and I wish I had been able to take part instead of just listening to it. Population evidence to the all-party group suggested—this is a relatively low estimate—that at least a quarter of the children in the care system are affected by FASD. I have heard other adopters and people who run adoption agencies describing adoption as a family-finding service for children with FASD, because it is so common among the adopted children population. May I add to the tribute paid in the last debate to adopters, foster carers and all professionals who do what they can to support the children, young people and, indeed, adults who continue to face the challenges of FASD?

What am I asking for? I am asking for action on prevention and diagnosis, and action to cut the numbers, and for a sea change in our approach and our building of awareness among the population, including and especially among health professionals.

**Lyn Brown** (West Ham) (Lab): My hon. Friend and I have talked about this issue a number of times, and I commend him for taking it forward. I was interested to read that twins who are exposed to exactly the same amount of alcohol in the womb can have very different outcomes. It is a very complicated situation. Genetic factors are involved and we have no way of predicting in advance what the risks are. Does my hon. Friend agree that we need to understand this better, we are learning all the time, and we cannot identify anything that would make drinking safe during pregnancy?

**Bill Esterson:** I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention which prompts me to cite a recent study from the Washington State University. Its foetal alcohol syndrome diagnostic and prevention network has identified that fetuses can experience vastly different FASD outcomes despite being exposed to identical amounts of alcohol—which is what happens with twins. There is no way of predicting what will happen, and its conclusion, which I am glad to see the chief medical officer now accepts, is that the only safe amount to drink is “none at all”.

I am asking that the chief medical officer's advice and guidance, which has now been accepted by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence as well, be

given much greater prominence and that we build awareness so that everyone understands it, especially, but not exclusively, health professionals. I am asking that we have a proper study of incidence so that we need not rely on the limited evidence of the Bristol University study. It was only able to make rough estimates, given the nature of its research, but if it is between 6% and 17%, it really does need that intervention and prevalence study.

We have to build greater understanding among health professionals and professionals right across the public sector. I have mentioned support as well. There needs to be greater support for those living with FASD—both those suffering from it and those caring for them—and those in education and elsewhere who are looking after them.

**Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I commend the hon. Gentleman for all the work he has done raising the profile of this condition. He knows I support him through the all-party group, and he knows of the experiences I have had with children's homes in Denmark, which very much pioneered the work here, because of the alcohol problems among residents of Greenland and others. He is absolutely right that many of our children in the care system are directly affected by this. Does he agree that we have to get much better at giving clear advice, as we now do on smoking and its impact on lungs? We need a similar campaign to make absolutely clear to women exactly what the risks are to their unborn children if they continue to drink, as many of them will do.

**Bill Esterson:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to draw the comparison with smoking. There is no way anybody does not understand that you do not smoke when you are pregnant. We need the same cultural understanding of the effect of alcohol.

I am very pleased that the chief medical officer listened to the all-party group's advice in the inquiry that we held when we published our report at the end of 2015 and that the guidance is now right and advises women not to drink at all if they are pregnant or planning to conceive. NICE caught up last year, but many people, including some health professionals, still regard the previous guidance as relevant. There is a question mark for many. They think, “If the advice previously was one or two drinks, maybe it's still okay”. It is not, and we need to make that clear.

The country has a history in this respect going back many years. A glass of Guinness used to be thought a good idea for pregnant women because of the iron.

**Lyn Brown:** And red wine.

**Bill Esterson:** My hon. Friend says red wine too.

I described some of the symptoms to a constituent of mine in his 60s, and he said, “That's me”. That will have been a result of the culture and the advice about it being okay to drink. We need a sea change in that culture, which is so deep seated, in order to end the misapprehension. A baby's liver matures later in pregnancy than other parts of the body and so cannot process alcohol. When mum drinks, so does the baby. People have to understand this. The problem is that much of the damage is likely to be done early in pregnancy. There is a video on the internet of an embryo that is introduced to a

[Bill Esterson]

drop of alcohol. It stops moving for two hours. Goodness knows what damage is done in that time by one small drop of alcohol. People do not understand the risks they are taking. In that regard, the intervention from the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) was very welcome.

Nicola Blackwood, in a Westminster Hall debate on 2 February 2017, talked about improvements to industry labelling, and guidelines were issued in March 2017, but I am afraid it simply has not changed. It is not good enough. The labelling is not clear. It is still small. People do not understand it. We need to improve on that. That was a subject of my ten-minute rule Bill in 2015. Please can we have improvements there.

Nicola Blackwood also said in that debate:

“Health professionals are supposed to discuss it with pregnant women”.

We need to ensure that health professionals put much more emphasis on the issue and to consider the impact across the wider population. There should be greater understanding and awareness in the drinks industry. The industry makes great progress some of the time, but where are the notices in our pubs and restaurants telling people about the dangers of FASD? I want to know what happened to what the then Minister said in that debate, because we have not seen much progress. I think it was the Minister present, the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, the hon. Member for Winchester (Steve Brine), who responded to my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) just a few weeks ago about the duties of midwives and other professionals. It is great that we have the duties, but what are the outcomes? That is something that needs to change.

I want to hear the Minister’s response, but I have one or two more comments. Sadly, women sometimes consume alcohol before they know that they are pregnant, and damage may be done during that early period, but others are unwilling or unable to stop drinking alcohol while pregnant. The damage to babies, the impact on families, the long-term effect, the direct costs to the public purse, and the lost productivity from FASD sufferers and carers are real problems for this country. It is a hidden epidemic, and it is time that it was out in the open. It is time that we had the full information. I said that I want prevention and greater support, so let us get the advice out there. I am sure that the Minister can make a lot of progress in that regard.

This is too big just for good intentions. Those suffering from FASD need firm commitments and action. This country has the fourth-highest prevalence of FASD in the world. Canada has invested 1.1 million Canadian dollars just for indigenous children who suffer from FASD. We have money going into dealing with alcohol-related problems, but not directly into FASD, so perhaps the Minister will take that away and consider it. FASD is an entirely preventable problem, and it is the biggest cause of disability in the UK. Minister, your move.

5.17 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Steve Brine):** Nobody has ever handed over to me that way before, but I like it. I was just saying to the Whip on duty that I should congratulate the

hon. Member for Sefton Central (Bill Esterson) not just on getting this debate, but on his consistent record of campaigning in this area over many years. I am sorry that that came about due to bad personal experience, but I hope that his two adoptive daughters are okay and are proudly watching him do his work in the House tonight.

I thank the hon. Gentleman for all his work to raise awareness of the condition through the all-party parliamentary group on foetal alcohol spectrum disorders. I chaired many APPGs when I was on the Back Benches, and I always say—I make no apologies for repeating it—that so much good work in this House goes on in APPGs. There is so much expertise, and they do not get enough awareness in the public or in this House, but they should. The hon. Gentleman has certainly helped with that tonight.

It is true that we do not know enough about the extent of FASD. The recent Bristol screening tool study suggests that between 6% and 17% of people in the general population could be suffering from FASD, but I suspect that that is an underestimation. The study is an important contribution but, even as its authors acknowledge, there are limitations to the data, and its prevalence estimates should be treated with caution. There is no question that the hon. Gentleman is right that more needs to be done to clarify the true prevalence of FASD, and the Department will consider future research in this area—I take the hon. Gentleman’s challenge. We do know that the impact of FASD can be severe, with the lifelong physical, behavioural and/or cognitive disabilities that he mentioned. Unfortunately, there is no cure, but we know that early intervention can help improve a child’s development and help them to lead an improved life. The hon. Gentleman made well the point that FASD does not just affect babies.

Touching on prevention, the hon. Gentleman will know that it is one of the key priorities of the new Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, which is music to my ears as the Minister for Public Health, Primary Care and Prevention. The hon. Gentleman is right that FASD is an entirely preventable condition, so that makes my ears prick. Prevention is vital, and the all-party parliamentary group has made it the fulcrum of its work to raise awareness of the dangers of drinking in pregnancy in order to protect future generations from an entirely preventable condition.

First and foremost, we need to be absolutely clear to women about the facts on alcohol so that they can make well-informed decisions. That applies both before they become pregnant and when they come into contact with the health system—in primary care we call it making every contact count. The UK chief medical officer, Professor Dame Sally Davies, with whom I work closely, published low-risk drinking guidelines in 2016, which provide very clear advice to women not to drink alcohol if they are planning for pregnancy or if they are pregnant. Public Health England, for which I have ministerial responsibility, reinforces that advice through its public health messaging, both global and targeted.

We have been very clear with the alcohol industry that we expect the guidelines to be reflected on the labelling of all alcoholic products, and we have given the industry until September 2019 to ensure that its labelling reflects the updated guidelines. The industry knows that I will be watching it like a hawk.



There is also central advice through NHS.uk and other media platforms such as our Start4Life branding to inform women of the dangers of drinking during pregnancy. Of course, all upper-tier local authorities in England are now public health authorities. As part of their local public health duties, they rightly continue to educate the public about the dangers of alcohol during pregnancy, and it is encouraging to hear about initiatives such as “Be your baby’s hero, keep alcohol to zero,” which is one of my particular favourites. In Blackpool, of all places, areas of high alcohol use in pregnancy are being targeted to stop future cases of FASD. Be your baby’s hero, keep alcohol to zero—I just like saying it.

Once women are pregnant, they generally come into contact with health services frequently, which gives many opportunities for healthcare professionals to give advice on alcohol. As I mentioned at Health and Social Care questions this week, there are many campaigns on diet and nutrition, and health professionals are very aware of the dangers of drinking. Cancer Research UK has been helpful on this issue, and it is very aware of the dangers of drinking alcohol during pregnancy. The key thing is that pregnant women are given consistent messages, delivered in a supportive, non-judgmental way. The same goes for obesity, another area for which I am responsible. Messages about being overweight should be delivered in a supportive way and alongside a call to action, and many primary care professionals find that difficult, which I understand. It is easy for us to say, “Well, they should just mention it,” but it is not quite so easy.

Midwives and health visitors have a central role in providing clear, consistent advice and early identification and support, and they are well equipped to do it supportively. We are reinforcing that role through a number of strategies. Through the maternity transformation programme, the Department is working with NHS England, Public Health England, the Royal Colleges and a range of charities such as Sands, the stillbirth and neonatal death charity. The House will be well aware of Sands, which does such good work to promote safer maternity services. This programme covers a range of initiatives, which include raising awareness of the known risk factors among pregnant women and health professionals, as the hon. Gentleman has asked for. This will ensure that women receive consistent, supportive advice on how to minimise the risk of stillbirth, including the importance of healthy eating and of not smoking—I am responsible for the tobacco control plan—or drinking alcohol during pregnancy.

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence has updated its guidelines to reflect the CMO’s advice not to drink during pregnancy. The Department will continue to work with the Royal Colleges—I was with the head of the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges last night—and various other regulatory bodies to raise the profile of the CMO’s guidelines and to recommend that they include those guidelines within their training, which the hon. Gentleman has consistently asked for.

**Bill Esterson:** I appreciate the tone and content of the Minister’s response so far. I neglected to ask him about the alcohol strategy. Will he say a few words about his intentions to include action on FASD in that strategy? That would be an extremely important and welcome step for those interested in this subject.

**Steve Brine:** I do not directly own the alcohol strategy, but obviously I am involved in it. I take the hon. Gentleman’s challenge on board, and maybe we can discuss it further. I know he has stuff he wants to feed into the strategy—he has produced it through the all-party parliamentary group—so perhaps we can discuss it further. I can then discuss it with my ministerial colleagues in the Home Office. It would make absolute sense to do so as part of the strategy, and I suggest linking it to our Green Paper on prevention, which we will be bringing out this year. His question is spot on.

I will now touch on services for affected families. We know that FASD can have a huge impact on the early years development of children and on their life chances, and the hon. Gentleman gave a number of good examples. We also know that early intervention services in this area, as in every area, can help to reduce some of the effects and, therefore, the secondary disabilities that come as a result. The responsibility for commissioning services in this space lies with the clinical commissioning groups in England, working together across all different sectors of the local health economy. We have heard of cases of long waiting times for a diagnosis. My Department will consider how we can improve access to these services and a diagnostic pathway, but we also need to learn from best practice. The Tameside and Glossop Integrated Care NHS Foundation Trust has developed the maternity alcohol management algorithm pathway—why can people not come up with something snappier, like that first one? It has introduced screening and awareness of FASD, enabling what we think is effective early intervention. Just as the long-term plan gives different examples on smoking, with the Canada example on challenging smoking rates among pregnant women, I am interested in the best practice ideas and that trust has a lot to bring in this space. The Surrey and Borders Partnership NHS Foundation Trust has a specialist centre, although sadly it is the only one in England. The trust provides a comprehensive and rapid diagnostic pathway for those with FASD and it has a lot to share from its journey and with its ideas for service delivery, and on the success it has had.

**Bill Esterson:** The Minister mentions Surrey and Borders, and I have had significant interaction with Dr Raja Mukherjee, the specialist who runs that centre. I am glad the Minister acknowledged that it is the only one in the country. May I encourage him to intervene to make sure we have such centres right across the country, as that would make a massive difference?

**Steve Brine:** The hon. Gentleman can certainly encourage me in that regard, and I will look at that in terms of the prevention paper. We would have to be guided by the clinicians and the CCGs on where they would see the greatest need for that provision to be. That is very much the spirit of the long-term plan, but it is not ideal that that centre is the only one. Surrey is near my constituency, but a long way from Sefton.

Finally, I wish to touch on the wider departmental policy engagement in this area. Our deputy chief medical officer, Gina Radford, has held roundtable meetings on the subject, which considered the future development of policy to improve prevention and support. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman has been involved in that. These meetings were attended by experts in the field and, crucially, FASD service users. I thank

[*Steve Brine*]

NOFAS UK—the National Organisation for Foetal Alcohol Syndrome-UK—which has been helpful in supporting and contributing to these meetings, along with other charities working in this field. We are also providing wider support to children and families affected by alcohol misuse, through the children of alcoholic dependant parents programme, which I am proud of. It was one of the first things I got to announce in this job. The previous Secretary of State working as one with the current shadow Secretary of State had managed to do this, which shows that cross-party working can happen in this Parliament between the two main parties—and there were no preconditions to it.

**Lyn Brown:** That is a career-limiting comment.

**Steve Brine:** The preconditions did not come from this side; I filled it in nicely. Through that programme,

we are investing some £6 million over three years to support a vulnerable group, as part of our new alcohol strategy.

The Government take alcohol concerns, across the board, very seriously and even more so when they relate to pregnancy. We are making progress—I hope—to prevent future FASD cases, and trying to change the landscape on prevention and treatment for those affected. But there is not an ounce of complacency in us—there certainly is not in me. We will continue to work towards improvements in the area. I can promise the hon. Gentleman that and I know, given his consistent work in this space, he will make sure he holds us to that and continues to raise awareness of the dangers of drinking alcohol during pregnancy in this House and outside. I thank him for that.

*Question put and agreed to.*

5.29 pm

*House adjourned.*

# Westminster Hall

Monday 7 January 2019

[MR VIRENDRA SHARMA *in the Chair*]

## Televised Election Debates

4.30 pm

**Steve Double** (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered e-petition 228572 relating to an independent commission on televised election debates.

It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Sharma. I start by thanking the petitioner, Jonathan Levy from Sky News, who began this petition as part of the Sky News “Make Debates Happen” campaign, and also the more than 130,000 members of the public who have signed the petition since September 2018, which has led to this debate today. The e-petition states:

“Genuine leaders’ debates took place in 2010, but in the next two elections didn’t happen.”

It calls for the electoral laws to be amended to make it mandatory for party leaders to take part in televised debates, and also proposes establishing an independent debates commission to set the rules and format of such debates, which the petition states

“would take decision making out of the politicians and broadcasters’ hands and ensure TV debates become a regular fixture of UK elections.”

It is worth noting that the Sky News “Make Debates Happen” campaign has received a fair amount of cross-party support from some prominent Members of the House, and I want to acknowledge the work that my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone) has been carrying out on his private Member’s Bill, which will be shortly coming before the House, to make general election leaders’ debates take place. I am sure we all look forward to hearing his contribution to this debate in due course.

**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhese** (Slough) (Lab): I wholeheartedly commend Sky News and others for their initiative for an independent commission on televised election debates. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that there should be an independent commission rather than this being left to the Prime Minister of the day’s political whims as to what is in their best interest, and that maybe we should also have deputy leaders’ debates within that framework?

**Steve Double:** The hon. Gentleman makes a very good point, which I will develop later. If we are to have regular leaders’ debates and formalise that process, it is absolutely right that that be managed by an independent commission—as he rightly says—to take it out of the hands of politicians and ensure that it is carried out in an orderly and fair manner. On extending this to deputy leaders, I am not sure I would go that far, but I believe that the deputy leader of the hon. Gentleman’s party is indeed keen for such a debate to take place.

We are here today to debate having debates, and I believe that this petition is very timely in its coming to the House, because there is no doubt that the nature of politics in this country has changed considerably in recent times. The growth of the 24-hour news cycle and

the development of social media mean that what the public have come to expect of their political leaders has changed. We now generally expect our leaders to be much more visible and accessible than they were in previous generations. I believe that it is in this context that the matter of holding leaders’ debates must find its place.

Only last month we saw what can happen, when a debate was proposed between the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition on the EU withdrawal vote. After various to-ings and fro-ings, it proved very difficult to find agreement on that debate and it ended up not happening. I am not sure that what we saw take place last month reflected very well on our democratic process.

It is also interesting and worth noting that the petition had at that time reached around 60,000 signatures, and the number of signatures it was attracting had really slowed up. After that debate was proposed and then failed to take place, there was a sudden surge of signatures that pushed the petition well over the 100,000 mark very quickly. That shows the interest among the public in televised leaders’ debates, but also perhaps demonstrates the frustration that many people felt—the to-ing and fro-ing and horse-trading that went on at that time did not materialise into a debate taking place. There is clear evidence of an appetite among a large part of the public to see our political leaders debate on TV.

**Jonathan Edwards** (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): I apologise for missing the start of the hon. Gentleman’s speech. I agree that what happened last month did not reflect particularly well on politics in the British state, but one of the big problems with that episode was that it was seen as a debate between just the Labour party and the Conservative party. Does he agree that if we are to have these formalised television debates—they are vital for democracy—every single party contesting those elections should have a part to play?

**Steve Double:** I am not at all surprised at the point the hon. Gentleman makes, for obvious reasons, and that is one of the big challenges and questions that would need to be addressed. It is right that it be addressed by an independent commission, because clearly there is a tension and a balance that has to be struck on leaders’ debates when it comes to who is included, how many debates there are and so forth.

We need to ensure that we strike the right balance between all political parties in that process, and also meet the expectation of a large part of the public—they want to see a debate between people who have a realistic chance of being the future Prime Minister. That is one of the big tensions that leaders’ debates create, and it would need to be addressed by the independent commission, but I absolutely take on board the hon. Gentleman’s point.

The fact is that fewer and fewer of our constituents vote for us, our political parties or indeed our leaders based simply on what they read in the leaflets we put through their doors or in newspapers. There have been significant changes to the way we interact with one another and to how we gain the information we need through the media, as well as through social media, to inform ourselves before we decide how to vote. There is a clear expectation among the public that politicians, and particularly leaders of political parties, be much more visible and accessible than they were previously.



[Steve Double]

I believe the public want greater opportunities to see the political leaders in action and interacting with each other to build up a more complete picture of who they are and what they stand for. Party leaders have been at the forefront of some of the changes that have taken place and the election campaigns of all main parties now focus much more on the leader than was previously the case. Often, their style of leadership is scrutinised carefully. Televised debates are a great opportunity for our political leaders to present their case and communicate directly with voters through the TV screen, into their living rooms and on their smartphones. They are also a way for leaders to showcase the rigorous debates on important national matters that we see week after week here in Parliament while putting them into a format that is much more accessible for the public.

**Hugh Gaffney** (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman mentioned TV channels. Is not the problem which TV channel would get the debate? They are all looking for that prize.

**Steve Double:** The hon. Gentleman raises an important point that the independent commission would need to decide on. I believe it is important that we have a commission that is independent of politicians and broadcasters to manage the process and decide who would be involved in the debates and who would broadcast them. I think the debates should be accessible and shared across as many broadcasters as possible, but the independent commission would have to manage that.

It is probably inevitable that debates will become a regular feature of our elections in the future. Although not everyone will welcome that, that is clearly the direction of travel. Debates took place in 2010 and were generally well received by the public. I believe that the public now expect debates to happen regularly, so it would be better to embrace that expectation and put a proper process in place for debates, rather than go through the dance we have seen at every recent election.

**Simon Hart** (Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire) (Con): Can my hon. Friend point to any evidence that supports that comment? That is quite a sweeping statement and it would be interesting if he backed it up with some evidence or proof.

**Steve Double:** Which statement is my hon. Friend asking me to clarify?

**Simon Hart:** My hon. Friend's claim that the televised debates were well received by the public. The extent to which the public viewed them would be an interesting add-on to his comments.

**Steve Double:** If I remember the figures correctly, I think that about 10 million watched the leaders' debates in 2010. I base that comment on what I perceived from the voting public—I was out campaigning in that election for someone else, and I saw on the doorstep that the debates sparked a great deal of interest—and on the fact that many people were disappointed that debates did not happen recently. I take my hon. Friend's point that views on debates are mixed—they are not universal—but I believe that the public have a growing appetite for them.

**Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on introducing the debate on behalf of the Petitions Committee. To back up what he is saying, this is what the Hansard Society found in its 2018 "Audit of Political Engagement":

"Among different sources of news and information respondents used to inform their decision-making at the 2017 general election, party leaders' debates and political interviews were the most important".

Although the process was imperfect in 2017, voters nevertheless said that debates were among the most important sources informing their decision making.

**Steve Double:** I agree. There is a growing appetite and many more voters today use leaders' appearances on television, whether in head-to-head debates or in other formats, to get the information they need to make an informed decision.

I feel that the current situation, with horse-trading between the parties and a sense that no one really knows whether debates will happen or not—people set out their criteria, and we cannot be sure how serious anyone is about wanting the debates to take place—is not helpful and does not reflect well on our democratic process. I therefore believe that it is time to embrace debates and formalise the process so everyone is clear about the expectations. They should be taken out of the political sphere and put into the hands of an independent body that can hopefully manage the process much better.

Sky News laid out some proposals for the independent commission that is proposed to manage this process. It said that the commission should be established by parliamentary statute and funded solely by agreed contributions by UK broadcasters—I am sure we would all agree that the taxpayer should not fund the commission or the debates; they must be paid for by the broadcasters. It said that the commission should be made up of former judges, civil servants, broadcasters and other public figures who have experience in the media and politics, and overseen by a Cross-Bench peer with relevant experience, and that it should ensure that the general public have the opportunity to see the leaders of the political parties that could form a Government debate each other by including at least one televised debate between electorally realistic candidates for Prime Minister before every general election. I believe that those sensible proposals would put in place a framework that would ensure that the process is managed well and happens in an orderly and fair manner.

**Simon Hart:** I am not being awkward for the sake of it. A televised debate is just one means that a party or leader has of communicating with voters in the run-up to an election. What is so special about that form of media? Why should the independent commission not have any say over any of the other methods through which we communicate with our potential voters? It seems strange to isolate television as the preferred means by which to impose this new regime and to disregard social media, for example, which probably reaches as many people—I do not know the exact figures—just as effectively. Why would we stick with just one?

**Steve Double:** Leaders' debates on television are unique because the leaders of political parties go head to head with each other. On social media, political parties primarily

promote their own leader or policies. Head-to-head debates, which clearly need to be managed and adjudicated fairly and transparently, are quite different from parties' campaigning on other media platforms. Party political broadcasts on TV are already regulated, and this proposal is an extension of that. The head-to-head nature of TV debates means that they are a slightly different animal from regular campaigning.

I think we should embrace debates. As has been mentioned, we must balance any decision to formalise regular leaders' debates with people's legitimate concerns. We have to acknowledge that not everyone believes that this is a positive step or the right way forward. In the run-up to this debate, the House of Commons social media team carried out a very quick, unscientific survey on its Facebook page. It asked:

"Should party leaders have to take part in a TV debate before a general election?"

The response was mixed. More commenters were opposed to televised leaders' debates than were in favour. Many felt that TV debates are largely about performance and that they facilitate judgments based on personality, appearance and media-savviness, rather than on a leader's capacity to be Prime Minister. Some referred to the Americanisation of British politics and suggested that debates could result in a more presidential style of politics, which runs contrary to our parliamentary institutions and tradition. Others pointed to the perceived gap between politicians and voters, and said that canvassing constituents and other forms of direct engagement would be far more useful. It is right to acknowledge that not everyone is entirely enthusiastic about this proposal and we must balance those views. It is important that we weigh up the genuine concerns and reflect on them before any decision to press ahead is made. I have personally considered the pros and cons of regular debates. Although I believe that we will inevitably reach that point and that it is probably better to embrace and shape the idea rather than resist it, a number of important points need to be considered.

It is important that we do not allow leaders' debates to dominate political campaigning in general elections. Debates should not replace other forms of campaigning and should complement the election campaign, rather than replace or dominate it, so there must be careful consideration of how many debates are scheduled. We had in three in 2010, which was probably too many. I think it would more naturally sit at one or two.

It is also important that we think carefully about the timing of debates. During the 2010 campaign and the debates that took place then, I was very much aware of the role of postal votes. Today, increasing numbers of voters choose to vote by post, and we need to recognise that for many millions of people across the country, polling day is not election day. It happens several days before election day, when their postal votes land on their doorsteps. We need to take that into account. It was wrong that in 2010 some of the debates happened after the postal votes had landed, and some people had already voted before all the debates took place. Certainly, if I had any role in this, I would strongly recommend that all leaders' debates took place on television before postal votes were dispatched, to ensure that every voter had a chance to see the televised debates before they had the opportunity to vote.

Another benefit is that that would free up the last couple of weeks of the campaign. Those final two weeks of the campaign would not be dominated by televised leaders' debates but by the other, more traditional forms of campaigning. I think that would be the right thing to do. I am sure that many of us remember David Cameron's comments when reflecting on the 2010 debates. He said that

"they took all the life out of the...campaign"

in those final weeks because they sucked in so much energy and attention. Avoiding that would be very welcome.

Sound and informed debates are one of the fundamental pillars of our parliamentary democracy, and it makes sense that the voting public can see our political leaders in debate during general election campaigns. We need to accept that our politics continue to change, and to adapt to changes in how people communicate and inform themselves. We should embrace that change in our election campaigning. Leaders' debates are a good format for making politicians more accessible to voters and, should we decide to formalise regular leaders' debates, it is absolutely right that responsibility for managing the process is taken out of the hands of politicians and broadcasters and put into the hands of an independent commission. It should be completely funded by broadcasters, and the bill should not in any way come to rest on the taxpayer.

I trust that the debate will prove a useful opportunity to consider the matter. Once again, I thank Sky News for initiating the petition, as well as the 130,000 people who signed it. I look forward to the contributions of other hon. Members and to hearing the Minister's response.

4.54 pm

**Dr David Drew** (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): I am delighted to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Sharma. I congratulate the hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) on introducing the petition in a particularly objective way, even though he supports it. He covered many of the issues. I had not originally intended to engage in the debate and wanted to make only one point, but now that I have been given the opportunity to speak I will wrap that point into a wider speech.

From my perspective, the 2010 debate let the genie out of the bottle and, quite simply, it cannot be put back in. In both 2015 and 2017, when there was at least a precedent, it was bizarre that the Prime Minister of the day decided that debates were not appropriate for those particular elections—that is dangerous. I think that we give Prime Ministers far too much power and that there is a need for an independent voice on this issue. Responsibility should not rest with the Government of the day, let alone the Prime Minister.

My main point, which is the one I had intended to make, is that the broadcasting of politics is in serious need of investigation. I do not know if I am right—the Minister will no doubt put me in my place if I am wrong—but since my return to Parliament, I have been alarmed at the lack of regional coverage, certainly by ITV, which I do not think is meeting its obligations. The required amount of coverage is in statute.

That issue may differ somewhat from the question of whether we should have prime ministerial debates, but it is interesting that the petition was initiated by Sky, which is not subject to the same rigours as both the

[Dr David Drew]

BBC and ITV, and it is disappointing that our mainstream media do not want to get as much as they should from the political scene. I do not believe that broadcasters should show debates at the peak time of 7 o'clock—there are reasons why that would go down badly with the wider electorate—but to my mind, the rules and regulations on how much politics should be shown at both national and regional levels are not being adhered to, which is why this debate is particularly apposite.

We should be able to remove the matter from party politics, implement an independent scrutiny arrangement and make sure that politics is properly covered in the media—certainly in the broadcast media, which have more control than print media. I hope that the matter does not end with the next prime ministerial debate and that we consider more wholeheartedly the way in which broadcasting is currently handled and ensure that sufficient time is given to politics. I do not expect the Minister to count every minute with a stopwatch—although perhaps she has time for that—but I think we are being short-changed, and we ought to pay attention to that.

The hon. Member for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire (Simon Hart) may be on to something. He may come at the issue from a different angle from me, and he probably does not share my view—I am not sure he is convinced that this is how we should conduct our politics—but he certainly made the point that debates should be subject to some form of wider scrutiny, and I share that view. I think it is important to put that on record.

The debates have to be held in the fairest and most impartial way possible, which is why responsibility needs to be taken away from the Prime Minister. It cannot in any way be fair or impartial for one person to decide whether to go on television to defend their party's policies—during debates, it is a party standing for election, not the Government—so that decision should be taken away from them.

Whether we like it or not, we all watch the US presidential debates, which always seem to be the centrepiece of the whole presidential campaign. I do not know whether votes are won or lost by those debates; Richard Nixon certainly lost some, but whether they are won is another matter. The fact is that that approach is built into the American constitution, because Americans have a President. I must make it very clear, however, that our Prime Minister is not a President, and we should constrain the role of the Prime Minister. Nevertheless, television debates are a way in which the public can find at least some comfort that the person who will lead the Government is able to answer questions in a format that they can access, so that they may make up their own minds.

The debate should be held earlier, as the hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay has said, recognising that so many people vote by post nowadays. Given that we have the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011 and we know when the next election should take place, I do not understand why we do not yet know how many days that election campaign will be held over. It would be good to regulate that as well, so that we know when during the campaign the debate will take place. That should all be laid down so that candidates can prepare for the debate and the public can be made aware of the timing. The question whether we should have two, three

or only one television debate needs to be investigated properly and to be the subject of debate in the House. That is why we are in this Chamber today.

My last point reinforces what the hon. Gentleman said: the debate on a so-called debate on the meaningful vote degenerated into a farce—including whether it would be on the BBC or ITV, what format it would take, who would be interviewing, and whether members of the public would form part of the panel—and that did not help us in this place. It looked like our self-interest always comes to the fore. If we genuinely want to reach out to people, we have to accept impartial rules for how a debate is conducted.

I hope, therefore, that any commission would have a wider range of responsibilities than those relating to a prime ministerial debate. Any crucial issue should be subject to rules regarding who will be interviewed, how they will be interviewed, and at what time. All that should be laid down in advance, rather than be subject to a Dutch auction between the Leader of the Opposition and the Prime Minister that makes it look like it is about which one of them blinks first. That does none of us any good in the long run.

This has been a useful debate. I think that most of us would support revisiting the issue and it being dealt with properly by Parliament and the Government of the day. Anything that adds to people's interest in politics has to be a good thing. Of course, it has to be managed properly and we have to strike a balance with regard to the participating parties. That will be difficult, given that so many parties are represented in this House, not to mention those outside it. There must, therefore, be a *de minimis* level, based on the previous general election, to decide who is entitled to take part; otherwise, people would invent themselves as party leaders just to get a free hit on the television.

All those things need to be looked at, and the only way in which we can do so is to have an independent commission with the powers and duty to ensure that it is done properly and in a way that enhances, rather than belittles, our democracy.

5.3 pm

**Mr Peter Bone** (Wellingborough) (Con): It is great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Sharma. It is also a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Stroud (Dr Drew)—I agree with virtually everything he said—and my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double), who introduced the motion in a very reasoned way. I also thank the Petitions Committee for the debate—one of the advantages to come out of the expenses scandal is that the public can have things they are interested in debated in this House.

I am delighted that we have such an excellent Minister present to respond to the debate and to agree with everything I say. I am very interested to hear what she has to say, as I will be to hear the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan), and the spokesperson for the Scottish National party, the hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard)—two excellent parliamentarians.

I am particularly interested in what the shadow Minister will say, because at some time in the future his party might be in government. I hope that what he says today



will apply when Labour is in government. It is a problem that people are quite keen on TV debates when in opposition, but not when in power.

**Kevin Brennan:** I should point out that when I was in Government, the Prime Minister at the time did agree to a television debate—in 2010.

**Mr Bone:** I will come to that specific point, because it is a very good example.

I am very grateful to Sky News, because it has done something really useful: it has got the wider public thinking about these debates. We cannot arrange them two or three months before a general election; we have to have an independent commission, because the problem is that the party with the advantage does not want to have a TV debate. The only time we get a debate is, for example, if the Prime Minister thinks that the Government are behind and the Leader of the Opposition wants publicity. That is exactly what happened with Gordon Brown. I would suggest that he thought it right to have a debate because he was behind.

I thought that the debate between Gordon Brown, David Cameron and Nick Clegg was very good. When we go out campaigning during a general election, we have a campaign session in the morning and in the afternoon, and between 5 pm and 7 pm in the evening. I remember getting back one evening after campaigning, going to the gym, putting on a headset and listening to the debates. The only thing that I remember really is the phrase, “I agree with Nick”, but the debates were very useful in helping electors to make up their minds on how to vote.

**Adam Holloway (Gravesham) (Con):** My hon. Friend mentioned Nick Clegg’s participation in that debate, but that was part of the problem raised by both the hon. Member for Stroud (Dr Drew) and my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double). Should not the debate be for those with a credible possibility of becoming Prime Minister? What we ended up with then was Cleggmania and a disastrous coalition Government.

**Mr Bone:** My hon. Friend might say that, but I couldn’t possibly do so. However, I certainly agree with the first bit. When I promote my private Member’s Bill, I will explain why the debate should be between only the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition: in a leaders’ debate, we look at who is going to be Prime Minister.

Those of us in this Chamber get some spin-off advantages from leaders’ debates. For us constituency candidates, there is nothing worse than to be told that we are to get a visit from the leader of our party, because we know that we will lose days of campaigning as a result. First, we will be asked to find a suitable venue that ties into everything the leader wants to promote. Desperately, we find somewhere, talk to people and they agree, but then the party officials say, “No, we don’t want that”, and ask for something else. Eventually, they decide on somewhere else and they send down an advance team of young people who boss us around and tell us how to run things in our own constituency—that is another day lost. In time, the leader turns up and we get a PR event—they used to be called “Cameron Direct”—where people ask difficult questions of the Prime Minister or the Leader of the Opposition.

But that was not the case: all those questions were planted. There was no real debate at all and we lost three or four days of campaigning. If we had leaders’ debates, that would at least give us a few days on which they would not be able to visit us in our constituencies.

Where I disagree slightly is with the idea that leaders’ debates dominate the decision making of the British public. I do not think that that is the case, nor that there is a national swing any more. Voters are much more savvy now, voting on what is in their interests. The last general election had all sorts of strange results, but if votes had been determined purely by the party leaders and what they said, the results would have been much more uniform. The debates do not make that sort of difference, but they are an important part of the democratic process.

Those who argue against televised debates say they are all about performance, not substance. Is that not what people used say before the Houses of Parliament were televised? There were exactly the same arguments, and we now know that they were completely wrong.

I really wanted to talk about my private Member’s Bill on the televised leaders’ debates commission, which was given its First Reading in 2017 and is scheduled to be debated on 15 March. It is the second Bill on that day, the first being the Prime Minister (Accountability to House of Commons) Bill, which also stands in my name. I assure the House that if that Bill is not moved, the first Bill will be on the leaders’ debate. We have an opportunity in March to move the whole process forward. The Government have little legislative time because of Brexit, but this is a private Member’s Bill. On 15 March, if nobody objects, we can move forward and make the Bill an Act of Parliament. I hope that the Opposition and the Government will allow the House to make its own decision on this matter and not try to block the Bill with some parliamentary procedure.

Much of what Sky News says is already proposed in my Bill: to set up an independent commission responsible for holding a number of leaders’ debates during the regulated period. My Bill calls for three debates: one with the leaders of all the parties represented in the House of Commons at the time of the general election, and the second and third between the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition. As my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Adam Holloway) mentioned, we want a debate between people who are likely to be Prime Minister, although I do not want to leave out the smaller parties.

There is a problem that I accept: by having a debate between the leaders of the parties in the House of Commons, not every party will be included. But would we really want a communist party or the British National party in the debate? I think not. There was a serious problem with the UK Independence party, when at the height of its power it had no MPs but clearly had very large support. I would leave it to the commission to decide whether to bring any other party leaders into the debate, but the leader of any party represented in the House would have to attend. By the way, attendance would not be optional; the Prime Minister or the Leader of the Opposition could not offload it to someone. No; they would have to attend.

People say the debates would take up lots of the party leaders’ time, but if they had to prep for weeks on end they could not be much good as a leader. They should know what they think, and be able to go out and debate.

[Mr Bone]

Under my Bill, there would be proper debates. The moderator would ask a question, but the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition could debate with each other, back and forth. There would be an actual debate, not rehearsed lines delivered before they moved on.

We can argue that we do not have a presidential system, but we have moved a very long way towards a presidential system since Tony Blair. I remember in the last election, Conservative MPs were all there, standing with Theresa. That was the message—it went down well—because the leader is so associated with local politics.

**Jonathan Edwards:** The notion that we are moving to a presidential system worries me greatly, and perhaps is one of the concerns about formalising a TV debate schedule. I have served in three Parliaments, two of which were hung Parliaments—one with a small minority Government. Does that not mean there should be a requirement for every single political party that could form a part of the Government to have a full role in the TV debates?

**Mr Bone:** Under my Bill, there would have to be a minimum of three debates—two head to head between the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition and one with all party leaders. That is the minimum, but if the commission thought it was right to have more debates, it could have them. I want a minimum number of compulsory, not optional, debates—the leaders would have to turn up.

The make-up of the commission is where I move slightly away from Sky News's suggestion. One commission member should be nominated by the Prime Minister and one by the Leader of the Opposition, two by broadcasters and three by the Speaker of the House of Commons, one of whom would be the chairman. The commission would serve for the whole Parliament, and a new commission would be set up depending on the election results. That is slightly different, but it would be funded entirely by the broadcasters. The object would be to have as much coverage as possible, and it would help to inform the debate.

We have a very good Minister and I know she will take our remarks on board. This is an opportunity for the Government to do something now that will benefit democracy when the general election comes around. The Prime Minister has said that she will not lead the Conservative party into the next general election. It is a great opportunity, as part of her legacy, to do this. I hope it will not be dismissed out of hand.

One of the great advantages of this debate is that on Second Reading in March, even if we have only limited time, I can point to this debate and say, "This is what Members said." One reason I have not published the Bill yet is because I wanted to hear what Members said today, so that that could be incorporated into the Bill. I entirely take on the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay about the two polling dates—the postal vote deadline and polling day. It is absolutely right that the leaders' debate between all party leaders should be before the postal vote date, and at least one of the head-to-heads should be before the postal voting date. I will incorporate that into my draft Bill.

I hope Members here will find the time to serve on the Bill Committee when we move forward, so that all the details can be worked out. I hope this Minister will be on the Bill Committee, so we can get an Act of Parliament. Some people say I am being hopeful, but in this Parliament I have already managed to make one of my private Member's Bills an Act of Parliament. As it happens, I have another on drone regulation, which seems to have some relevance. Through private Members' Bills we can get what the electorate want.

**Mr Dhesi:** I agree that the proposal is entirely sensible and inevitable, but surely the fear is that the Government may kick the petition and the campaign into the long grass. Electoral laws are widely accepted as outdated, and in February 2016 the Law Commission published an interim report calling for current laws governing elections to be rationalised into a single consistent legislative framework governing all elections. Three years later, the Government have yet to respond, so what chance does the hon. Gentleman's Bill have of seeing the light of day?

**Mr Bone:** I will park other electoral reform, but the public want this particular reform; the broadcasters want it, I argue most MPs want it and it is an opportunity for the Government to do the right thing. We need a bit of good will at the moment, so it would be a nice thing to do.

I thank Members who will come to support my Bill and those who will oppose it.

**Adam Holloway:** Will my hon. Friend join me in paying tribute to the extraordinary and supremely able editor of Sky News, my friend from ITN John Ryley? He has been the driving force behind this.

**Mr Bone:** I was supposed to say that earlier. I mentioned Sky News, but it is John Ryley and he has done really well. I also thank Adam Boulton for what he has been doing at Sky News. He is always fair and balanced when it comes to Brexit.

Thank you for listening to me, Mr Sharma. I am interested to hear what other Members have to say; hopefully, I can incorporate some of their comments into the Bill.

5.20 pm

**Graham Stringer** (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab): Like my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Dr Drew), I originally turned up to listen to the debate and possibly to make an intervention, but I will follow the excellent speech by the hon. Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone). I start with two disappointments. One is that there are not more right hon. and hon. Members present. This is an important issue; I can guarantee that every Member of Parliament has a view about how debates on television and in the media should be conducted during a general election. It is a disappointment that more people have not turned up. It is disrespectful to the 130,000 people who petitioned for the debate and it does not do justice to the importance of the issue.

My second disappointment is that the three hon. Members who spoke before me all came to the conclusion that we need a quango to regulate debates. Reluctantly, I agree with them. As we do not have a written constitution, it has the merit of being flexible; when the world

changes, the processes within this place and electorally change. If people were acting with democratic spirit and good will, and as television and the media have developed, one would have expected politicians and political parties to have responded to that by enabling people to benefit from having the debate broadcast on television in their front rooms. That has not happened for the reasons stated explicitly by the hon. Member for Wellingborough. When Leaders of the Opposition are massively ahead in the opinion polls, they do not want a debate. Why would they risk hitting a banana skin? When Prime Ministers are in No. 10 and ahead in the opinion polls, they want to avoid exactly the same banana skin. Therefore, I think we need a regulatory body.

My heart sank when the hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) went through the list of the great and the good who would have to serve on a quango to regulate television debates—judges and other people. Sadly, we have developed a population of quangocrats who serve on many quangos, scratch each other's backs and move from one quango to another. That means that sometimes we do not get the breadth and the quality in those organisations that we should. I make a partisan point here, from the position I have taken on the Brexit debate. It is extraordinary that the total membership of the Electoral Commission are remainers. The difficult problem in setting up any quango is not going to the pool of people who have made themselves available to serve—often public spiritedly; I do not want to be too mean—as it is a closed group. Reluctantly, I think we have to have a body that will consider the complicated issues involved, but I hope it is not the list that was given by the able motivator of the motion, the hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay.

It is important that we have televised debates or discussions set up, in whatever form, because sometimes we do not state the blindingly obvious: that debate is at the core of democracy and our society. We need to have that debate in as many forums as we can. When the BBC was the monopoly broadcaster in the 1950s, it might have been sensible to just have the debate on the BBC, but now we have a range of social media and different television broadcasters, including access to television stations from around the world, as well as traditional print media. We need to ensure that there is regulation on television, which is where most people look for discussion during a general election. The viewing figures for the debates in 2010 were immense. However much Cleggmania we had in that election—and I got worried looking at the figures because it seemed that the Lib Dems were going to get a huge number of votes in my constituency, but I went out every day and I suppose I must have knocked on a Lib Dem door, but nobody admitted to it through the whole campaign—those debates were important, as the people and leaders challenged each other, but I do not think they changed very much.

That has been the case in many elections. I remember the opinion polls ticking over on the bottom of the Sky television screen in the 1997 election, barely shifting half a point during the whole election. We live in a time where the world is changing and politics are more fluid than they have ever been. We need a response to that. It would be the difficult job of a regulatory body to balance up the major parties and who would be invited. It is said, rather glibly, that only the leaders of the

parties that are likely to provide the Prime Minister should be there. If we looked at the experience in Canada, the people who were going to be Prime Minister before the election eight or nine years ago were not elected. One of the major parties got 2%. There have been major changes in European Union countries. Parties that were permanently in the ascendancy, such as the Social Democrats in Sweden, are now minor parties. Sometimes these changes happen very quickly. There has never been a more intense time for debate.

It is going to be a difficult job for any regulatory body that is set up, but I think it is vital. It is not just that there are a lot of different outlets for information nowadays. We have coined the phrase “fake news” for a lot of the information that has been used in elections and referendums, because of the internet. One of the great things about a debate is the ability to challenge lies. In the old cliché, if you keep on telling lies I will keep on telling the truth. That is the purpose of debate.

People have complained about the referendum—about whether certain facts were facts—but it is the purpose of debate to expose such things. What better place than on television, with a huge audience, to get those issues out? I do not think that the 2010 election was affected by the television debates, but I believe that the 2017 election was massively affected by the debates, quite simply because the Prime Minister did not have the courage to debate. She would not put the case for the Conservative party, which went from having a large lead in the opinion polls to not being able to form a majority Government. If anyone doubts the power of the debate, I think the television companies were right to empty-seat the Prime Minister and go ahead without her. It was a bit strange, and it looked a bit strange, but it exposed the fact that the leader of one of our major parties was unprepared to get up and defend its position.

I have another example of the positive side of television debate and discussion, although not in a formal leaders' debate. It certainly affected me when I saw how important it was. Hon. Members will remember the rise of the British National party. It did not rise to a significant extent, but it looked as if it was making progress when it was led by the bottom-feeder Nick Griffin. On the evening when he went on “Question Time” I was in someone's front room talking about pavements and street lighting. At the end of the meeting they said to me, “Are you going to go and buy a bottle of wine?” I thought, “What do these people know about my drinking habits? That's a bit strange,” but every single one of those people, living in terraced houses in north Manchester, was going back to watch Nick Griffin and Jack Straw, and the other party people on “Question Time”. Griffin was destroyed and the BNP fell apart. That is the power of debate, and however complicated it is to deal with parties that have significant support with no representation, and those such as the Scottish National party and Plaid Cymru whose primary objective is to get out of this place, and who do not want their leader to be Prime Minister but who clearly have a significant democratic impact in the whole United Kingdom, we should do what we can to facilitate those positions.

I could go on speaking about this issue, which is an important one, on which we should be giving support. Having heard what the hon. Member for Wellingborough said, I wish him well with his Bill. It may need some tweaks. However, the whole of the House of Commons



[Graham Stringer]

and House of Lords should get together, because when we are away from elections we all believe in debate. It is only vested interest, when we think we can grab an election without debating, that stops it happening. I did not intend to speak, but the debate is a good one, and it is a shame more people are not here. Sky is to be congratulated, as are the people who signed the petition, on stimulating the discussion.

5.33 pm

**John Lamont** (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Sharma. I commend the organisers of the petition, the Petitions Committee for allowing time for the debate and my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double), who introduced the motion so effectively.

I agree with the former Deputy Prime Minister Lord Whitelaw, who said in the House of Lords in 1990 that Sky News had “a very high reputation”, adding:

“I admire it as do many other people.”—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 9 October 1990; Vol. 522, c. 195.]

Those comments are relevant today. Sky News is an award-winning broadcaster, picking up awards from the British Academy of Film and Television Arts and the Royal Television Society; it has won the RTS news channel of the year award. It therefore has a strong reputation for news coverage. That strength comes from the quality of its journalists, including Beth Rigby, Ed Conway, Mark Stone and Mark White. It undoubtedly has a team of top-notch journalists and is one of the main sources of news in my household. I cannot understand why the channel has threatened an enviable reputation by devoting so much coverage and air time to its own campaign and petition for the leaders’ debates commission.

I am now going to shatter what has so far been the consensus in the debate. In this day and age, when we are all concerned about fake news and the reliability of what we read, watch and interact with, I question the editorial decision by Sky News to report constantly on its own campaign, as if it were actual news rather than simply an attempt to gather more signatures.

The campaign and petition on the Parliament website started in early September 2018, ahead of the party conference season. Since then, Sky News has been reporting on its progress almost every half hour and certainly every hour. Latterly, there has been a running total of the number of signatures in the top left-hand corner of the Sky News screen together with its campaign hashtag. During critical moments of the Brexit debate in this place, and at moments of crisis, either for the Government here or elsewhere in the world when wildfires were sweeping California or conflict was raging in Yemen, Sky News still found time to insert and promote its campaign for election debates.

If the petition was gathering huge support it might be argued that that should be reported by Sky News. However, if one looks at the other petitions on the Parliament petitions website that argument falls flat. A petition calling for a ban on the sale of fireworks has 297,000 signatures, which is twice the support that the Sky News petition has. A petition asking for the UK to leave the EU without a deal has the support of almost

300,000 people. Another petition, set up by a young cancer sufferer and calling for the lowering of the age for smear tests from 25 to 18, so as to prevent cancer, has 93,000 signatures.

My point is that but for the fact that Sky News was the promoter of the debate campaign, it would not have been gathering the air time and signatures it has. I have struggled to find any coverage of any of the other petitions, which have either attracted more support or are arguably more worthy, on any Sky News outlet. One hundred and sixty-five of my 74,000 constituents signed the petition and, despite the best efforts of Sky News, only one asked me to attend today’s debate. I felt so strongly about the misuse of Sky News’s position in the broadcast media to promote its own campaign and petition that I had to come and speak.

As to my views on leaders’ debates and the idea of setting up a commission, general elections in the United Kingdom are not about electing a president. Voters elect 650 individual MPs, and from them a Government is formed. My experience of previous elections—to this place and to the Scottish Parliament—is that leaders’ debates suck the oxygen away from local campaigns. The focus on the doorsteps, instead of being on the merits of each candidate and on local issues, is on what will happen or has just happened in the debates. The media reporting is all about how well each leader performed. Who looked good? Who answered the questions best? How did the broadcasters or newsreaders appear? It is not about the substantive issues of the election campaign.

For a period, journalists are not reporting on the critical issues of the election. They become more like commentators at a boxing match. In 2010, as several hon. Members have mentioned, it was perceived that Nick Clegg had performed well in the debate. That resulted in hours of coverage of the so-called Liberal Democrat bounce. However, the actual result showed little or no change in Liberal Democrat support, so how much influence do the debates have? In my view, the drive for leaders’ debates is simply about the media machine and journalists trying to insert themselves into an election campaign rather than doing their job of reporting on the key election issues of the day. They provide little new information to voters.

In the United Kingdom, we have the added complication of four nations with differing political perspectives. If a leaders’ debate is about assessing how potential Prime Ministers perform, how does that model accommodate smaller parties, such as the Scottish National party, the Democratic Unionist party and Plaid Cymru? Other Members have already commented on that issue.

Those parties might have significant support in their own parts of the country, but there is no prospect of their leaders occupying Downing Street. The Sky News proposal does not accommodate what is essentially a way to scrutinise presidential candidates. I note that my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone) proposed an alternative, but I do not think that accurately reflects the huge regional variations in how we vote as between the different parts of the United Kingdom. Why, for example, should voters in Cornwall have to listen to the leader of the Scottish National party, when none of the voters in Cornwall has any prospect of voting for the leader of the Scottish National party, whether or not they have any desire to do so?

In the letter that we all received from John Ryley, the head of Sky News, before this debate, we were told that an

“independent commission would remove the ability of political leaders to block debates because of narrow political interest.”

My question is this: if it is the politicians who are blocking this, where are the BBC and ITV in all this? They have been pretty quiet ahead of this debate, which I think is telling. I have had private discussions with the BBC and ITV, and I think a number of hon. Members will have done likewise.

**Steve Double:** As a matter of accuracy and balance, my hon. Friend might be interested to know that I was interviewed this morning by BBC Scotland about this debate, and there was a great deal of interest in this from the BBC in Scotland.

**John Lamont:** I am grateful for that comment, but from my constituents’ perspective there has not been much interest. My point was more about the management within ITV, the BBC and BBC Scotland, who are not as supportive as the editorial team behind Sky News appears to have been in pushing this campaign; certainly they do not have equivalent petitions running and have not added their support to the petition being run by Sky News.

I look forward to hearing the rest of the debate and the Minister’s response. I could have said more, only I thought that more colleagues would have wanted to contribute to this debate, given that it is headline news—but it would seem that it is headline news for Sky News and very few other people.

5.41 pm

**Peter Heaton-Jones** (North Devon) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Sharma. I join other hon. Members across the Chamber in congratulating my fellow south-west MP, my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double), on the way he introduced this debate and the Petitions Committee on bringing it forward. I also join other colleagues in congratulating Sky News on initiating the petition; it is to be congratulated, certainly, on achieving 130,000 signatures—as my hon. Friend the Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (John Lamont) said, not for want of trying, given the fairly widespread coverage that Sky News was able to give it.

I suppose I should start with an informal declaration of interest: before I reached this place, I was a broadcast journalist for 20 years. For much of the time I worked, not for Sky News at all, but for the BBC—this is starting to sound less like a declaration of an interest and more like an admission of guilt, is it not?

I suspect people will be unsurprised to hear that, because of that background, I take a close interest in the interaction between the broadcast media and democracy. I have seen it from both sides—poacher turned gamekeeper, if you like—and while I cannot claim ever to have reached the exalted heights of editorial management at the BBC in which I would have been responsible for anything so important as a televised national election debate, I was involved on a regional level in organising debates between candidates in individual constituencies, and many of the arguments run across the piece.

I will admit to having been slightly torn when I heard about this petition, because fundamentally, now as a democratically elected politician and before that as a broadcaster, I want us to do everything possible to engage more people in the democratic process. That is vital. My problem lies in the fact that I remain to be convinced that televised leaders’ election debates are the way to achieve it. I will go on to give a few reasons why I do not believe that to be the case.

I was also torn about the precise merits of this petition as it is written, until I looked at it in detail. The coverage that Sky News has been giving it, as my hon. Friend the Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk made clear, has made one think that it is simply about who should be organising a debate—an independent electoral commission, in other words—but when one actually looks at the wording, one sees that it seeks to go far further, which is where I have the problem.

The petition says:

“Amend election law to make party leaders take part in a televised debate.”

That, I am afraid, is where the petition lost me, for a number of reasons. First, it is not a matter for legislation to make party leaders take part in an election debate. The second problem I have is this: without wishing to be facetious, supposing that in a parallel universe a Parliament were to pass this law and make it mandatory for party leaders to take part in an election debate, how would they be forced so to do? As I say, I do not wish to be facetious, but if a party leader, the Prime Minister or the Leader of the Opposition declined to take part in such a debate, what would happen on the night of the debate? Would an independent commission send beefeaters with spears to force them into a carriage and take them to Television Centre to take part? It just does not seem plausible to me that such legislation could possibly work.

**Mr Bone:** My hon. Friend is making a powerful speech, but if it were the law of the land that the Leader of the Opposition and the Prime Minister attend these debates, they would do so. To do otherwise would be outrageous.

**Peter Heaton-Jones:** I do not see that that would be enforceable, although I take my hon. Friend’s point that it would probably be outrageous not to take part so far as electoral ambition was concerned. The point was made eloquently earlier that there is some sign that not taking part in a debate probably does not do a leader any good, but I still stick to the point that I am not clear how one would force a party leader to take part in such an event. I am not convinced that the petition is calling for something that could be delivered in reality.

Generally speaking, although I have said clearly that I welcome any moves to make the democratic process more accessible to our constituents, I am not convinced that TV debates are the way to do that. They have not historically been part of our democratic process. Other hon. Members have said this, so I will not develop the point at length unnecessarily, but only in 2010 did the first leaders’ election debates occur.

We spoke earlier about the figures and, using the wonders of new technology, I have the figures for the 2010 debates here. They are substantial viewing figures, it is true. For the first debate, hosted by ITV, 9.9 million viewers watched. The second debate, hosted by Sky

[Peter Heaton-Jones]

News, had 4.2 million viewers and the third, hosted by my former employer the BBC, had 8.6 million. Those numbers are not insubstantial, but nor are they massive. For comparison's sake, about two weeks ago on Christmas day, "Call the Midwife" was watched by 8.7 million people.

The broadcasters shot themselves in the foot somewhat after 2010 by trying to make the point that if we added up those three figures, a total of 22.7 million people watched the debates. That is a bit like saying that, because I am speaking in this debate in this Chamber and I also hope to speak later in a debate in the main Chamber, somehow, miraculously, there are two of me. That is not what those viewing figures show at all, and the organisation Full Fact, whose website I have just accessed, makes that point as well. It is debatable how popular the debates are and how much they are relied on by members of the public to make their decisions.

We do not have a presidential system, as has been described. People may think we have moved towards one whether we like it or not, but constitutionally the voting public do not vote for a Prime Minister.

**Graham Stringer:** National elections, certainly for the parties that fight seats across the United Kingdom, are fought on the basis of manifestos. Would the hon. Gentleman like to compare the number of people who read our manifestos with the number of people who watched the television debates? He is absolutely right that these are not presidential debates, but the leaders put forward their manifestos.

**Peter Heaton-Jones:** It is true that manifestos, in my experience, will never make it to the top of the bestseller lists. However, although the hon. Gentleman makes a perfectly reasonable point, there are other ways than a televised leaders' debate in which parties and party leaders can get their messages across and sell their manifestos, which I will come on to.

My main concern about party leaders' debates is that they have a tendency to suck the oxygen out of the rest of the campaign, as was ably mentioned earlier by my hon. Friend the Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk. I take a rather old-fashioned view about this, and perhaps I am aiming for some sunlit uplands that have long since dissipated—if they ever existed in the first place—but I would quite like election campaigns to be about ideas and policies and ideologies. I do not want them to be about whether the Prime Minister was wearing kitten heels, whether the Leader of the Opposition was on the right or the left podium, what colour tie the leader of a third party might have been wearing or whether the TV host of that particular event did a good job, but that is what we will get if we have a campaign that is bookended by two election debates, perhaps a fortnight apart. The first week will be looking forward to debate No. 1, the second week will be looking back at debate No. 1, the third week will be looking forward to debate No. 2 and the fourth week will be looking back at debate No. 2. Where is the time within that actually to debate policies and ideas? The difficulty is that that is what we will end up with.

I speak with a little experience, having worked in politics not only in this country but in Australia, where I worked on election campaigns. There is a longer

history there of leaders' debates on television. I have to say that they are not hugely watched, but they happen, and the public expect them to happen. However, the entire election campaign tends to be about the debate and the process of the debate, rather than the ideas that might be discussed during it. My concern is that that is what we will end up with if we rely on debates as the means to get people interested in the democratic process.

I will move on briefly to the substance of the petition—setting up an independent debates commission. I have a great deal of sympathy with this idea. If there are to be leaders' election debates, we absolutely have to end the current chaotic system of rival broadcasters jockeying for position, putting forward opposing ideas for formats, arguing about how high the podium will be and whether people will enter from stage left or stage right—and that before individual parties start to have their say.

One side will think that a particular format put forward by one broadcaster favours their man or woman, but the other party will say it prefers another format, so we will end up with either no debate or a month of ridiculous discussions about something that only a few nerds in politics and broadcasting are interested in, and once again we will get absolutely no further forward on discussing ideas and policies. I am not convinced that an independent debates commission would change any of that.

I am also not convinced that, even if a commission was set up with a great deal of legislative power behind it, it would be immune from the sort of pressure that is currently brought to bear on the broadcasters by the different party leaders, who each jockey for a different format. I am also not convinced that it would be immune from potential legal action.

The point was well made earlier about how to define a party leader. Someone could suddenly set themselves up as a party leader. Where would that leave us? Should we then say that only potential Prime Ministers may be allowed to take part? This is a very difficult circle to square, and I am not convinced that an independent debates commission would have any success in doing so. However, my overall view is that we are barking up the wrong tree.

I absolutely want more people to be involved in the democratic process—that is vital—and I could understand if we were having this discussion 20 or 30 years ago, but I think the boat has sailed on TV election debates and on expecting people to sit down at 9 o'clock on a random Tuesday evening to watch something on linear television, even though it will be repeated and watched on iPlayer, or the Sky version thereof.

TV debates feel like they are a bit old hat in 2019. There are many more ways through which we can and should encourage people to access the democratic process, as they are already doing. There are any number of social media platforms where, in my experience from the last general election, the real policy debates seem to happen. I am not sure that, in 2019, mandating a TV election debate in prime time is really looking forward at all; it is probably looking backwards.

I was much taken by the point made by the hon. Member for Stroud (Dr Drew) about the need for our regional broadcasters to get more involved in the democratic process. That is absolutely crucial. I speak as someone who spent most of his career in regional broadcasting. In my area, BBC Spotlight and ITV News West Country



do a very good job with their coverage of local politics, but maybe we ought to think about such outlets taking a greater role in ensuring that some of the issues are debated on a level more relevant to people in their constituencies.

I will not detain colleagues any longer. I understand the principle behind the petition, and I applaud Sky News for initiating it. I am not opposed to leaders' debates per se, but I remain unconvinced that they are the way forward and I am utterly unconvinced that it is possible or desirable to make it mandatory that they happen. If there is an agreement that they should take place in the future, I absolutely see the argument in favour of a debates commission independently—that is the key word—to decide on their format and timing, taking those decisions out of the hands of the broadcasters and party leaders.

Overall, I do not believe that making debates mandatory is the way forward; I remain very uncomfortable with that. I applaud the Government's response to the petition, which I assume the Minister is about to repeat, which is that they should not change the law in this direction.

5.58 pm

**Tommy Sheppard** (Edinburgh East) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Sharma, even though you are about to leave.

[PHILIP DAVIES *in the Chair*]

On a Monday morning I usually spend time traveling down from Scotland to take part in the afternoon's business, but today was a little different. Already being here, I had the great privilege and honour of being interviewed live on Sky News from its platform on College Green. It was a very interesting experience, because today there was a cornucopia of dissenters heckling and providing a narrative to the entire episode, including some members of the English Defence League and an evangelical gentleman who all the way through the interview encouraged me to repent my sins.

In the middle of that experience, the redoubtable Adam Boulton asked me whether I would have faith in an independent commission to organise these TV debates. I had to think about that a little, because I would not want to write anyone a blank cheque—particularly not a new quango, were one to be set up—but my response was that I would have more faith in an independent commission to organise TV debates than I have in the way that is done at present, which is a chaotic and anarchic amalgam of political fixers getting together to try to do what is best for them and the broadcasters trying to do what is best for them. I am attracted, therefore, to the idea of putting this on a statutory footing and having in writing the rights and the responsibilities to which the commission would have to adhere in organising the debates.

Three immediate benefits would arise from having an independent commission. The first is that that would take the matter out of party politics, out of the hands of the political fixers, and provide a level playing field and a set of fair rules that everyone would have to abide by. I am sure that from time to time they might prove inconvenient or troublesome to one or other of the parties, but it would none the less be a situation in which everyone had to play by the same set of rules.

The second reason why I would welcome an independent commission is that it would give us the opportunity to ensure that not just third party but fourth, fifth, sixth and other minority voices were represented in the debate. The third reason why I think that having an independent commission would be useful is that that would allow some discussion to take place, and some control, over the format of the debates. We have not spent much time this afternoon talking about format, but I would understand why a lot of people might be sceptical about the idea of television debates if they resembled the circus that we have every Wednesday afternoon at Prime Minister's questions. That is an exercise in how the Executive are not accountable to the legislature, with prearranged and, quite often, pre-rehearsed questions and answers being traded for the benefit of the TV cameras. It is not really an exercise in scrutiny or debate. Allowing a more inquisitive format, whereby people are allowed truly to challenge each other and perhaps are also subject to third-party questioning in moderation would be, it seems to me, extremely beneficial.

Until the last two colleagues spoke, I was worried that this debate would be a bit one-sided; there was consensus among all those who spoke previously. But in the last 20 minutes or so, some arguments have been advanced against the principle of having television debates at all, never mind whether they should be run by an independent commission. I think it is important, as we consider how this argument develops, that we consider the arguments against and see whether they have validity or can themselves be countered. I want to spend a couple of minutes on some of them.

The first is the suggestion—this has been hinted at—that having televised debates would somehow trivialise serious political discourse, that it would be taking politics and important decisions and putting them on television in the name of entertainment. It seems to me that having an independent commission would be the best way to guard against the trivialisation of politics and its being presented as entertainment, because we could build into the process clear rules to prevent that from happening. I also think that when party organisers, media or broadcast officers, or whoever is responsible, express such concerns, they are being a little disingenuous, because those are the very same people who spend an awful lot of time and money looking at the very latest social media platforms and trying to ensure that they are using them as effectively as possible—often by trivialising or, certainly, condensing the political message so that it is easily understood on those very limited platforms.

The other argument against is, "Well, how would you define what a leader is?" I want to discuss at this point the role of the SNP, in particular, in such debates because the hon. Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (John Lamont) suggested that someone watching in Cornwall might not care very much about what the leader of the Scottish National party would have to say, were she to take part in a debate. Perhaps that is because he assumes that the leader of the Scottish National party would talk about matters only in relation to Scotland, which is of course the principal brief of the SNP, but it seems to me that televised debates also provide an opportunity for everyone in the place where the election is taking place, which for now would be the United Kingdom, to ask, "What type of Government do we wish to get out of this electoral process?"

[Tommy Sheppard]

As the hon. Gentleman knows, his side was successful and mine unsuccessful back in 2014, in the Scottish independence referendum, so for now, Scotland remains part of the United Kingdom, which means that its representatives in this Parliament have every bit as much right as anyone else to determine and to influence the character of the Government of the United Kingdom. I think that people in Cornwall and everywhere else in the United Kingdom would be extremely interested to know what criteria the SNP would adopt in this Parliament, were it successful in the election, in terms of determining who should form the next Government of the United Kingdom.

**Luke Graham** (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con)  
*rose—*

**John Lamont** *rose—*

**Tommy Sheppard:** Let us see whether the hon. Gentlemen make the same point. I will take the intervention from the hon. Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk first.

**John Lamont:** Just to clarify the point that I was making, it was not that the people of Cornwall would not care about what the leader of the SNP would want to say, but that neither she nor the party are on the ballot paper in Cornwall, so the people of Cornwall would not have the opportunity to vote SNP even if they wanted to. If we extend the argument, or the argument that the hon. Gentleman is making, which other parties do we include in the debate if they are also not on the ballot paper?

**Tommy Sheppard:** Let me just take the intervention from the hon. Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Luke Graham), which I presume is relevant to the same point.

**Luke Graham:** It is, and I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way. He makes a point about having the right people in the right debate, and he is quite right. When the SNP has MPs at Westminster, it is quite right that it should take part in Westminster debates. Should it not be Westminster leaders who take part in Westminster debates and Members of the Scottish Parliament who take part in their own leadership debates? The hon. Gentleman would not want the Prime Minister to take part in a debate for our devolved Parliament, and it should be his Westminster leader, not Nicola Sturgeon, who takes part in a debate for Westminster.

**Tommy Sheppard:** Members have said in this debate that of course the British system is not a presidential system, so it is not just a matter of who will become the Prime Minister; indeed, we do not elect Prime Ministers in the election, which is constitutionally absolutely correct. For me, the purpose of TV debates is not just to say, “Who is going to be the next Prime Minister?” and to have some gladiatorial contest between the potential challengers for that position. It is a matter of saying, “What do we want the Government of the country to be? What are the serious issues they should adopt? What are their priorities? What is their general direction?”

That is where TV debates can prove extremely useful, in educating the public and raising awareness of those very important issues, and having an independent commission would give us or it the opportunity to ensure that matters were conducted in a way that allowed that to happen, rather than this being seen as some sort of presidential contest.

There has also been a suggestion that somehow it is not quite right that Parliament should seek to make regulations for broadcasters and that it is up to them to cover politics in whatever way they see fit. The hon. Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk was critical of Sky, in particular, and the editorial judgments that it makes to cover its own campaign. There is already much regulation about the conduct and coverage of elections in this country. We have a very highly regulated electoral system, and quite right too, so that people are able to make a challenge if something is seen to go wrong. Therefore, the idea of Parliament seeking to regulate the broadcast coverage of an election campaign or any other political campaign seems to me to be entirely consistent with the fair and democratic process that we have of trying to ensure that all these matters are fairly regulated.

There was also a suggestion that somehow a national TV debate would undermine local campaigning. I am sorry, but I just do not buy that. In my experience, and as colleagues have mentioned, people do tune in to the TV debate, perhaps because of how it is presented as a television programme. But the effect of doing that is to engage them with the political process more generally. Having had their appetite whetted a little—perhaps “having been hooked” is the wrong phrase—they move on to take more interest in the local campaigns and to ask questions. Perhaps they even get involved; perhaps they turn up to hustings for local candidates as well. The two things can be perfectly symbiotic: one can encourage the other. Anything that we can do to stimulate political awareness and engagement will be for the long-term benefit of our democracy.

Returning to the question of the role of minority voices, it is important to stress—I say this to the hon. Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone)—that this is no longer a two-party political system, if it ever was; there are third, fourth and fifth parties, and they have a right to be represented as well.

**Mr Bone:** The hon. Gentleman is making a powerful speech. The whole point of my Bill is to include a debate between the leaders of the smaller parties as well. I hope that the SNP will support the Bill, because it does include that provision.

**Tommy Sheppard:** That is welcome and important. In the country that I represent in this Chamber, the two major political parties—Labour and Tory—are lucky if they can command half of the electorate’s support between them. Almost half of the entire electorate places its allegiance with parties other than the two main parties in the United Kingdom. That needs to be understood and built into the process.

Before Christmas, when we had the shenanigans about the debate on what to do about Brexit—it was not meant to be an election debate—we had a situation whereby the SNP, the third largest party in this House and the second largest political party in the United

Kingdom in terms of its membership, was likely to be excluded from a debate between the leaders of the Conservative and Labour parties, although it did not take place in the end. The situation was all the more bizarre—the shadow Minister might want to respond to this—given that the leader of the Labour party, as I understand it, has said that if there were to be a general election in the coming months, Labour would commit in its manifesto to implementing Brexit. It might do it differently, but it would none the less commit to implementing Brexit. Therefore, we were going to have a debate between a Conservative way of doing Brexit and a Labour way of doing Brexit, ignoring other voices, which do not want Brexit to happen at all, and conveniently ignoring the fact that opinion polls consistently show that a majority of people across the United Kingdom do not want Brexit to happen at all.

**Mr Bone:** Rubbish! The hon. Gentleman is making outrageous claims about how the British people would vote. Let's face it: there was one referendum, the decision was made and your side lost. Stop moaning about it.

**Tommy Sheppard:** I am a democrat and I believe that in a democracy people have the right to change their mind, and it is quite clear that a very large number of people who voted for Brexit three years ago have changed their mind, now that they understand what it actually means. Leaving that to one side, my point is that before Christmas we were in danger of witnessing a debate between the leaders of the two main political parties in the United Kingdom where the alternative to Brexit was not going to be represented, so it was just as well that it did not go ahead.

A number of people will be concerned about the practicalities of how this can work, and how the uniqueness and idiosyncrasies of the British system can be respected. It should not be beyond our ability and wit to make this happen. In Scotland, five parties are represented in the Scottish Parliament and regularly there are five-way debates on broadcast television and other forums, which do not seem to present any great difficulty at all. Many other countries throughout the world have multi-party and proportional electoral systems, where it is usual for Governments to be formed on the basis of coalitions between a number of different parties. They have no difficulty in representing all the party views in televised debates. If they can do it, we should be able to do so as well.

I know that the Minister keeps getting sent out to this type of debate and that she has to say that this was not in the Government's manifesto—I am sure it was not—so they are not minded to do anything about it. However, I ask her to accept that this should be an ongoing and open debate. I ask her to consider playing a role in stimulating that debate, and not to close her mind or her ears to the voices that say that we need to consider much better regulation, which has in fact become part of our institutionalised way of doing politics in this country. We might as well accept that and make it the best that it can be.

6.14 pm

**Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab): This has been a very interesting debate so far and I would like to say at the outset that, contrary to what has been said by some

colleagues, I think that Sky News has performed a valuable public service in trying to take the party politics out of the process of election debates and allow us as politicians to concentrate on how best to present our policies, which, after all, is what really matters. I think that the Government should stop digging their heels in and back election debates as an integral and important part of our democracy. There is no need to wait; let's just agree to debate.

We have had some very good speeches. First of all, the hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) presented the debate on behalf of the Petitions Committee extremely ably. He referred to the recent to-ing and fro-ing about the possibility of a Brexit TV debate, as did other hon. Members. I will come back to that point later in my remarks. He was intervened on by the hon. Member for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr (Jonathan Edwards), who pointed out the necessity of involving other parties in the debate process. We have had further discussion of that in the course of the debate and I will come back to it in a moment. The hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard), speaking on behalf of the SNP, also raised this issue. It raises interesting and complicated questions when people participating in the debate, which is about electing this House of Commons, are not even candidates in that election to the House of Commons, and the hon. Gentleman made a very interesting argument as to why that broader perspective should be taken into account.

**Christine Jardine** (Edinburgh West) (LD): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Kevin Brennan:** I will not give way to the hon. Lady, because she was not here for the debate and I am old school in that regard, I am afraid. I am happy to give way otherwise. It is not personal, but that is how I prefer to operate.

The hon. Member for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr made a valid point, but I think it raises interesting issues about which parties should be involved in these debates. They certainly must have a role and somehow be incorporated into this process, whether through the means suggested by the hon. Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone) or others.

The hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay also said that leaders are much more visible and accessible these days than they used to be. I am not sure that is entirely true. When Clement Attlee was campaigning to be Prime Minister in 1945 and 1950, he drove around the country with his wife, Violet, in a Hillman Minx, to engage with the electorate. It is certainly true that times have changed. Attlee also said that being Prime Minister was the job that took up the least amount of his time of any job he had ever had.

The hon. Gentleman gave an interesting response to the questions from Parliament's social media. Some of the points being made about the potential Americanisation of politics are important. However, I think the real challenges are not about the Americanisation of politics through TV debates, but about the involvement of large and shadowy amounts of money in British politics—the activities of organisations such as Cambridge Analytica and so on. Those are more worrying issues with the Americanisation of politics, rather than our having television debates.



[Kevin Brennan]

My hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Dr Drew) quite rightly said that the decision about whether we should have debates should not just rest in the hands of the Prime Minister. He also quite rightly pointed out the lack of television coverage of regional politics these days. He wanted to take the issue of debates out of party politics. He referred to the Nixon-Kennedy debates, saying that the thing he knows is that Nixon lost. Interestingly, of course, a lot of the polls showed that Nixon had won, particularly for people who had followed the debates on the radio rather than on television. That makes a valid point about the role of image in people's political perspectives. Whether or not the TV debate was responsible for John Kennedy's narrow victory is highly debatable, not least because when his father, Joseph Kennedy, was asked why the victory had been so narrow, he said that he could not afford a landslide. Again, money was perhaps more compelling and important in American politics than the debates.

In response to the hon. Member for Wellingborough, who also mentioned the 2010 debates, I am tempted to say—unusually—"I agree with Peter," because I did agree with much of what he said. We look forward to seeing the details of his private Member's Bill. He is the sort of Member who would never commit to supporting a Bill without having read every clause and word, and without having carefully performed an exegesis of every part, so I will not make any commitments about his Bill until we have seen what it says, but it certainly sounds like it contains some interesting ideas. We look forward to it surfacing on the Ides of March, as he suggested, and hopefully it will have a less portentous fate than that date might otherwise suggest.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the inclusion of the minor parties in one of the debates proposed by his Bill. It is an interesting area, because it is true that some parties that have a lower share of the vote and that do not stand in all parts of the United Kingdom were represented in previous debates—for example, in 2015, when David Cameron insisted on having a diluted debate because he did not want to have a head-to-head debate with my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) and preferred to have a large number of voices, possibly to defuse the impact of the event overall. Nevertheless, despite the fact that it is the "Conservative and Unionist" party, at no point was it suggested that the Democratic Unionist party should participate in the debate. Unlike Plaid Cymru and the Scottish National party, it was not invited, even though it also stands in only one of the constituent countries of the United Kingdom. Nor was the Social Democratic and Labour party, which had hon. Members elected to this House at that time; the Ulster Unionist party, which has had hon. Members elected to this House in recent times; or indeed—whether it would have turned up or not—Sinn Féin, which stands in the general election and has elected MPs, although they do not take the oath or take their seats in this place.

There is an asymmetry to the way that such debates have been organised. Northern Ireland has largely been excluded from that process, even though it is an integral part of the United Kingdom. It is interesting that we now frequently debate the issue of the British border in Ireland, as I call it, because of the backstop and Brexit,

but that in those general election debates, Northern Ireland was treated as a sideshow and almost as a separate election from the United Kingdom general election in terms of inviting people to participate. We look forward to the Bill tabled by the hon. Member for Wellingborough.

My hon. Friend the Member for Blackley and Broughton (Graham Stringer) reluctantly accepted that there would have to be a quango to administer election debates, but quite rightly pointed out that any such body should have a greater diversity than bodies such as the Electoral Commission. I agree that different political views should be represented, and it would also be important for any such body to have representation from the nations and regions of the United Kingdom, and from different social classes. Many of our bodies tend to be made up of the same kind of people with similar views. His suggestions on that were refreshing and interesting.

My hon. Friend also discussed the 2010 leadership debates and the so-called Cleggmania that allegedly resulted. Interestingly, of course, despite that spike in the polls, the Liberal Democrats won fewer seats in the 2010 election than they had held before, but because it was a hung Parliament, they ended up in government for the next five years.

The hon. Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (John Lamont) was extremely critical of Sky News for having campaigned on the issue. I have thought carefully about what he said and whether it is appropriate for a broadcaster to campaign in that way. It would be wholly inappropriate for a broadcaster to campaign on a political policy issue, but I do not think it is inappropriate—it is not outwith Ofcom's rules—for a broadcaster to campaign in such a way for such debates. It is possibly more difficult for the BBC and ITV, which are also party to Ofcom's rules, because special considerations are involved for public service broadcasters. I do not agree, however, that it was inappropriate for Sky News to campaign on the issue and in fact, in doing so, I think it has provided a valuable public service and has helped to bring about this interesting debate.

**John Lamont:** Given that other petitions on Parliament's petition website are arguably more worthy and, in some cases, have more support, why has Sky News not given them any coverage or reported on them, but has given almost hourly coverage to its own campaign?

**Kevin Brennan:** I suggest, probably, because it is its own campaign. It is a valid point that a lot of the issues that the hon. Gentleman mentioned are worthy of more news coverage. Hopefully his remarks will have brought those campaigns to broadcasters' attention and they will receive more coverage in future.

The hon. Gentleman said that he thought debates provide little additional information for voters, and again I disagree. As I said in an intervention on the hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay, the Hansard Society report indicates that the general public say that they find debates a valuable way—indeed, among the most important ways—of gaining information to help them to decide how to vote. He went on to talk about the SNP leader's role in the debates and whether a voter in Cornwall would be interested in what the leader of the SNP had to say. He said that such a voter could not vote for the leader of the SNP, but, of course, nobody in

Scotland could vote for the leader of the SNP, because the leader of the SNP was not a candidate in the general election. That raises interesting points as to who should participate in debates and whether those who do should be the leaders of political parties or the leaders of groups that are hoping to gain election to the House of Commons. It is a moot point, but a valid one. Even though the leader of the SNP is extremely important to Scottish voters, it is true that Scottish voters would not have an opportunity to vote for her in a general election.

The hon. Member for North Devon (Peter Heaton-Jones), who always speaks with a great deal of expertise on broadcasting matters because of his previous career with the BBC, asked how leaders could be compelled to attend if we were to pass a Bill, such as the one envisaged by the hon. Member for Wellingborough, that said that political party leaders had to participate in such debates.

As other hon. Members have pointed out, it is not unreasonable for us to expect the leaders of political parties, who have ambitions to become the Prime Minister, to comply with the law. I am not suggesting that we should have draconian penalties for anyone refusing to comply, but it would be extraordinary if the leader of a political party, a potential candidate to be the Prime Minister of this country, sought not to comply with a perfectly reasonable law to get them to participate in an essential element of the democratic process as judged by this Parliament. That is a bit of a red herring; they would turn up by virtue of the fact that it would be the law that they should participate. Nor is it unreasonable that such a law should be considered and potentially reach the statute book.

The hon. Member for North Devon made an interesting and valid point about how relevant TV debates are in this age of social media, whether they are old fashioned and whether, in a sense, we are asking a question that is no longer particularly pertinent and might have been more relevant 30 or 40 years ago. However, although I bow to his expertise about television, I think that where linear television still hits home is in the big live event type of television, whether that is “The X-Factor”, a sporting event, or the participation of political leaders at the time of a general election, when the nation’s attention turns to the question of who will govern the country for the next five years. At such times, a live television linear-type event is still highly relevant and of interest to the public, and would be supplemented massively by activity on social media; I think that is true. Obviously, social media has a huge role to play in modern elections and we need to look at the whole issue of social media, including Facebook and other types of platforms, in more detail, as it now has a major influence on our politics.

We support, in broad terms, the campaign that there should be some sort of independent means to ensure that TV debates take place between party leaders at general elections. The reason we are doing so is that the Minister, as a Minister, has the opportunity to try to make some sense of the complicated electoral law that we have. It is voluminous, it is fragmented, and it poses problems for electoral administrators, campaigners, voters and policy makers. There are 40 Acts of Parliament and more than 170 statutory instruments relating to our electoral legal framework and some of those provisions go back into the 19th century.

It is widely accepted by those involved in administering or competing in elections, such as the Electoral Commission and the Association of Electoral Administrators, that fundamental reform of electoral law is needed, but the Government have not really listened to that argument. In February 2016—nearly three years ago—the Law Commission published its interim report, calling for the laws governing elections to be rationalised into a single consistent legislative framework governing all elections, but the Government are yet to respond to that, even though, as I say, it has been nearly three years. I encourage the Government to look again at that report and respond to it.

I have mentioned this previously, but I also urge the Government to look at the 2018 audit of political engagement by the Hansard Society, which found that among the different sources of news and information that respondents used to inform their decision making at the 2017 general election, party leaders’ debates and political interviews were deemed to be the most important ways in which they were able to make up their minds. Furthermore, 74% of those who used those things in that way said the party leaders’ debates and political interviews were at least “fairly important” in their decision making. There is a need for a wider reform of electoral law and the issue of TV debates should be included within that.

My own party leader has said in response to this campaign:

“I welcome any move that will guarantee general election debates so that voters can hear directly from those putting themselves forward to lead the country.”

That was a welcome statement, but unfortunately the Prime Minister has not matched it, which is a shame. Speaking to Sky, she said:

“The next general election isn’t until 2022. There’s plenty of time to think about those issues at that time.”

In fact, that is exactly the time when there will not be plenty of time to think about these issues. Now is the time to think about them. We may not be immediately able to solve them, but now is the time to think across parties about the best way to handle the issue, because if we get to 2022 and start thinking about it, we will have the same old to-ing and fro-ing, and shenanigans, and jiggery-pokery that we have seen recently in relation to the discussions about the possibility of leaders’ debates on Brexit.

Whatever we think about the merits of such debates, and the question is different from that of whether party leaders should debate at a general election, the truth is that the way in which such arguments come about, and this has happened over the course of a number of Governments, going back some considerable time, is something like this—in fact, I know exactly how the suggestion of a Brexit debate came about. No. 10 went to Tom Newton Dunn at *The Sun* and said, “We need a page lead for the Prime Minister on Brexit. The Prime Minister is in trouble on Brexit. We need a page lead.” If someone needs a page lead in *The Sun*, they don’t get it for nothing. So *The Sun* said in return, “Well, what can you give us as an exclusive, or a scoop in old-fashioned terms, for giving you a front-page lead in *The Sun*?” Of course, the answer was, “Well, we’ll say that the Prime Minister is in favour of challenging the Leader of the Opposition to a debate on Brexit”, in the full knowledge that that would never happen unless some groundwork

[Kevin Brennan]

had been done, unless there had been some discussion between parties, and unless the other parties that have an interest in this matter—as the hon. Member for Edinburgh East, the spokesman for the Scottish National party, rightly pointed out—had an opportunity to have an input as well. A debate on Brexit was not going to happen on those terms, but that is how these things come about, which is a pretty shabby process. If we had a properly independent process, then we could get rid of all the jiggery-pokery around election debates and actually get down to concentrating on trying to present our policies effectively to the electorate.

Finally, I challenge the Minister to go a little further than the Government have so far and at least entertain the possibility of supporting the kind of measure that is being proposed by Sky News and her hon. Friend, the hon. Member for Wellingborough, which the Opposition and other parties support, whereby a consensus on a way forward can be found to ensure that such debates can happen, rather than waiting until 2022, when it will be far too late.

6.36 pm

**The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Chloe Smith):** It is an absolute pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies, and that of Mr Sharma earlier.

First, I thank the petitioners for creating this petition and my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) for bringing it here today and articulating the arguments for it for the purposes of the debate. My hon. Friend put the original arguments in a capable way and I am glad that he did so for us. I thank the Petitions Committee, which he represents, and of course those members of the public who signed this petition.

I will say at the outset that I very much agree that TV debates are that useful democratic exercise that many Members here today have said that they are and can be. They allow the electorate to reflect on the choices that they wish to make at an election. There is plenty of academic literature, as well as surveys, confirming that members of the public do indeed find TV election debates informative and engaging.

In addition—this is very important to me in my work as Minister with responsibility for elections—such debates can also serve as one of those important tools that engage people who perhaps do not normally engage in politics, so that every so often they can have a think about an election and the big choice that is represented by that election. I really value that, as I know many hon. Members who are here today in Westminster Hall do, too, so I do not think there is any dispute between us that TV debates are an important matter. However, what we are here to talk about is the best way to go about having those debates. That is what I will focus my remarks upon. I am not persuaded that mandating television election debates is the way to achieve that very important goal.

I thank all hon. and right hon. Members who have contributed today. In summary, we heard the case against TV election debates put by my hon. Friends the Members for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (John Lamont) and for North Devon (Peter Heaton-Jones), and the case for put by the hon. Member for Stroud (Dr Drew),

my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone), and—reluctantly, I think—the hon. Member for Blackley and Broughton (Graham Stringer), as well as the two other Front Benchers here today: the hon. Members for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard), who spoke for the Scottish National party, and for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan), who spoke for the Labour party.

Of course, I note the private Member's Bill tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough and look forward to—no doubt—continuing this discussion with him when the Bill comes before the House. I reassure him and other Members that I do not stand here in any way to dismiss these arguments; I stand here to engage with them. However, the question I face is whether such measures are the best way to get more people to engage with our democracy.

I will make five key points around the idea of legislating to mandate TV election debates; my points will be about not the virtue of TV elections in their own right, but legislating to mandate them, which is what the petition we are considering asks for.

I begin with the point that TV election debates have already happened—under their own steam—in the last three general elections, without having to be mandated by election law. The hon. Member for Edinburgh East made that point. He rightly said that debates happen all the time, and in five ways, in Scotland. Indeed, they have happened in many ways throughout our elections in recent history. I draw on the words of the hon. Member for Stroud, who said that the genie has been out of the bottle since 2010. Yes, it has, and without needing to be legislated for.

My first point, therefore, is this: the current arrangements between political parties and broadcasters work. They already give rise to election debates, bolstered by the regulatory framework set by the independent regulator, Ofcom. I will come on to those points in more detail.

Secondly, I want to develop the argument that attendance at TV debates is a matter for political parties rather than for the law. I will also bring into the debate how many other campaign mediums are used by parties to convey their messages, and by voters to choose how they get their information, and how we should not prioritise one over others. We need to consider some implementation matters, and I will come on to those, and I also want briefly, in closing, to refer to some of the other evidence on the matter that we have seen here in Parliament, for example from Select Committees.

I start with the point that debates are already happening. Indeed they are, and Members have capably covered how they have been happening since 2010. Under the current arrangements, they have happened by agreement between political parties and broadcasters, and broadcasters collaborate with each other on key factors. TV election debates have been successfully delivered; decisions about format, location and participation have all been settled; and, crucially, the public have benefited from, and no doubt enjoyed, the results. Experienced broadcasters—Sky, but others as well—are well placed to continue to make such decisions, and it would not be right to take that from them and put it into law. It is helpful that different broadcasters are able to choose bring their own distinctiveness to election debates. In what we are discussing, we come close to matters of editorial independence, which we should of course leave with broadcasters, as well as the ability to organise and deliver TV election



debates, especially given that we are talking about the costs residing with them. One might argue that the costs and the delivery should stay in the same place.

I will move on to another argument. I said earlier that the debates are a matter of choice for political parties. I do not say that lightly; I say it in full consideration of the fact that it is then for the electorate to choose a political party that has capably communicated to them something they liked to hear. That is what elections are about; it is the fundamental nature of a choice at an election. Voters reward political parties that are aligned with their own priorities and communicate that successfully. Failing effectively to communicate priorities to a voter is unlikely to lead to electoral success—I do not think I need to break that to any colleagues here. That is the whole point of elections, so I say again that there is no need for legislative intervention when voters' interests, and indeed those of parties, are closely aligned in a way that has already worked.

I want to bring in some points about Ofcom and the broadcasting code. In discussing the current framework, it is important to consider the framework that TV election debates would have to adhere to. Ofcom, as the independent communications regulator, already sets the standards for TV and radio programmes, and its code contains rules that apply to all those broadcasters it licenses, ensuring that news, in whatever form, is reported with due impartiality, accuracy and fair prominence of views and opinions. Crucially, it also includes specific rules on impartiality that apply during election periods, including the requirement for due weight to be given to the coverage of parties and independent candidates.

We can continue to have confidence in that regulatory framework, in that it supports the editorial independence of broadcasters and has already demonstrated an ability to deliver fair and politically neutral television election debates. An independent broadcasting system is in itself a democratic function that we enjoy, and are lucky to have, in this society, and I say again that Government intervention risks undermining that independence, of both the broadcasters and Ofcom. I note that the argument has been put that the same could be achieved through an independent debates commission, and I will come back to that point in a second.

First, however, I will deal with whether we should privilege one campaigning medium over another: should we privilege telly over other ways of communicating with each other? I am not convinced. Political parties use many mediums to convey their message to members of the public before a general election, and at every other time of year, and the public demand that. As I said earlier, this is absolutely a two-way matter between how the public choose to get their information, and ask to have it, and how parties can respond to that. It is very much a two-way process between parties and the public.

I, for one, am quite a fan of the good old-fashioned political canvassing method. I was out there in the very chilly Norwich weather on Saturday morning, knocking on doors—back to work in the new year, as I hope every Member in this room was. That is another way to get in touch with voters, and who am I to say that television is any better or worse? I do not attempt to make that judgment call, and I am sceptical of the call today suggesting that any one medium is better than another.

**Graham Stringer:** Does the Minister not accept that we already discriminate in legislation—possibly in favour, possibly against, depending on one's point of view—against electronic media? We demand that they provide a platform for party political broadcasts and that they balance the different views during a general election campaign, but we do not apply that to any other form of media. There is already that separation and it would not, therefore, be changing the legislative framework very much to say that a platform for debates should be provided.

**Chloe Smith:** I agree, and I disagree. I respect how the hon. Gentleman has tried to bring the point to bear, but the point of detail he has chosen is about how, when any one medium is used, impartiality within it is ensured. That is admirable, and that is where I agree with him, but where I disagree is regarding further entrenching the choice of any one medium over another.

I will put this in a generational sense for the hon. Gentleman: television broadcasters are quite simply losing favour with the younger generation as their source of news. Why should we legislate at this point for a medium that will not necessarily remain favoured among those who are, and those who will become, the voters in elections to come? I am happy to substantiate that.

On how news consumption is going in the UK, a report by Ofcom stated that in 2018 alone 52% of 16 to 24-year-olds used Facebook as their news source while only 39% used BBC1. The report found that people in that age group were more likely to get their news from social media posts than directly from news organisations. In the face of that technological shift, I remain unconvinced that the case is made for privileging a form that one might almost argue had its heyday with Richard Nixon in the last century. Why should we privilege that form? I say Nixon; as has already been covered, it was thought that Kennedy won the debate, but that is the very point. It is a matter of history, and if we legislate at all we ought to look to the future rather than the past.

I will incorporate at this point the parliamentary example that I think was provided by my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay. Here we stand today having a debate in Parliament—in itself a form of political debate, a form of debate on political policy—and we do not expect it to be covered only on the TV, although it will capably be, and I am glad for that.

I certainly support the use of TV in Parliament and the accountability that we can provide by being on camera as we do our work. However, we also expect social media to carry part of that weight, and we also might well expect that some people would prefer to read about our proceedings via the written word. All of those are valid ways for people to get their information, and we should not privilege one over another.

Fourthly, I wanted to bring together some points about implementation and refer to a few that have been made in the debate. First, the proposal would require primary legislation. The point has already been made that if we anticipate a general election as far away as 2022, which of course is the case, we have time to look at the issue and get it right. However, even with that timescale, there are other pressing priorities that the public ask us to address through legislation, and I suspect that they would prioritise them over this issue.

**Mr Bone:** I understand that the Minister is making a strong Government speech—very little of which I agree with, I have to say—but I am here to help her.

**Dr Drew:** As always.

**Mr Bone:** As always. The proposal does require primary legislation, but not Government legislation. That is why I have taken the private Member's Bill route, and all I ask the Minister is whether she would allow that debate to get a fair hearing, with no objecting, no filibustering, and no putting up people to stop it. Let us have the debate and a vote. Would she be open minded to that?

**Chloe Smith:** I hope that my hon. Friend's flattery of me extends to knowing that I am a friend of Parliament, and I look forward to Parliament having the opportunity to have that debate when the time comes. I will make no further comment on what should be the passage, or otherwise, of that Bill. Today, what I am trying to do—which I hope is welcome—is go into some of the arguments that reasonably pertain to the proposal in front of us. The least courtesy we should give to any petition is to give it a proper going over, debating the arguments that we think relate to it.

I call the House's attention to the fact that the proposal would require primary legislation, which is not two a penny. What we choose to do through primary legislation requires some prioritisation, and that is the part of the electoral law framework that would have to be looked at if we wanted to do this. The hon. Member for Cardiff West has already made the point that election law is complex. It is thought by many to be fragmented and unwieldy, and it absolutely the case that it is aged. He is right to say that parts of election law relate to the 19th century. As I have said, I am not convinced that we should add another piece that relates, arguably, to the 20th century, not to mention the 21st. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that election law is a complicated matter, but I do not yet see the argument for adding this proposal to it through primary legislation.

Another aspect of what it means to put something into law has already been referred to, particularly by my hon. Friend the Member for North Devon. I share his concern that forcing somebody to attend a debate—effectively, making somebody a criminal for not taking part in a debate—is unlikely to be a priority for law enforcement. The hon. Member for Cardiff West suggests that he does not want to add any penalties to the proposal, but he still wants to see it in law. I do not think that is a very strong position: if we do not wish to criminalise somebody for something, we do not put it into law. If a proposal stands on its own because it is reasonable and virtuous, that is fine, but in this case debates happen already and need not be made mandatory. We put something in law if we want the hon. Gentleman's chief constable, and my chief constable, to have to spend their time thinking about it. I am not convinced that turning members of political parties into criminals for not participating in a television debate, or indeed in any other campaigning activity, is the right thing to do.

We also ought to think about the electorate. If participation in the debate is compulsory, is watching it going to be compulsory as well?

**Kevin Brennan** *indicated dissent.*

**Chloe Smith:** The hon. Gentleman laughs at that point, but I say in all seriousness that if we privilege one campaign medium in law, the question follows whether we think it is important that people are compelled to take part in that activity. That is what we do when we put something into law.

Moving on to the suggested use of a quango to achieve the proposed objective, my hon. Friend the Member for North Devon was not convinced that an independent debates commission would improve the current system. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Blackley and Broughton for also giving that issue some thought, although in the end he came down on the other side of the argument. I do not think that having a quango and simply calling it independent is the answer to every policy question. It raises many questions that are as yet unresolved. Who would appoint the members of such a body? How would it function? What would happen if political parties, or any figure involved with that body, disagreed with the suggested format? Those are all questions that would have to be bottomed out if we went for an independent debates commission format.

Other reports and research exist. Setting up an independent body is not a new proposal: it has been addressed in multiple reports, including a report by the House of Lords Select Committee on Communications, which in 2014 published its findings on the broadcasting of general election debates. That Committee found no substantial evidence that an independent debates commission should be set up to oversee election debates. The report instead focused on recommendations for broadcasters that oversee election debates, such as making more use of the opportunity to inform voters and encouraging members of the public to be more interested in the electoral process.

Another interesting piece of work was published in 2015 by Professor Charlie Beckett of the London School of Economics. His findings highlighted the fact that a formal regulatory or legislative framework for TV debates is largely viewed as unrealistic and undesirable. He also raised questions about such a framework, including who would have the final say and how it might be adaptable to evolution in the political landscape.

I thank hon. Members for giving me the time to go through the arguments at some length. I also thank the petitioners, first and foremost, and my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay for introducing the debate and allowing us to examine the arguments. We have heard a number of very good arguments on this topic, although to my ear they mainly focused on the way in which TV debates are good and helpful in themselves, rather than on the ins and outs of whether legislating for them is the way forward. Were we to consider a change to electoral law, those arguments would need to improve before making debates mandatory and making additions to an area of law that is already complex and precious.

Participating in TV election debates should continue to be a matter for political parties, and we should continue to view that as a two-way relationship, with the encouragement of voters. The delivery of such debates should remain in the hands of broadcasters, other publishers and, indeed, the public themselves, through social media and the other media of the future. I am a passionate promoter of people's involvement in democracy, and I am honoured to be a steward of our

electoral system. That is what leads me to conclude that we should let people decide for themselves what the formats of the future ought to be, rather than privileging one format at this point in time. In conclusion, I entirely trust the British people to be able to find the information that suits them to make their choices in elections and at election times. That is what I hope to see in elections of the future.

6.59 pm

**Steve Double:** I thank all Members who have participated in this debate. It has been a good debate with a good number of thoughtful and well-presented contributions. I again thank Sky for its role in bringing forward the petition, which has enabled us to have this debate. It is right that we have had the debate; the issue needs careful consideration, and I hope the debate has made a useful contribution. I thank the Minister for her response laying out the Government's position. Although many of us will be disappointed that we have not managed to persuade her to our way of thinking, I appreciate the way in which she presented the Government's position.

The matter needs to be dealt with through consensus in Parliament. It goes wider than the Government's decisions on general elections and our democratic process, so I very much welcome the private Member's Bill promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone), which will give Parliament another opportunity

in the relatively near future to consider the matter again. I hope that will enable Parliament to express its view. If that view is that we should formalise leaders' debates, the Bill will give us the opportunity to do so.

In winding up, I simply make the point that it is important that we embrace all methods of engaging the public in politics, particularly at the time of elections. I was thankful that the Minister made clear that she welcomes TV debates. It is not that anyone is against TV debates; the issue is how we facilitate them. I continue to be of the view that the current system does not really work. The horse-trading and the to-ing and fro-ing reflect badly on this place and the political parties. Formalising things and taking them out of the hands of politicians would be a positive way forward. I hope today has been a useful contribution to the debate, which I am sure will continue in the coming months and years. We look forward to discussing the issue again in the very near future. I once again thank everyone for their contributions.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered e-petition 228572 relating to an independent commission on televised election debates.

7.2 pm

*Sitting adjourned.*





## Westminster Hall

Tuesday 8 January 2019

[MR GEORGE HOWARTH *in the Chair*]

### Cancer Workforce and Early Diagnosis

9.30 am

**Jim Fitzpatrick** (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered early diagnosis and the cancer workforce in the NHS long-term plan.

It is a pleasure to see you presiding over our business this morning, Mr Howarth. I wish everyone a happy new year. I thank the Backbench Business Committee for supporting the bid of a number of colleagues for this debate, and the Chairman of Ways and Means for allowing it. I was lucky enough to be chosen as the chief sponsor, but I recognise the support of other Members in this Chamber. I will try to keep my remarks to 10 minutes or thereabouts.

I am grateful for the many briefings we have had—we have had briefings from the House of Commons Library, Barts Health NHS Trust, Cancer Research UK, Breast Cancer Care, the Fire Brigades Union, Macmillan Cancer Support, Breast Cancer Now, the Royal College of Pathologists, Maggie's, the British Lung Foundation, the Royal College of Physicians, CLIC Sargent and the Royal College of Nurses. I have had more briefings from interested parties on this debate than on any other in my 21 years here. Interestingly, they virtually all agreed on two basic points. First, they welcomed the fact that the Government have addressed their issues in the 10-year review and, secondly, they welcomed the new investment but asked for more detail about staff training, recruitment and retention.

Running through most of the briefings I received were questions about the publication of the NHS long-term plan, which was promised by the end of 2018. In very timely fashion, the Government published it yesterday. It has focused the debate but not eliminated the need for it.

I want to highlight some of the issues raised in the briefings. The Royal College of Pathologists cited disturbing statistics. Notably, just 3% of services reported that they have enough staff to meet clinical needs, and more than three quarters of departments reported vacancies for consultants. The royal college emphasised the need for early diagnosis and called for increased investment in pathology services, particularly in the recruitment and training of pathologists and scientists. It said that histopathologists should be listed on the shortage occupation list as there is a shortfall in that speciality. The Migration Advisory Committee currently includes no pathology specialities on the shortage occupation list. Placing histopathology on that list would help overseas qualified pathologists to obtain a visa to work in the UK.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds** (Torfaen) (Lab): I lost my mother to bowel cancer last year, and I have been campaigning to reduce the bowel cancer screening age to 50. I understand from my campaign and the debates

I have had that it is important that we get the pathology capacity right. Otherwise the reduction in the screening age will not work. Does my hon. Friend agree?

**Jim Fitzpatrick:** I certainly do. I am sorry to hear about the fatality in my hon. Friend's family. I am sure the Minister will talk about staff and I will come to it later in my speech. Without staff in diagnosis and pathology services, the reduction in the screening age will be pointless.

The Royal College of Pathologists identified a growing demand for pathology services and predicted a 28% shortfall in staff by 2010. Cancer Research UK said, as we all know, that the earlier a cancer is diagnosed, the more likely it is that it will be treated successfully. The Labour Government's initiative to reduce the time between an urgent GP referral to seeing a cancer consultant to two weeks was a success in ensuring swifter treatment, but 2018 was the first year in which that target was not met. I would be grateful if the Minister told us how the Government expect to address that slippage.

Cancer Research UK added that it expects new cancer cases to reach 500,000 a year by 2035—right now, it is 350,000. With more cases and more thorough screening measures, our NHS will need more diagnostic and treatment staff. Cancer Research UK highlighted that the promise to produce a workforce implementation plan after the 2019 spending review leaves the status of Health Education England's upcoming cancer workforce plan unclear. Will the Minister give us more information about how the two initiatives relate to each other?

Macmillan said that it recognises and welcomes the focus on cancer in the NHS long-term plan, including the Prime Minister's commitment radically to improve early diagnosis. However, it has concerns that the long-term plan will not adequately address the immediate and long-term pressures facing the NHS cancer workforce. It also asked when the workforce implementation plan can be expected this year. I note that the Health Secretary said yesterday that he expects Baroness Dido Harding to report to him by the end of March. I would be grateful therefore if the Minister can confirm that we can expect the publication of the workforce implementation plan by summer this year.

Breast Cancer Now made the point that only 18% of breast cancer screening units are adequately resourced with radiography staff, in line with breast screening uptake in its area. My area of north-east London is covered by Barts Health NHS Trust, the NHS North East London Commissioning Alliance and the East London Health and Care Partnership. Many of the points made by the national charities are apparent locally. Those bodies have made their concerns clear. They have raised the basic issue that cancer outcomes in north-east London are among the poorest in London and the country, and that presentation via the emergency route remains high and is clearly associated with advanced cancer and low one-year survival rates.

In my borough of Tower Hamlets, the one-year survival index of people diagnosed with cancer is 4% lower than the England average, and diagnosis through the emergency route remains high. The local NHS trust has plans to attack that problem with a new early diagnosis centre, which is due to open in December; the introduction of multi-diagnostic clinics, which were first introduced in Denmark and were supported here in the pilot phase by

[Jim Fitzpatrick]

Cancer Research UK; and new faecal immunochemical testing for colorectal cancer in primary care from April this year. It plans a health and wellbeing school spread across the whole of north-east London, based on the principle of making every contact count. It is raising population awareness and screening initiatives, including placing staff to promote screening in GP practices, promoting text reminders for cervical cancer screening, video competitions for schools to promote vaccinations, prostate cancer targets, breast and bowel cancer target ads on Muslim TV channels, and the reintroduction of bowel screening reminder calling and other initiatives.

The North East London NHS Foundation Trust conclusions are relatively simple. The workforce is a key factor in delivering a faster diagnosis standard, expected by 2020 and beyond; earlier diagnosis of cancer needs a resilient and sustainable radiology, endoscopy and pathology workforce; the high cost of living, the lack of affordable housing and the disparity in salaries across London are barriers to recruitment; and there is a need to look at technology such as artificial intelligence and digital pathology, and innovations in careers.

CLIC Sargent raised the problem of diagnosing child cancer and said, worryingly, that more than half of young people diagnosed visited their GP with their parents at least three times before their cancer was diagnosed. That is of particular concern.

Breast Cancer Care also raised the workforce plan, and asked how the commitments of the current cancer strategy and the ambitions of the long-term plan will be met. The Royal College of Physicians told me that, in London in 2018, 27% of physician consultant posts advertised were not filled, and that across the UK a total 45% of advertised consultant posts went unfilled due to a lack of suitable applicants.

The British Lung Foundation made two key points: that early diagnosis is essential because almost half of lung cancers are diagnosed at stage 4 when survival rates are very poor; and that there is an urgent need to train and employ more NHS staff to diagnose lung cancer earlier. The Royal College of Nursing stated that in England there are nearly 41,000 vacant registered nursing posts in the NHS. It predicts that the number will increase to almost 48,000 by 2023 if the Government do not take action.

The Commons Library briefings said that the cancer workforce plan devised in 2017 recommended that action be taken to ensure that enough staff with the right skills are trained to deliver the cancer strategy by 2021. In November last year, the highly respected Professor Sir Mike Richards—NHS England's cancer director—announced that cancer screening would be overhauled as part of the long-term plan. He also announced a review team to assess current screening programmes and a report is due this summer. I ask the Minister whether that timetable might coincide with the publication of the Government's workforce plan. The Library stated that there is no measure of the total NHS cancer workforce. Will the Minister comment on that anomaly?

I would be grateful if the Minister addresses the fundamental issue raised in all the briefings: how the workforce implementation plan fits in with the strategy, and when it can be expected. I look forward to his response. He is highly regarded in his post. I look

forward to the responses from the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford), the Scottish National party spokesperson, and from my hon. Friend the Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson), the shadow Health Minister, and to other colleagues' contributions.

Several hon. Members rose—

**Mr George Howarth (in the Chair):** Order. This is an important subject and many Members have signified that they wish to speak in the debate. I will not impose a time limit straight away. I will see how it goes. If hon. Members co-operate, I am sure that everybody will be able to speak.

9.40 am

**Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD):** Thank you, Mr Howarth. It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship. I wish everyone a happy new year and congratulate the hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick) on securing this incredibly important debate, which is timely in the light of yesterday's announcement of the NHS long-term plan.

I will restrict my remarks on the cancer workforce to the radiotherapy workforce and other issues relating to radiotherapy. Sadly, at some point in our lives, one in two of us will have cancer of some form or other, and one in two of those with cancer will receive radiotherapy treatment, so one in four of us will need radiotherapy. Roughly speaking, 1,500 people—clinicians, medical physicists and therapeutic radiographers—make up the entire radiotherapy workforce of the United Kingdom. In the plan that we have been digesting since yesterday, there are many things worthy of remark and which are to be welcomed, but many questions remain unanswered.

On radiotherapy, the focus on survival and early detection is clearly crucial. The United Kingdom is very low down in the league table of European countries when it comes to early detection of cancer, which is the chief reason why survival is so poor compared with other nations of similar prosperity. That is tragic on a personal level and deeply humiliating on a national level. If the Government, the National Health Service and we all are successful in our bid to detect cancer earlier at stage one and stage two, treat it effectively and cure patients—radiotherapy is eight times more likely to be curative than chemotherapy and 50% of those with cancer are already having radiotherapy—it stands to reason that the need for capacity for radiotherapy will increase manifold.

There are 52 radiotherapy centres in England with a number of other satellites. There is nothing in the plan that scopes forward how the national health service will cope with the additional work required if early diagnosis becomes more successful. It is worth bearing in mind that, as things stand, there are significant pressures with a workforce of 1,500. There are two ways of looking at it: one is that the workforce is a very small and precious resource that we need to protect, and the other is to remind ourselves that those are relatively small figures, and that with a relatively small amount of investment, we could make a significant difference to increase that workforce. Relatively small numbers equals a huge percentage, which equals the ability to tackle many more cancers and, indeed, to cure many of them.



I will focus briefly on one profession within the radiotherapy workforce—therapeutic radiographers. I do not know whether hon. Members are aware, but in the current academic year, there has been a 50% drop in applications to therapeutic radiography courses at UK universities. One of the leading universities had to cancel its entire intake altogether due to under-recruitment. The cause is almost certainly—99% certainly—the removal of the bursary from that programme. The standard applicant is a mature student who chooses to do something different with their life, having done something else first, and the withdrawal of the bursary has had a huge impact on those people. If the Minister wanted to do something quickly to tackle that workforce issue, I will throw out there the suggestion that he could reinstate the bursary for radiographers.

I am chair of the all-party parliamentary group on radiotherapy, and one of our vice-chairs is here—the hon. Member for Easington (Grahame Morris). We and many other hon. Members had a really good meeting with the Minister at the end of November last year. I am very grateful to him and to his staff for their time and attention. They have yet to respond to the manifesto that we presented to them that day, although I did not expect them to have done so by now. That manifesto calls for a number of things: new investment and more money—it would be surprising if we did not ask for that, but I will put it in context.

As I have said, half of those who have cancer in the United Kingdom will require radiotherapy, yet only 5% of the cancer budget goes on radiotherapy. That compares poorly with other countries. In Australia, the figure is about 5% but the European average is something like 7% or 8%. Our cross-party proposition is that the Government invest £100 million every year into machine upgrades for high-quality, targeted, stereotactic, and other advanced forms of radiotherapy. That fund would cover all trusts, which would not have to delve into their own reserves. We also propose a £250 million up-front, one-off investment so that people who live in communities like mine an awful long way from the nearest treatment can have a satellite unit developed close to them.

Many of my constituents in South Lakeland have to make three or four-hour round trips to get good treatment at Preston, but a large percentage—up to 50%—of those who could have radiotherapy in my constituency and in other parts of south Cumbria do not get it because they are considered to be too far away for it to be a reasonable journey time. Radiotherapy is so often more curative than chemotherapy, ergo people do not live as long because they live too far from treatment. That is why the radiotherapy satellite centre at Westmorland General Hospital in Kendal is a key example. Access and travel times are a problem in other parts of the country, which is why investment in satellite units is important. They do not necessarily involve that much more staffing because, with proper IT networking, we would be able to do many of those things remotely.

In conclusion, the NHS plan announced yesterday contains much that is interesting, but when it comes to radiotherapy, it is entirely a rehash of things that we already know. Some things are welcome, but there is nothing new. I look forward to the Government's response to its consultation on radiotherapy, which closed 12 months ago, and I ask for an update on that. I also ask that the National Cancer Advisory Group's 2018 report is released

as soon as possible. Finally, I very much look forward to the Government's response to the manifesto by the all-party parliamentary group on radiotherapy, which was presented to them in November.

**Several hon. Members rose—**

**Mr George Howarth (in the Chair):** I call Grahame Morris.

9.47 am

**Grahame Morris (Easington) (Lab):** Thank you very much for calling me to speak in this important debate, Mr Howarth. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick), and I thank my friend the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron), who chairs the all-party parliamentary group on radiography, of which I am also a member.

I do not want to repeat the arguments that have just been made, but some key threads run through the whole of the debate. Although the motion refers to “early diagnosis and the cancer workforce in the NHS long-term plan”, we have to marry some concepts. Yes, early diagnosis is important, but it has to be married with a skilled and effective workforce, as well as the most effective treatment available, by which I do not mean the treatment available in our capital city only, but across the whole country. I will touch on that issue as well.

I declare an interest: I am a cancer survivor. I was successfully treated with both chemotherapy and radiotherapy, thanks to a relatively early diagnosis. I am vice-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on radiotherapy. I am not alone in having benefited from radiotherapy. As was mentioned earlier, during the course of our lifetimes, almost half of us will suffer from cancer at least once, and about half of those people will receive radiotherapy.

Although I was fortunate and count my lucky stars, I am acutely concerned about particular cancers, notably prostate cancer, pancreatic cancer—yesterday, we heard a terrible story from the hon. Member for Crawley (Henry Smith) about his caseworker who passed away as a consequence of pancreatic cancer—and lung cancers and breast cancer. For a modern industrial nation, our cancer outcomes are poor. They should be far better. I hope that the 10-year forward plan that was published yesterday is an opportunity to address some of those fundamental problems. It is important for us to invest in modern accessible cancer diagnosis and treatments.

I want to talk about the long-term plan that the Prime Minister announced yesterday, on which we had a statement in the House. I will refer in particular to chapter 3, especially section 3.62, on treatment and radiotherapy. I must admit that I was optimistic after meeting the Minister, who I have known for some years. I think he is a decent and honourable individual, and he and his staff were very positive in our meetings. I therefore hoped that, based on the evidence presented, we would have a much more positive outcome from the 10-year plan.

The Government have promised to complete the £130 million investment in radiotherapy machines and to commission the proton machines—the two proton-beam

[Grahame Morris]

machines, at the Christie in Manchester and at University College Hospital, London—but, in all honesty, that is not a new commitment. Those machines are already or almost completed, so the commitment is a recycling of an existing announcement.

If we are to have a step change and to achieve a world-class set of outcomes and a world-class cancer treatment service, we need a modest increase—modest in relative terms—for advanced radiotherapy. As set out in the “Manifesto for Radiotherapy”—which I recommend that all Members read, because if they are not affected themselves, many of their constituents certainly will be—we ask for an initial one-off investment of £250 million, with an additional £100 million in each successive year for workforce, running costs and so on.

Radiotherapy is required in 50% of cases, but access is patchy. Access varies from 25% to 49%. For example, the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale represents a rural area, where the figures are low. The average is about 38%. Ideally, according to Cancer Research UK, patients should not have to travel more than 45 minutes to access such treatment and, if we are to achieve that, considerable investment is required. The Minister might be able to elaborate on this, but I do not think that anything concrete in the plan addresses that serious issue.

I welcome the Government commitment on early diagnosis to increase the number of patients diagnosed with stage 1 and 2 cancer by 25% and, for lung cancer, to increase the diagnosis of stage 1 patients by 47%. In practical terms, however, the Government will need more advanced radiotherapy machines to ensure that many of those stage 1 tumours can be cured, as well as additional radiotherapy machines to treat the stage 2 patients. The Government will need to rapidly expand the number of advanced radiotherapy facilities around the country, and how to do that is set out in the manifesto, which would achieve not only early diagnosis but improved survival and outcomes.

I want to give the Minister credit—he is looking a bit quizzical, but I had not intended to beat him up, because we are trying to be helpful. The aspiration and wish to improve cancer outcomes and to see a first-class service is shared in all parts of the House. I am therefore very pleased that he has recognised the representations made on hypofractionated treatment and the perverse incentive in relation to the tariff. The Government have said that they will address that issue, but I would like an assurance that it will be addressed quickly and not in 10 years’ time. The evidence is clear about that disincentive to the most appropriate form of treatment.

Many people want to speak in the debate, so I will wind up. I am pleased that the Government have admitted and accept that advanced radiotherapy is more effective and has fewer side effects. I would like to see a specification come out and to ensure that, when it comes out, we do not see what we have in effect at the moment, which is the rationing of effective treatment. Specialists in the field have told me that the specification under discussion now is in essence no different from that available a year ago. I therefore press the Minister to respond to our submissions.

I want to see an increase in the budget for advanced radiotherapy—fairly modest as part of the NHS budget, or even the cancer budget—from 5% to 6.5% of the

cancer budget. That would enable large numbers of cancer patients to live longer and more fulfilling lives and would achieve better NHS outcomes and positive economic benefits. I commend that proposal to the Minister, and I urge him to look at it as part of the ongoing cancer strategy and the NHS 10-year plan.

9.57 am

**Thangam Debbonaire** (Bristol West) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve with you in the Chair, Mr Howarth. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick) and other hon. Members for their contributions.

I will focus on cancer affecting children, teenagers and young adults. As hon. Members know, I have personal experience of breast cancer, but more expert people in the Chamber will talk about that, so I will discuss the form of cancer for which I recently set up the all-party parliamentary group on children, teenagers and young adults with cancer.

I set up the group because each year in the UK, 4,450 children and young people under 25 are diagnosed with cancer—that is 12 children and young people every day somewhere in the UK. Four out of five of them will survive for five years or more, but for the parent of a child such a survival rate seems minuscule. Most of us expect our children to survive far longer than that, so the survival rate can seem quite hard. Those of us who have had adult cancer might think, “Oh good—five years! I’ll still be around in five years’ time.” For adults, that feels like a success; for children, not so much.

Cancer remains the biggest killer by disease of children and young people under 25 in the UK. That is important, because one of the reasons why cancer is the biggest killer is that other diseases have declined. That is a good thing, but cancers still affect many children. We want the incidence to decrease, and the number of children surviving and being diagnosed earlier to increase. The all-party parliamentary group wants things to be better. The Minister knows that, because he has been good to the group and worked closely with us. We understand that the small number of children affected can make it difficult to identify real specifics that could make a big difference, but because the number is small, some of the things that we want might be relatively straightforward to do.

Last year, we held an inquiry into young people’s experience of childhood and young adult cancer. We now call on the Government and the NHS long-term plan to look at the impact of a young person’s route to diagnosis. Recent research by CLIC Sargent found that more than half of young people had to visit their GP at least three times before their cancer diagnosis. Katie, the young woman who was a panel member in our inquiry, said that because childhood and young people’s cancer is so rare, GPs did not expect to see it, so frequently signs and symptoms were misunderstood. I have the greatest sympathy for GPs and clinicians, and because those cancers are so rare, we would like a training and e-learning module for healthcare professionals.

CLIC Sargent and the Teenage Cancer Trust have teamed up to create such a module on the signs of cancer in children and young people, developed in partnership with the Royal College of GPs. We would like more support in the NHS workforce to improve

recognition of the signs, whether that is the e-learning module or something different. I hope the Minister will say something about that when he sums up. In the NHS long-term plan published yesterday I was really pleased to see a specific mention of childhood cancer, but I was disappointed that there was not more emphasis on skilling up the healthcare workforce to recognise the signs and symptoms. We all know that often the consequence of failing to make an early diagnosis is a very poor survival rate.

In our inquiry we recommended many measures, which the Minister has very kindly agreed to go through with his officials and respond to in some detail. Perhaps after the debate, will he liaise with my office about a time to meet? I am grateful to him for his willingness to do that, but we would like to make some progress in the first half of this year. Some of our recommendations are relevant to this debate. We say that the Secretary of State for Education should ensure that every young person receives health education that includes cancer signs and symptoms, done in an appropriate way. The Teenage Cancer Trust has developed an education module, which many of us will have seen recently when it was demonstrated in Parliament. I would like to see something such as that being used.

**Craig Tracey** (North Warwickshire) (Con): The hon. Lady makes an excellent case for education. As co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on breast cancer, I want to raise the fact that about 3,500 breast cancers go undetected each year due to women not understanding the risk due to breast density. Education would seem critical as part of the long-term plan to get world-class outcomes, so that people understand their personal risk.

**Thangam Debbonaire:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right; education is critical across all cancers, particularly breast cancer. Many young women need more understanding of how their risk can be reduced by certain lifestyle choices. I say that carefully, without wishing to blame cancer survivors, because there is a difficult balance. Education is important, because the health service we want for the 21st century is about health rather than sickness. I wanted to see more emphasis in the NHS long-term plan on prevention.

Will the Minister respond to some of our recommendations in his reply to the debate? The all-party group thinks that an emphasis on prevention is critical to young people's long-term survival and long-term health—not long-term sickness. We are concerned about the shortage of radiographers and radiologists, but other Members will discuss that. If more children and young people with cancer are to survive longer than five years, early diagnosis is critical. Health professionals may see only one childhood cancer in their entire professional life, so they will need help. I ask the Minister to talk to us and to his officials about how to help the professionals to do better. We would like more education for young people on a range of cancer indicators and on ways to change their lifestyle, such as exercising more, reducing alcohol consumption and so on. We all know about those actions, but quite often it is too late; we could do with knowing them from an early age and building them into our way of life, starting when we are young.

I want to conclude, without getting too emotional, by paying tribute to CLIC Sargent and to the Teenage Cancer Trust in particular. They do so much, not just for children and young people but for parents and families. Members of my family received help from CLIC Sargent. My dear sister-in-law works for CLIC Sargent and she has been an inspiration to me on childhood cancer. I want the work they have done to be embraced by Ministers other than this Minister, who already has embraced it, to take that forward in the NHS long-term plan.

10.4 am

**Stephen Lloyd** (Eastbourne) (Ind): It is a privilege to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Howarth. I thank the hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick) for securing this important debate.

I will keep my remarks brief because quite a lot of people want to speak, so I will focus on one area of early diagnosis—that of bowel cancer. There are two reasons for that: bowel cancer is the fourth most common cancer, and it is the second biggest cancer killer, yet bowel cancer is not only treatable but curable, especially if diagnosed early. The Minister will know that since my re-election I have pressed him and the Department hard to reduce the bowel cancer screening age in England from 60 to 50. I was delighted when, a few months ago, the Minister agreed to that and announced that the reduction would take place.

I pay tribute to my constituent Lauren Backler, who started the campaign to reduce the screening age three years or so ago. Sadly, her mother died in her mid-fifties; it is very likely she would not have died had she lived in Scotland and had an early diagnosis. That prompted Lauren to launch a campaign, and it has been an unbelievable success in numbers alone: more than half a million people across the country have signed her petition. Colleagues in the Chamber and I have campaigned avidly for it for the last couple of years, and the Minister and the Department of Health announced the change a few months ago.

**David Simpson** (Upper Bann) (DUP): The hon. Gentleman will be pleased to know that in Northern Ireland, following the introduction of bowel cancer screening kits, participation is 60%. It is a fantastic result for Northern Ireland and we need to do more of it.

**Stephen Lloyd:** The hon. Gentleman is right. The introduction of the new faecal immunochemical test kits will make a huge difference.

I am speaking in this debate because, as the Minister will know and one or two people have alluded to, in yesterday's announcement there was no clear announcement about additional staff and capacity to ensure that the bowel screening age is brought down from 60 to 50. I commend the Government for listening to Lauren, hundreds of thousands of people across the country, my colleagues here and me, and reducing the age—it is quite clear statistically that many thousands of lives will be saved—but I am anxious that there was no announcement yesterday about the additional budget that will be required for new staff, and a plan for it to happen. I am keen to hear from the Minister not just that the Department of Health is behind it, but detail of when the announcement



[Stephen Lloyd]

will be made about additional staff capacity. I urge that particularly because, as the Minister knows, the budget decisions will be announced in March. I want some flesh to be put on the bones.

This is an issue where we know we have a solution. We in this Chamber understand that there are capacity and finance issues. We applaud the Government and the Department of Health for publicly stating that they will bring down the screening age limit. What we all need now is flesh on the bone and detail, so that Lauren Backler, following her remarkable campaign in tribute to her mother, can see in the next few months the first roll-out of the age reduction in screening for bowel cancer.

10.8 am

**Nic Dakin** (Scunthorpe) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick) on securing this important and timely debate.

We very much welcome the NHS long-term plan. It is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to improve cancer care significantly in this country. The plan rightly recognises that one of the biggest actions the NHS can take to improve cancer survival is to diagnose cancers earlier, and sets out welcome commitments to radically improve early diagnosis. I hope that as the plan develops there will be more specific plans for the less survivable cancers—pancreatic, brain, lung, stomach, liver and oesophagus—that account for more than 50% of all cancers.

As chair of the all-party group on cancer I was pleased to chair the Britain Against Cancer conference last month, which focused on future priorities for cancer care. There were many reasons to be cheerful, but one big concern was whether the workforce will be sufficient to deliver the care that will be needed in the future. There is still a lack of clarity about that, despite efforts in the long-term plan, so it is useful to have this opportunity to focus on that.

We know that the number of people diagnosed with cancer in the UK is increasing and that the changing needs of cancer patients present a challenge for professionals working in cancer care, who are dealing with rising case loads, and increasingly complex needs. The plan's ambition to diagnose three in four cancer cases at an early stage by 2028 is welcome, but unless we have a plan to deal with staffing shortages, backed up by significant investment, the NHS will struggle to maintain today's standards.

In NHS North Lincolnshire clinical commissioning group, only 71.9% of cancer patients receive their first treatment within 62 days of an urgent GP referral. That is well below the England average and below the national target of 85%. Delays to cancer waiting times are often caused by a diagnostic bottleneck, where there is not enough capacity to carry out the tests needed to confirm a cancer diagnosis so that the patient can begin treatment. I therefore welcome the announcement made just before Christmas of capital investment for Northern Lincolnshire and Goole NHS Foundation Trust, and of diagnostic equipment for Diana, Princess of Wales Hospital in Grimsby and Scunthorpe General Hospital. I hope that will make a significant difference.

To improve early diagnosis and match the best cancer outcomes in Europe, it is crucial to have the workforce in place to support growing patient need. Although the NHS long-term plan sets out ambitions for the future workforce, funding available for additional investment in that workforce in the form of training, education and continuing professional development through the Health Education England budget, has yet to be set out by the Government. Will the Minister—he is an excellent Minister—set out when that budget will be confirmed and say whether the Government intend to set out further funding arrangements as part of the comprehensive spending review?

NHS staff shortages in primary and acute settings have been consistently highlighted by organisations in the sector in recent years, and there is an urgent need to grow the cancer workforce. Cancer Research UK estimates that the cancer workforce needs to double by 2027. Similarly, Macmillan Cancer Support has estimated that the supply of adult cancer nurses must increase by 45% in the next 10 years. Those are big numbers.

Macmillan's workforce census last year highlighted considerable variation in vacancy rates for cancer nurse specialists across the country. That is also true for specialist chemotherapy nurses, with vacancy rates as high as 15% in some areas. A recent survey of healthcare professionals working in breast care in hospitals by the charity Breast Cancer Care painted a worrying picture, with 87% of respondents stating that job shortages in their hospital could affect breast cancer patients. A freedom of information request from that charity found that two thirds of hospital trusts in England do not provide a dedicated nurse for people living with incurable breast cancer. It is therefore crucial that a fully costed plan is produced to demonstrate how the health and care workforce will be sustained and grown. The long-term plan states that there will be a separate workforce implementation plan in 2019, but more detail is needed about the timeframes. Will the Minister say when the plan will be published? "Soon" is not quite good enough. We would like a date, please.

The 2015 cancer strategy recommended the publication of a cancer workforce plan, yet the sector is still waiting for the publication of phase 2 of that plan by Health Education England. Will the Minister outline how the implementation plan relates to the long-promised phase 2 HEE plan on the cancer workforce? If the ambitions of the long-term plan and the 2015 cancer strategy are to be realised, a comprehensive and fully funded workforce plan must set out how the cancer workforce can be upskilled and developed to meet the needs of the growing number of people living with cancer.

10.14 am

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick) for securing this debate, and for giving us the opportunity to discuss this important issue. I am the Democratic Unionist party spokesperson on health, so such matters are at the top of the tree for me. I am pleased that the Minister and shadow Minister are here to respond to our concerns, and we appreciate the Backbench Business Committee kindly granting us this debate.

Cancer is a word I hate; it is a disease I hate. A respecter of no person, it indiscriminately attacks and takes from us those who we love and rely on. I truly

believe that a cure must be found and found soon for this dreaded disease, but while that work is taking place, we must focus on the best use of the limited resources available. I congratulate the Government on their NHS 10-year plan and their commitment to a cancer strategy within it.

As hon. Members have said, we all have family members and friends who have been stricken by cancer. I have a good friend who will have breast cancer surgery on Friday, and my father survived cancer on three occasions due to the expertise of the surgeon, the nurse's care and, critically, the prayer of God's people. My hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (David Simpson) referred to the bowel cancer testing kit in Northern Ireland, and probably because of my father's history, I carry out screening with that kit every year, and therefore I would know early on whether any cancer has been detected. That is what we are doing in Northern Ireland, and hopefully it is something that other parts of the United Kingdom can take on board.

**Mr Gregory Campbell** (East Londonderry) (DUP): Does my hon. Friend agree that, given the almost universal acceptance of the importance of early detection, the long-term plan, like any other plan, will be judged against an increase in early detection? That is the key.

**Jim Shannon:** I agree wholeheartedly with my hon. Friend and colleague, and although many people are dying from cancer, a larger number are surviving that diagnosis.

I wish to thank the tremendous staff who work well above their paygrade and the hours they are paid to make a difference to the quality of care and support for cancer sufferers. I also thank the wonderful charities that aim to step into the breach where at all possible. We all know of such charities, and if I do not mention some of them that does not make them any less important. Many charities, including Marie Curie, do tremendous work.

Macmillan Cancer Support is an amazing charity. In 2017, it had more than 5,700 nurses supporting 658,000 people, with a further 2,000 healthcare professionals throughout the United Kingdom. In 2017, 1.6 million people received personal, high-impact support from one or more Macmillan professionals or services. While broadly welcoming the Government scheme, Macmillan has expressed serious concerns that the plan does not adequately address the immediate and longer-term pressures facing the NHS cancer workforce. Those concerns are put forward in a constructive fashion, as they should be:

“The NHS long-term plan makes clear that the funding available for additional investment in the workforce, in the form of training, education and continuing professional development through the HEE budget has yet to be set by the Government. This is a key priority and must be urgently addressed. The plan states that there will be a separate Workforce Implementation Plan in 2019, but more detail is needed about the timeframes, and how the implementation plan relates to the long-promised phase 2 HEE plan on the cancer workforce. It is essential that we build on the ambitious foundations of the NHS long-term plan and put in place a fully-funded strategy for the workforce that will deliver truly world-class cancer care.”

That is what Macmillan Cancer Support expressed before this debate. Perhaps the Minister will respond to those points.

I agree with the sentiments expressed by Macmillan, and more detail is needed to deal with funding gaps to address the issue of speed of diagnosis in quick-moving cancers such as pancreatic cancer. My hon. Friend the Member for East Londonderry (Mr Campbell) and the hon. Member for Bristol West (Thangam Debbonaire) spoke about early diagnosis, and nearly every Member who has spoken in the debate has said it is critical—and so it is. Pancreatic cancer is the quickest-killing cancer, with one in four people dying within a month, so we need a faster pathway to diagnose and treat it, as the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin), who is particularly interested in it, will know. Early diagnosis is essential in the case of pancreatic cancer, as it offers the only chance for potentially curative surgery. However, fewer than 20% of people with pancreatic cancer are diagnosed at an early stage, and fewer than 10% will receive surgery. The capacity does not currently exist, and there must be an increase in the cancer workforce to ensure timely diagnosis and treatment. Every Member who has spoken in the debate has supported the point of view expressed by Macmillan, and it is critically important.

Prostate cancer has been mentioned. When men are ill we are, by our nature, the illest people in the world, but sometimes we just do not know when we are ill. I make that point in relation to prostate cancer because we do not do the checks, although we know what has to be done. Needing the toilet more frequently, a burning sensation and passing blood are some of the symptoms, and men perhaps need to look out more for them. We need to raise awareness of prostate cancer. To be fair, I think that the Government do that, but perhaps there is a need to do more.

I hope I will be forgiven for repeating some comments that have been made, but these issues are important. The hon. Member for Bristol West referred to CLIC Sargent, and I want to make some comments on children's cancers. CLIC Sargent is a wonderful charity and has asked me to use this opportunity to stress something that shocked me when I first read it, and which underlines the point about the workforce. Children make up the highest proportion of cancer patients diagnosed through emergency admissions, and many young people and parents have a poor experience of diagnosis. The 2016 “Best Chance from the Start” research report on experiences of diagnosis found that more than half of young people and almost half of parents had visited their GP at least three times before the cancer diagnosis.

As the hon. Member for Bristol West said, there is a particular need for early diagnosis for children. Nearly half of young people felt their GP did not take their concerns seriously. I do not think that is a criticism; it is how they felt. A third of parents felt that their GP did not take into account their knowledge of their child. We should not ignore what parents know and say about their child. It is important to do something to raise GPs' awareness in relation to children. Just over a third of young people and a quarter of parents felt that their GP did not have enough time to listen to them talk about their symptoms. I want to ask the Minister what has been done about that. I am mindful of the pressure on GPs, who have a lot of work to do. However, something needs to happen for children diagnosed with cancer and their parents. Like the hon. Member for Bristol West, I am requesting that something be done.

[Jim Shannon]

The urgent change that is needed can be achieved only through funding to take the pressure off diagnostics, allowing GPs to refer before the third repeat visit. They must be allowed to go with their gut and send anything suspicious to be tested further, rather than playing a numbers and probability game. Cancer does not respect the numbers game—it strikes where it might be least expected.

This is my last paragraph, Mr Howarth. Time has beaten me. I heartily welcome the strategy, but we need more detail and more action, and soon, to make a difference, and so that we can make a worthwhile attack on the plague of cancer, which affects families throughout the United Kingdom. That is why the debate is so important.

10.24 am

**Bambos Charalambous** (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Howarth. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick) on securing this important and timely debate.

Lives are saved when cancer is diagnosed early. I know we all are united in wanting all cancers to be caught early so that survival rates can be drastically increased. However, to diagnose and detect cancer early, we need a sufficiently skilled workforce and full staffing. NHS staff do amazing work, but they are under extreme pressures. We are one of the richest countries in the world, but lives are being lost because of under-investment in our NHS workforce. If we are to come anywhere near to achieving the Prime Minister's target of diagnosing three in four cancers at their early stages by 2028, we will need to have a long-term plan that will deal with the staffing shortages, which will no doubt get worse post Brexit.

Cancer Research UK estimates that by 2035 a person will be diagnosed with cancer every minute. At present nine out of 10 people will survive bowel cancer if it is diagnosed at an early stage, but that figure reduces to only one in 10 if it is not diagnosed until stage 4. Currently between 46% and 61% of cancer sufferers are diagnosed at stage 1 or 2, which means that people are slipping through the net and dying needlessly owing to a lack of resources. With 40% more people being referred for diagnostic cancer tests than four years ago, cancer diagnostic services are struggling to keep up with demand. They have already missed their cancer waiting time targets over the past three years.

I am the co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on breast cancer. The rest of my comments will focus on breast cancer, for which the situation is even worse than I have been outlining. The breast imaging and diagnostic workforce are critical for the early diagnosis of breast cancer, but Breast Cancer Now has discovered that only 18% of breast screening units are adequately resourced with radiography staff to meet demand. Taking into account the ageing workforce of breast imaging radiographers and the increase in demand, we have an exacerbation of pressures that will only get worse. For every three breast radiographers who retire over the next five years, only two are expected to replace them, which means that imaging and diagnostic services will

be unable to keep up with demand. That will cause delays, which in turn will cause greater anguish for those waiting to be tested.

Fifty-five thousand people are diagnosed with breast cancer in the UK every year, yet the survival rates lag behind those of Sweden, Portugal, Germany and France. We have a declining workforce and an increase in demand. Unless the Government invest in a fully funded workforce plan, patients will suffer. We need a new approach to workforce planning based on best practice and clinical need. Health Education England must produce phase 2 of the cancer workforce plan, which looks at how many staff are needed to meet growing patient demand, and set out a 10-year cancer workforce strategy. The plan must be backed with appropriate funding. Breast Cancer Now has called for the Government to invest £39 million in recruitment to the breast imaging and diagnostic workforce as part of the plan to cover the cost of training to fill clinical radiologist vacancies and to address the current shortfall in radiographer numbers.

The Government's decision to scrap bursaries for allied health professionals and nurses is a factor in making it harder to recruit. Someone who wants to become a mammographer must self-fund an MSc following a three-year radiography degree. Prior to the 2017 bursary cuts to allied health professionals courses, including for diagnostic radiographers, the undergraduate degree was covered by a bursary. Following that disastrous cut, there was a 20% decrease in the number of applications to allied health professionals courses and a further 9% cut in 2018. That under-resourcing, directly linked to the Government's bursary cuts, has undoubtedly cost lives. I urge the Minister to reverse the cut to bursaries to ensure that the financial barriers to becoming a mammographer are removed and that more applicants are encouraged to apply for allied health professionals courses.

Funding for early diagnosis is not just about staffing levels and recruitment. It is also about new technology. There are new improved ways of detecting breast cancer, such as via tomosynthesis, which is far more effective in detecting breast cancer in some women. Artificial intelligence could also be used to assist in analysing the vast data capture involved in screening, but that would require the commitment by the Government of investment in new technologies and training. Risk-stratified breast screening is another way of making better use of technology to assess a woman's individual level of risk by using algorithms to assess various risk factors. Once an assessment has been done, a more personalised service can be given for women at higher risk, which could again help to save lives.

I will finish by asking the Minister whether he will commit to getting Health Education England to produce phase 2 of the cancer workforce plan, which will be based on need, and confirm that it will be properly funded. Will he reverse the cuts to bursaries for courses for allied health professionals and nurses, and make sure that recruitment levels are up to the levels that are required, especially with Brexit looming? Finally, will he commit to exploring and funding new technologies and training that will help to detect cancer earlier, target those who are at higher risk, and alleviate the pressures on the workforce? If the Government do not get things right in relation to the shortfall in funding for early diagnosis and the cancer workforce, some people will inevitably die an avoidable death from cancer.



10.30 am

**Dr Philippa Whitford** (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Howarth. I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick) on securing the debate. It is a slight pity that it is less than 24 hours after the publication of the long-term plan, but people seem to have done lots of fast reading last night.

Like others, I welcome the plan and particularly the extra funding for the NHS, but it is important to remember that this brings it back to 3.4%, which was the average over many years—indeed, below the average over many years—prior to 2010. As the Secretary of State highlighted yesterday, with a million extra patients, the money per head of the population is actually going down. That is something that should be looked at, because it is a much better comparative measure.

In Scotland, we spend £163 per head more on health than here in England, and £113 per head more on elderly social care. We know that if we do not fix social care, then unfortunately any money put into the NHS is haemorrhaging out because of elderly people trapped in hospital, where they do not want to be. We see money focused on the NHS, because that sounds good to the public, but also further reductions in public health, despite all the talk in the plan about prevention. That does not make sense.

I welcome the Making Every Contact Count initiative. In Scotland, we have had Making Every Contact Count for years. As a breast cancer surgeon, I have discussed issues around smoking with all of my patients, because they inevitably ask, “Why did I get breast cancer?” We do not have the answer for breast cancer, but we do have the answer for the majority of lung cancers. I do not make my patients give up smoking immediately, when they are under stress, but I get them to promise me that they will do it in the long term, and quite a number of them do that. I do not have time to support them through that journey. We still need smoking cessation services, to which they can be referred. Those services are being cut, and that is a problem.

In the plan and in the Secretary of State’s letter yesterday, we again have a focus on cancer, which, as a breast cancer surgeon for over 30 years, I welcome. In his letter he talks about early diagnosis, but not about prevention, yet smoking is still the biggest cause of cancer, with obesity chasing it up as a close second. We need to tackle childhood obesity and we need a 9 pm watershed for advertising foods that encourage it.

Half of us will get cancer. As all the speakers have said, early diagnosis is crucial. It is particularly important to avoid diagnosis as part of an emergency admission, as that tends to result in a very poor outlook. For symptomatic cancers, as the Member for Shannon highlighted—*[Interruption.]* I keep saying that; I mean the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon). It is because the Shannon is another body of water in Ireland; I always get mixed up. We will just change it—you can be the Member for Shannon. *[Laughter.]* As the hon. Gentleman said, it is important to know the symptoms, but the public and sometimes GPs are too focused on late symptoms. Weight loss, jaundice and even, for some cancers, bleeding are not early enough. We need to educate people about that.

In Scotland, we have used humour. There was a testicular cancer advert over Christmas talking about men’s baubles. I do not care what kind of humour people need, whether it is toilet humour for bowel cancer or talking about boobs for breast cancer. If it gets people talking about it, that makes it easier for them to come forward. Many years ago we did an audit in Scotland looking at the whole patient pathway. It showed that for particular cancers, including bowel cancer, the longest step was from the first sign or symptom to going to the GP. The plan talks a lot about the pathway after going to the doctor, but there are only a couple of lines about educating the populous about what to look out for. That means we have to get people talking about it.

In Scotland, we have had bowel cancer screening starting at the age of 50 right from the beginning. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds), who is no longer in his place, lost his mother in her 50s. In the last year or so we have also had celebrities diagnosed late with bowel cancer, who might well have been picked up if the screening had started at the age of 50. Last August, I welcomed the Government’s commitment to making that change, but there has been no discussion in any announcements or in the plan about when that change will happen.

When I turned 50 and the poo-in-the-post envelope landed on the mat within two days, I found it a bit harsh. As my birthday is Christmas eve, I got another one last week. I would not mind if they were a bit more sensitive, but it is something that people have to do. In Scotland, we have already changed completely to the faecal immunochemical test, which involves only one sample. We have already seen a 10% increase in uptake. Again, the Government have committed to that and the roll-out has commenced, but when will it be complete?

It is important to be prepared for the impact that that will have on the NHS here. If the starting age for bowel screening is dropped from 60 to 50, there will be an increase of two thirds in the screening population. If there is then the same 10% increase with FIT, together that will mean an increase of three quarters in the colonoscopies required. The NHS will have to be prepared with endoscopists and, as mentioned earlier, pathologists, who will analyse the samples. In Scotland, we have seen an increase in waiting times for colonoscopies, just with the change to FIT, so it is important to be prepared.

There is a similar impact with public education campaigns. Intense campaigns alone are no use. When we did the first Detect Cancer Early campaign, an audit of the breast cancer units across Scotland found that there had been a doubling in referrals, but not a significant change in the number of cancer diagnoses. Women are pretty breast aware, but the adverts need to be trickled throughout the year, or the chances are that there still will not be an advert when someone is sitting and ignoring a symptom.

As well as endoscopists and pathologists, the other workforce is radiologists. Not all radiologists can be identified as cancer radiologists; they will find cancer in all sorts of parts of the body. This diagnostic workforce is critical. If we look at the waiting time performance across the UK, we see that people are struggling, particularly with the 62-day target, which has fallen below 80% in England. Everyone is struggling with it. Looking at the 31-day target—from diagnosis to treatment—we see

[Dr Philippa Whitford]

that most cancers are at over 90%, or indeed 95%. Once the NHS knows that someone has cancer, the pathway is relatively swift, but there is long gap to be diagnosed.

In my own speciality of breast cancer, radiologists are critical for the initial test, the investigation and the follow-up. For every three breast cancer radiologists who will retire in the next five years, they will be replaced by only two. The problem is that breast screening came in around 1990, so all the young consultants who were appointed at almost the same time will all, sadly, be retiring at the same time. The clinical radiology workforce census report shows that the UK has a shortfall of 1,000 full-time radiologists at the moment, which will grow to 1,600 by 2022. Some £116 million is being spent on outsourcing and overtime. The issue is not even money, because that amount would fund 1,300 full-time radiologists; the issue is that we do not have the workforce. Yet we see in the plan that health education has had its funding cut over recent years, despite grand statements about all the extra nurses, radiographers, allied health professionals and doctors who will be trained.

The plan talks a lot about IT, but instead of focusing on digital GPs it should be focusing on internal IT. We have had electronic prescribing, referral and response letters for years in Scotland, and one of the things we have that can help with the radiology shortage is the picture archiving and communication system, where imaging is shared right across Scotland. Every hospital uses the same system, which means that if one place is short of radiologists or is very rural, an image can be sent hundreds of miles to be looked at by someone else. The plan talks about generalists, and they are needed, but we also need specialists. The workforce plan is critical.

10.40 am

**Mrs Sharon Hodgson** (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Howarth. In case anyone wonders why I am shivering a bit, I have to say it is a bit cold in here.

**Mr George Howarth (in the Chair)**: But it is a very warm atmosphere.

**Mrs Hodgson**: Oh, good—we do try.

I start by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick) on securing this important and timely debate and on his excellent speech. I wonder whether he has a crystal ball and knew something that we did not; I am sure if he does, it will be much in demand, because we have an important vote next week and somebody might want to have a borrow. I thank all the other hon. Members who have spoken this morning—the hon. Members for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron), for Eastbourne (Stephen Lloyd), for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford), and my hon. Friends the Members for Easington (Grahame Morris), for Bristol West (Thangam Debbonaire), for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin) and for Enfield, Southgate (Bambos Charalambous)—for their excellent contributions to the debate.

As we know, the long-term plan was launched yesterday. We had waited several months for it to be published, but I am pleased that, after a few setbacks and delays, we now have it and are able to move forward. I was also pleased to see that cancer is a key priority in the plan; I am sure the Minister played a large part in that. Cancer is important, but it is an emotive issue. One in two of us will face a cancer diagnosis in our lifetime, which is a sobering thought, and many of us in this Chamber will know someone who has been affected by cancer. Some of us, I know, have been affected by cancer individually, and no doubt some of us will have lost someone to cancer.

What led me initially to join the all-party parliamentary group on breast cancer as a new MP was losing my mother-in-law to breast cancer over 20 years ago. I notice that in this debate there is a gathering of former co-chairs of the all-party parliamentary group on breast cancer, as well as the current co-chairs of that group and the current chair of the all-party parliamentary group on cancer. Once this subject takes hold and catches our interest, it stays with us for the whole of our parliamentary career—as it should, because it is so important.

It is estimated that by 2035, one person every minute will be diagnosed with cancer. That is why cancer diagnosis, treatment and care and their workforces should play an important role in our NHS now and in the future. The Prime Minister set out in her conference speech last September the Government's ambition to see three in four cancer patients diagnosed at an early stage within the next decade. Currently, just more than half of the people diagnosed with cancer are diagnosed early in England, so the Government have a long way to go to achieve that welcome ambition.

Early diagnosis improves the likelihood of survival, as we all know. For example, if bowel cancer is diagnosed at an early stage, nine in 10 people will survive, but if it is diagnosed late, at stage 4, only one in 10 will survive. Early diagnosis also increases the likelihood of responding well to treatment. Target Ovarian Cancer, which I am proud to say I am the chair of the all-party parliamentary group for, found that as many as one in every five women in England are too ill to treat by the time they receive their ovarian cancer diagnosis. Awareness and screening programmes are crucial to early diagnosis, but breast screening uptake, for example, is the lowest it has been in 10 years, with stark variations across the country. The percentage of women taking up their screening invitation within six months fell from 71.1% in 2016-17 to 70.5% in 2017-18. Some might say that is only 0.6%, but analysis by Breast Cancer Now has found that upward of 1,200 additional deaths could be prevented per annual cohort of eligible women if we were to increase screening uptake to the current target of 80% for individual breast cancer screening units. With 500,000 people projected to be diagnosed with cancer in 2035, it is clear that we must do more to ensure that cancer is diagnosed early so that it can be treated effectively.

The long-term plan, as I am sure everyone has read and the Minister will be aware, says:

“We will build on work to raise greater awareness of symptoms of cancer, lower the threshold for referral by GPs, accelerate access to diagnosis and treatment and maximise the number of cancers that we identify through screening. This includes the use

of personalised and risk stratified screening and beginning to test the family members of cancer patients where they are at increased risk of cancer.”

That is all great, but the Government cannot make those improvements without improving the workforce, and they must not be complacent about the role our NHS workforce have to play in this. As we all know, that workforce do a wonderful job every day, treating, caring for and supporting us and our loved ones, as those who have witnessed it at first hand will attest. Unfortunately, the cancer workforce is at breaking point and already struggles to keep up with increasing demand. There are chronic staff shortages across the NHS, with vacancies for 102,000 staff, including nearly 41,000 nurses. As anyone who has ever worked somewhere with staff shortages will know, the pressure that places on an individual is huge. I cannot imagine what it is like for the NHS staff who work day in, day out under those pressures, when so much depends on their being able to do their job properly.

Cancer Research UK has pointed to chronic shortages in the diagnostic workforce, with more than one in 10 positions unfilled nationally. According to Breast Cancer Now, for every three breast radiologists who retire over the next five years, only two are expected to replace them. I know that others have already stated a lot of these facts, but they are worth stating twice. There is a similar problem with breast cancer clinical nurse specialists; Breast Cancer Care states that they are an ageing part of the workforce, with 45% of breast cancer clinical nurse specialists aged 50 or above. The Royal College of Radiologists has warned of a shortage of cancer doctors, with 5% of clinical oncologist posts vacant during the course of last year, up from a 3% vacancy rate in 2015. The Royal College of Nursing also warns that in England there are nearly 41,000 vacant registered nursing posts, and it predicts a dangerous increase to almost 48,000 by 2023 if the Government fail to take urgent action now.

The Government must take the issue of the cancer workforce incredibly seriously, as nearly every person who has spoken so far in the debate has said. Will the Minister provide a progress report on Health Education England's cancer workforce plan, which was published just over a year ago? Additionally, will he please provide us with a date for when he expects the second workforce plan to be published? As others have said, “soon” is not good enough. The NHS long-term plan makes it clear that the funding available for additional investment in the workforce, in the form of training, education and continuing professional development through the Health Education England budget, has yet to be set by the Government. Can the Minister assure us that any workforce plan will be properly funded, so that the workforce gap can be filled as a matter of urgency?

The NHS long-term plan says:

“We will complete the £130 million upgrade of radiotherapy machines across England and commission the NHS new state-of-the-art Proton Beam facilities in London and Manchester”,

but staff will need to be trained on both how to use those new facilities and how to read the results. Education and training must be high on the agenda for the second workforce plan, including the reinstatement of the training bursary, removing any financial burdens and barriers so that we can recruit the nurses that we need for the

future. It also means offering further training opportunities once qualified, so that staff can keep up to date with technological advances.

Our NHS should be the most attractive employer in the country, but without the financial backing and support from the Government we are failing to recruit and retain our hard-working NHS staff. Of course, as the Secretary of State continues to say, prevention is better than cure, but £96 million has been cut from public health budgets this financial year.

**Mr George Howarth (in the Chair):** Order. I call the Minister.

10.50 am

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Steve Brine):** That was very decisive of you, Mr Howarth. It is quite cold in here, but the ministerial radiator next to me is doing very nicely. Note to the Box: must get radiator for shadow Minister.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Howarth. I wish everybody a happy new year. I congratulate the hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick) on securing the debate. It is good to see him again. He has impeccable timing; I am not sure if he knew that the plan would be published when he applied for the debate. If he could let me know how he managed that, I would be very grateful.

The hon. Gentleman and everybody else talked about cancer survival rates. The truth is that they have never been higher and have increased year on year over the last decade or so. The reason for that is not only the investment and policy decisions by the last Government and this Government but, as the shadow Minister said, the hard work of NHS staff up and down our country. They work tirelessly, going over and above to give cancer patients the care and compassion that they need. I place on the record my thanks to them, which was perhaps not said enough in the Chamber yesterday. We are not in the slightest bit complacent, though. At the end of the day, one death from cancer still devastates somebody's life and their family's life. We know that we need to do so much more to ensure that we deliver the world-class cancer outcomes in England that all of us want and expect for our constituents.

In introducing the debate, the hon. Gentleman set the tone when he talked about the workforce. He said that the workforce are, in a way, the rock on which to build the church. I will start with that. Where we cannot prevent cancer, which I will come on to, we must ensure that we have the right staff with the appropriate skills and expertise to ensure that patients receive the best care. The NHS is nothing without its 1.3 million staff. It is the biggest employer of trained staff in the world. In 2017, Health Education England published the first ever cancer workforce plan, in which we set out ambitious plans to expand the capacity and skills of the NHS cancer workforce, committing to invest in 200 clinical endoscopists in addition to the 200 already committed to, as well as an extra 300 reporting radiographers, by 2021. However, we know that we need to go much further and do more than that. The Prime Minister set out our new ambitions on cancer in her party conference speech, and we also set out our early diagnosis targets in the long-term plan and our survival targets. As the



[*Steve Brine*]

Secretary of State set out yesterday, the long-term plan is the next step in our mission to make the NHS the world-class employer that delivers the cancer survival rates that we want.

To deliver on those commitments, we have asked Baroness Dido Harding, chair of NHS Improvement, to chair a rapid programme of work for the Secretary of State. She will engage with staff, employers, professional organisations, trade unions, charities in this space, think-tanks, Members and all-party parliamentary groups to build a workforce implementation plan that matches the ambition set out in the long-term plan. She will provide interim recommendations to the Secretary of State by the end of March on how supply, reform, culture and leadership challenges can be met, and then final recommendations later in the year, around the time of the spending review, as part of the broader implementation plan that will be developed at all levels to make the long-term plan a reality.

The hon. Gentleman and others asked about the work of HEE and Baroness Harding. The announcement of the long-term plan superseded HEE's plans to publish a longer-term cancer workforce plan. HEE will now work with NHS England and Baroness Harding's NHS Improvement under the plan, led by the baroness, to understand the longer workforce implications for the development of the plan. As I said, recommendations will be made in March, with a full implementation plan published later in the year. I did not say, "Soon." I cannot give the House an exclusive this morning.

The hon. Gentleman also talked about Sir Mike Richards's screening review. That will make initial recommendations by Easter this year and be finalised in the summer to, as it says in the plan,

"further improve the delivery of the screening programmes, increase uptake—

I know that the shadow Minister is concerned about that; I am too—

"and learn the lessons from the recent issues around breast and cervical screening, and modernise and expand diagnostic capacity."

**Theresa Villiers** (Chipping Barnet) (Con): Will the Minister give way?

**Steve Brine:** I will, but it will mean that other Members will not get a response.

**Theresa Villiers:** Does the Minister agree that a crucial part of success in early diagnosis is for both the NHS and local authorities, with their public health budgets, to have specific strategies to engage with minority ethnic communities to raise awareness of cancer symptoms, and to encourage them to take part in screening programmes? That is an essential part of an effective strategy to improve cancer treatment in this country.

**Steve Brine:** Yes. That is why the House gave all upper-tier local authorities the power to be effective public health authorities with ring-fenced public health budgets—£16 billion during this spending review period. Decisions will obviously be made about that going forward. One reason why we did that was our belief

that, for example, my right hon. Friend's borough will have different priorities and demographics from mine in Hampshire.

It is a statement of fact that I will clearly not be able to respond to every Member's points in the short time that we have left. I will respond to everybody in writing, as I always assiduously do. I will try to take a few themes in the minutes that I have.

The hon. Members for Easington (Grahame Morris) and for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron) touched on radiotherapy. I very much enjoyed our meeting, and I thank them again for their work. I will send the hon. Member for Easington a note with more detail on his point on tariffs, because I know that he and the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale are concerned about it.

The hon. Gentlemen also talked about the manifesto response. We await the publication of the new radiotherapy specification before we respond. It is an excellent piece of work that will address many of the recommendations made, and we expect it to be published very shortly. I am afraid to say that the long-term plan makes no commitment to a one-off investment. However, it commits to improving access to safer and more precise medicines, including advanced radiotherapy. That document is not the final word. It is a living document that I will work on while listening to all-party parliamentary groups such as their own.

The hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale also talked about the radiotherapy review. There was a phenomenal response to NHS England's consultation, not surprisingly—a lot of those were from the west country of England. The NHS will plough through that. I am putting great pressure on it to publish its report in response to that, which I am hoping, and am told, will be in early 2019.

The hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford), otherwise known as the Member for the Irish sea a body of water, talked about prevention and smoking and child obesity and humour. I loved her reference to "poo in the post". There is a great charity that talks about men's bits called It's in the Bag, which is good at promoting awareness of testicular cancer. She is right to talk about prevention. I am the Minister for Public Health and Primary Care, looking at prevention. The Secretary of State has made prevention one of his top three priorities, and she knows that it is key for me.

Smoking is still the biggest preventable killer in our country today, as I said in the House last night in the statutory instrument debate. We have published a world-leading plan on child obesity. We will consult very shortly. I try to be honest with the House at all times, and I hoped to get it out before Christmas, but there is an awful lot else going on and there is only so much I can get out the door at one time. However, I will get the 9 pm watershed consultation out the door. It is damned important that we do that. We said that we will, so we will.

The hon. Lady is absolutely right that prevention is better than cure, which is why the child obesity plan and Cancer Research UK's work in that space has been very helpful.

**Mr George Howarth (in the Chair):** I remind the Minister that he ought to leave a little bit of time for the mover of the motion to speak.

**Steve Brine:** Okay. I will have to close. There is a lot of ambition in the long-term plan, which some people have very kindly said I may have had something to do with. That may be so. However, that ambition is matched by finances, and finances need to be matched by people. We understand that, but it is also about the much wider, holistic approach to prevention, and about staff being part of that. We get that. I hope I have given some reassurances around the work that will be done on that. I will write to Members on the rest of the points raised. I thank everybody for their—as usual—incredible and passionate contributions.

10.59 am

**Jim Fitzpatrick:** I am grateful to all colleagues for their contributions, which were pertinent, personal, knowledgeable and clinical. I thank the Front-Bench spokespeople for their contributions. The Minister knows that we all want the same things—success for the Government's programme, better and earlier diagnoses, adequate and professional staff and better survival rates. We are here to help him.

*Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).*

## Togo: Human Rights

11 am

**Teresa Pearce** (Erith and Thamesmead) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered human rights in Togo.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Howarth. I am grateful to have been allocated this debate. I am saddened by its necessity, but necessary it is, as I wish to raise the serious and worsening human rights situation in Togo. At present, according to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website, the United Kingdom does not have permanent representation in Togo, but covers it remotely, from Ghana. I would be grateful if the Minister, in responding to the debate, outlined how the current system works, because I have a number of constituents from Togo who say that it is ineffective.

The human rights abuses occurring in Togo rest heavy on the shoulders of my constituents who left that country to settle in the UK, because although they are far from home, news of the continued abuse of their relatives and fellow countrymen and women at the hands of the authorities and security forces reaches them nearly every week. It is not only the case that the authorities heavily curtail people's right to freedom of expression and freedom of assembly for peaceful protest; it has also been well documented that security forces use excessive force against demonstrators. Last year, Amnesty International stated that during one of the mass demonstrations organised by opposition groups, at least 11 people were killed by security forces. In addition, the random arrests, detentions, torture and other ill treatment of prisoners, human rights defenders, journalists and civilians continue. It appears that, in Togo, human rights violations continue with impunity. The Government and the security forces have a blatant disregard for justice and the rule of international law.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Lady for bringing this matter to Westminster Hall for consideration. Does she agree that the shocking report of the death of a 12-year-old in the run-up to the elections in Togo in December is an example of the fact that human rights are still suppressed to a great extent in Togo, and that we in this House must do more to encourage human rights? I suggest that it may be possible to do that by using the Togolese ambition to be a Commonwealth member nation; that may be a way to influence what is happening there.

**Teresa Pearce:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention, particularly as it has given me time to catch my breath, because I have just run all the way across the parliamentary estate—there are not many things that a 63-year-old woman would run across the estate for, but I will for human rights in Togo. The issues in relation to the election are very important, and I will touch on them later.

It is time for the Government of Togo to practise what they preach and fulfil the promises that they have made to the United Nations, to the international community and, most importantly, to their people. Togo is a United Nations member state. As is protocol, the UN conducts a universal periodic review of the human rights records of all UN member states. The first cycle of the UN

[Teresa Pearce]

universal periodic review of Togo took place in October 2011. Of the 133 recommendations made, Togo rejected a number, including a recommendation to amend or repeal the laws used to crack down on journalists and human rights defenders, a recommendation regarding the protection of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in the country and a recommendation regarding the inclusion of laws that criminalised defamation. There has been some progress in the ratification of crucial international instruments, but there is so much more to do. It is imperative that Togo live up to the recommendations that it has agreed to within the universal periodic review. Things must happen not just on paper, but in practice.

Togo was elected to join the UN Human Rights Council for the period 2016 to 2018 and was expected to use that mandate to strengthen its human rights commitments. Combating torture was one of the key recommendations made in the review. The country ratified the optional protocol to the UN convention against torture by rolling out capacity-strengthening workshops to combat torture for criminal investigators and prison and rehabilitation officers, but torture remains a practice in the country that is used by security forces against participants in anti-Government demonstrations.

Many hon. Members will be aware that between August and December 2017 the authorities continued violent crackdowns during mass protests. Those protests were led by the political opposition, calling for, among other things, the end of President Faure Gnassingbé's tenure as President. Freedom House is an independent watchdog organisation that dedicates itself to the expansion of freedom and democracy around the world. In its country overview for 2018, it stated:

"Togo's politics have been dominated since 1963 by Gnassingbé Eyadéma"—

apologies for my pronunciation—

"and his son, the current president...Advantages including a security service dominated by the president's ethnic group, disproportionately drawn election districts, and a fractured opposition have helped President Gnassingbé and his party hold on to power. In 2017, protests calling for the reintroduction of term limits were harshly repressed."

The President has been in power since 2005. His predecessor—his father—held on to power for 38 years before his death. Claims of the repression of protests that call for the reintroduction of term limits are supported by many human rights organisations and institutions. According to Amnesty, protests were met with excessive use of force by the security forces. Among other instances, security forces used live ammunition in 2017 to disperse a protest against rising oil prices in the country. Several people were injured, and many were surprised that only one death was recorded. In June 2017, videos posted on the internet showed members of the security forces, armed with shotguns, beating students on the ground with batons at a student demonstration calling for improved living conditions. That outrageous act occurred at the University of Lomé within the student union. As if that were not enough, security forces arrested at least 19 students, 17 of whom were later released. Several students stated in court that they had been beaten during their arrest and transfer.

Members of the political opposition held mass demonstrations in major cities across Togo. There are reports that those demonstrations were, again, broken

up by security forces, which used tear gas, batons, water cannon and live ammunition. It is simply not humane to use water cannon to disperse crowds and most certainly not for people who have a right to protest peacefully under the UN declaration of human rights, to which Togo became a signatory on 20 September 1960.

One of the main things that Togo seems to have refused to address or improve is the authorities' repression of people's right to freedom of expression. The Freedom House report entitled "Freedom on the Net 2018: The Rise of Digital Authoritarianism" stated:

"In almost half of the countries where internet freedom declined, the reductions were related to elections."

Unsurprisingly, that is true in the case of Togo. In September 2017, the authorities shut down the internet for nine days in retaliation to opposition-led protests. In doing so, they disrupted the organisation of protests and heavily disrupted the work of human rights defenders and journalists who were monitoring the protests. Those reports were later verified by the digital rights group Internet Without Borders. Togo is a signatory to the international covenant on civil and political rights, and its shutdown of mobile phone services and the internet is a violation of article 19 of the covenant.

In a year in which human rights defenders are operating in a shrinking civil society space, I hope that the House will agree with me that disrupting the crucial work of human rights organisations and human rights defenders is detrimental to democracy and should not be allowed to continue. Many cases have been brought to my attention to highlight the gross extent to which the Togolese Government curtail people's rights. They do so by arbitrarily closing down media outlets and arresting community and opposition leaders to crack down on anyone who expresses dissent.

One such case is that of Robert Kossi Avotor. Robert is a journalist who was viciously attacked with batons in the city of Lomé by the police. He was also handcuffed in a successful attempt to prevent him from photodocumenting an eviction that was taking place. He was subsequently detained and had his images deleted, before being released without charge. Although he filed a complaint with the prosecution service, he received no response. This is a classic example of the security forces using extreme force and brutality to curtail the legitimate work of journalists and human rights defenders. They are propped up by the general prosecutor, who issued a warning stating that anyone who reported on Robert's attack would face criminal prosecution for disseminating "fake news". When a Government who do not respect human rights are propped up by a judicial system that does not respect the rule of law and intimidates those seeking justice for crimes committed against them, what hope is there for the people of that country?

I would like to thank the Minister for the attention in the written answers she has already provided to me. In November last year, the Minister responded to one of my written questions on Togo, saying that the UK Government supported the President of Ghana and that they encouraged both the Government and the opposition in Togo to work towards ensuring that the elections to be held on 20 December would be free, fair and void of any violence. Sadly, as many will be aware, the elections were anything but that. According to various news sources, in the days leading up to the elections, many people were killed by security forces.



Despite advice given by Ghana and the UK, protesters still gathered and organised demonstrations in the lead-up to the elections, which in turn flared into violence. Some 14 opposition parties joined forces to call on their supporters to boycott the elections, amid fears that the President would put forth legislation to allow him to run again in 2020 and 2025.

During the mediation talks held by Ghana and Guinea to resolve the crisis, the opposition asked for an overhaul of the electoral commission and for term limits to be set, but this was not to be. Elections are a major source of contention and strife in Togo. How many more people will be arbitrarily arrested and detained? How many more people will tell us their tales of torture, simply because they exercise their human right to freedom of expression or opinion?

**Matthew Pennycook** (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important debate. Like her, I have many constituents, some of whom are in the Public Gallery, who will be watching this debate closely, and who have real concerns about their friends and family still in Togo. Does she share my concern about the repressive cyber-security law that the National Assembly recently passed, which human rights campaigners around the world agree will have a chilling effect on freedom of expression?

**Teresa Pearce:** I do have major concerns about that. If people are not free to access information and communicate with each other, it puts Togo in the same position as many other regimes, such as China. The Togolese Government beat their opposition for expressing dissent, and silence the media and journalists. In November, the Minister replied to a question that I raised, saying that the UK Government recommended that allegations of arbitrary arrest and detention, and allegations of torture, be investigated thoroughly. Reports from Amnesty International and other human rights organisations dispute that that has taken place in Togo.

I have five questions for the Minister. If she cannot answer them now, I request that she sends me a written response. First, what can the Foreign Office do—what will it do—to encourage Togo to end its security forces' excessive use of force and for their authorities to respect people's right to peaceful protest? Secondly, does the Minister join me in condemning the Togolese Government for shutting down the internet, and contravening article 19 of the international covenant on civil and political rights? Thirdly, what assistance is the UK giving to support human rights defenders and civil society in Togo? Fourthly, how might the Foreign Office encourage Togo to ensure that perpetrators of human rights abuses are held accountable and prosecuted in a court of law? Finally, will the Minister ask the Togolese Government when the high commissioner for reconciliation and strengthening national unity will action the plan to implement the truth, justice and reconciliation commission of Togo's 68 recommendations?

The 70th anniversary of the universal declaration of human rights was marked on 10 December 2018. Togo is a signatory to that declaration. On paper, Togo is doing the right things to show that it cares about and is committed to human rights values and principles—I have touched on those things throughout my speech. However, in reality, the Government and the security

forces there fail to adhere to human rights standards. Togo seems to be a country open to improvement when it comes to its human rights failings. That is why it was elected to the Human Rights Council. However, we seem to be dealing with a Government who make assurances to protect human rights and adhere to human rights standards one day, and abandon those values when they think that nobody is looking.

**James Duddridge** (Rochford and Southend East) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this excellent debate. The UN and, to a lesser degree, other international organisations are somewhat distant from Lomé. Does she agree that, in addition to the leadership that Ghana is showing, it would be good for the Economic Community of West African States to take a greater role in Togo and provide some leadership on what the international community wants? That local, regional leadership sometimes works better than distant people from New York telling individuals how to run their country.

**Teresa Pearce:** I agree that this is not a job for just one country, but for many. The UK cannot act alone, but together with others it can. Anybody who can apply pressure and alleviate the suffering of the people of Togo should be welcomed and encouraged. I would be interested to know the Minister's view on that issue.

It is my sincere hope that the UK Government will work closely with the Togolese Government to ensure that they are respecting human rights values not just on paper, but in reality too. In a year's time, I do not want to be sitting in my constituency surgery with my constituents who come from Togo telling me yet more stories like the ones that we have heard. I am sure that we are all appalled. I am sure that the Minister will do everything she can, and I am interested to hear what that might be.

11.16 am

**The Minister for Africa (Harriett Baldwin):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Howarth. I congratulate the hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Teresa Pearce) on securing this important debate and, through her, I thank her constituents who have rightly brought these important matters to her attention and thus to the attention of the House.

Promoting human rights worldwide is generally part of the UK's foreign policy. We believe that everyone everywhere should enjoy equal rights and protections under the law. We believe that human rights are the essential foundation for a fairer, more secure and more prosperous world. Standing up for human rights is not only the right thing to do, but the smart thing to do. In our work, we promote respect for human rights in various ways, from quiet diplomacy and private discussions to leading and supporting international public campaigns with our international partners. With regard to media freedom and in particular the internet, we are campaigning very much this year for media freedom worldwide. The hon. Lady will be aware that we have also increased our support to the BBC World Service and our overall coverage across Africa in a variety of languages.

On the political and human rights situation in Togo, and UK Government action, I will start by recapping the political situation as we see it. President Faure Gnassingbè has been in power in Togo since 2005 following the death of his father, who had held the post

[*Harriett Baldwin*]

for 37 years. The current President was elected for a third term in 2015, having set aside the term limits set out in the 1992 constitution. Togo is now the only country in the Economic Community of West African States that does not currently have presidential term limits. There have been increasing demands in recent years for that to change. A referendum on the issue was planned for September 2017 but did not go ahead.

Since late 2017 Togolese opposition parties have joined together to form a 14-party coalition, and have begun to stage protests in Lomé and across the country, to demand electoral reform. These protests are ongoing. Unfortunately, as the hon. Lady said, violence has been associated with the protests, mainly in the north of the country, perpetrated both by security forces and by protestors. At least 12 people, including some members of the security forces, have been reported as killed since August 2017.

Reports are difficult for us to corroborate because, as the hon. Lady notes, we do not have a permanent diplomatic presence in Togo, and media reporting is often contradictory or biased. Nevertheless, our non-resident high commissioner, who is based in Ghana, continues to monitor the situation in Togo. In the last 18 months, he has visited Lomé twice and he keeps in touch with partners and multilateral institutions.

**James Duddridge:** Iain Walker does a fabulous job, as did Jon Benjamin, but with the expansion of the network across Africa, is there a possibility that we could get greater representation in Lomé, perhaps within three years? Is that in the pipeline?

**Harriett Baldwin:** I was going to mention our honorary consul in Lomé, Sitsu Curterello—I will make sure that *Hansard* gets the right spelling. As my hon. Friend mentions, we are increasing the range of roles and our diplomatic presence across a range of African countries. Under current plans, we are not anticipating opening an outpost in Togo directly, but we are anticipating increasing representation in Ghana. As he will know, the coverage of political affairs is done from Abidjan, so we are increasing our presence across west Africa.

**Teresa Pearce:** On that point, my constituents have expressed dissatisfaction with how that system works. If I meet them again and they give examples of where it is ineffective, and I write to the Minister, will she respond?

**Harriett Baldwin:** I would welcome that. As the hon. Lady knows, the more specific the better—that is always helpful.

One point that I have raised with the Togolese chargé d'affaires in London is the accreditation of our representative from the high commission in Ghana and of the honorary consul. We would like that paperwork to be finalised because it has been outstanding for longer than it should have been.

In terms of regional mediation, as my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend East (James Duddridge) said, we believe that ECOWAS has an important role to play. It is best placed to mediate in the current political crisis, as it did so successfully in Gambia. We support the efforts of the Presidents of Ghana and

Guinea to that end. Indeed, a road map was brokered by ECOWAS in July 2018. We urge the Togolese Government and the opposition parties to implement that road map, and we encourage all parties to resolve the crisis peacefully through a political agreement.

Regarding the political situation more broadly, it was encouraging that legislative elections took place on 20 December and that they were assessed by ECOWAS monitors to have been credible and non-violent. However, it is concerning that local elections, which were due on 16 December, were postponed for an unspecified period. It is also regrettable that more opposition parties did not stand in those elections.

On the wider human rights picture, the UK welcomed Togo's positive progress during its last UN universal periodic review in 2016, which included taking steps to prevent torture and other human rights violations by the security forces, and releasing a number of political detainees. Clearly, where such allegations have been made, it is important for them to be fed in so that they can be reflected in future United Nations universal period reviews. We also welcomed Togo's election to the Human Rights Council from January 2016 and its decision to impose a complete moratorium on the use of the death penalty, as announced at the UN in September 2016.

We have raised concerns, however, about child trafficking, prison policies, prison overcrowding and the treatment of detainees in prison. At the time of the universal periodic review, we urged the Togolese authorities to thoroughly investigate all allegations of torture, arbitrary arrest and detention. We also remain concerned about the Government of Togo's continued resistance to provide legal protections for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people. We have urged them to ensure that the human rights of every individual in Togo are protected by law.

When I met the Togolese chargé d'affaires in London recently, I raised our concerns about human rights and took the opportunity to emphasise the importance of implementing the road map and of holding free, fair and peaceful local elections. We also discussed UK support for the economic development of Togo. The UK recognises that Togo is a country with a low average income. We provide about £12 million of development assistance annually, not directly through the Government but through a range of non-governmental organisations. In 2018, that included £1.6 million for the UN population fund, which supports reproductive healthcare and development across the country.

In conclusion, the UK Government welcome the steps taken by the Togolese Government to improve human rights in some areas, but we remain concerned about reports of violence, human rights abuses and violations associated with political protests. The treatment of detainees and the lack of protection for LGBTI people are matters of continued concern. We have said to the Government of Togo that they must now step up and deliver real progress on human rights, including on the ECOWAS road map, which will benefit all the people of Togo.

*Question put and agreed to.*

11.26 am

*Sitting suspended.*

## Apprenticeships and Skills Policy

[SIR DAVID AMESS *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

**Judith Cummins** (Bradford South) (Lab): I beg to move that,

This House has considered apprenticeships and skills policy.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship today, Sir David. The title of the debate is as broad as possible so that colleagues may join in and give their own perspective. I will address the problems in the apprenticeship levy and regional skills imbalances in our country; the mismatch between the skills system and the needs of the economy; and the need to give tools to places such as Bradford to help us to close the productivity gap between us and London.

In June last year, I held a business and jobs roundtable in my constituency. Business leaders and representatives of trade unions, the Bradford Economic Partnership, the Northern Powerhouse Partnership, Bradford chamber of commerce, Bradford University and Bradford College all attended, as well as my hon. Friend the Member for Bootle (Peter Dowd). The overall theme for the roundtable was how we could boost economic opportunity for all in Bradford South. Although the discussion ranged over a number of issues, a significant amount of time was spent discussing schools, training and apprenticeships. Later in my speech, I will address the specific issue of the apprenticeship levy, but first I will briefly outline the challenges and opportunities facing Bradford.

Bradford is a great northern city with a proud industrial heritage. That heritage was created by successful businesses, which used new technologies and the city's pioneering drive to build a world-leading economy. We are still home to many successful and enterprising businesses. In my constituency of Bradford South, we have a strong manufacturing sector. Bradford has 1,200 manufacturing businesses, employing more than 25,000 people in the district, which accounts for 13% of all employees locally compared with 8.3% for Great Britain as a whole.

We face a significant challenge with the interconnected problems of low skills and low wages, and I will give a few figures relating to my constituency to illustrate that. In Bradford South, 15% of the working-age population have no qualifications compared with the UK average of 8%; 14% of our working-age population are qualified to degree level and above, compared with 31% nationally; Bradford South has 600 jobs per 1,000 people in the working-age population, compared with 840 nationally; average weekly workplace earnings stood at £480 in April 2018, compared with a UK average of £570; and Bradford South ranks 520th out of 533 constituencies in England in the social mobility index from the House of Commons Library. Many people in my constituency do not have the skills they would need to access good-quality, well-paid and secure jobs.

**John Howell** (Henley) (Con): I understand the point that the hon. Lady is making about her constituency. Does she believe that schools in her constituency have something to contribute to redressing the imbalance she is describing?

**Judith Cummins:** I agree that schools have a lot to offer when it comes to redressing the imbalance. I will address schools a little later in my speech, when I will speak about the specific situation in Bradford and the specific project that we have there.

That situation is something of a vicious cycle. The lack of skills makes Bradford a less attractive place for businesses to locate and invest in. A good example is Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, which cited the lack of appropriate skills as one of the reasons to relocate its offices from Bradford. That is why getting the skills policy right is essential to give places such as Bradford the economic boost that they so badly need.

The issue is becoming ever more urgent as we face the impact of new technologies in the world of work. The Future Advocacy report places Bradford South in the top 40 constituencies that are likely to be affected by automation in the coming years. It also says that 35% of jobs in Bradford are in occupations that are likely to shrink by 2030. It is clear that Bradford will need to adapt to secure good-quality and sustainable jobs.

**Mike Amesbury** (Weaver Vale) (Lab): The Federation of Small Businesses has raised concerns about the 40-day requirement for placements associated with T-levels. Is that a concern for employers in the Bradford South constituency?

**Judith Cummins:** That certainly is a concern for employers in my constituency.

**Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): My hon. Friend has mentioned that modern technology plays a major part. Does she agree that the restoration of the education maintenance grant would help students in relation to apprenticeships? Furthermore, cutbacks in further education do not help—it seems to be treated as a Cinderella industry.

**Judith Cummins:** I thank my hon. Friend for the wise words and I certainly welcome them. I say to the Minister that now is the time that we must act to create a better skills and training system if we are to prevent disruption further down the line.

**David Simpson** (Upper Bann) (DUP): One of the problems we face in my constituency with training centres is that 20 to 25 students will start training, but only four will finish. How can we encourage young people to stay in apprenticeships, or is the apprenticeship scheme not fit for purpose?

**Judith Cummins:** That is a very interesting and pertinent point. I know that some apprenticeships are paid so poorly and offer so little training—apprenticeships are supposed to be jobs with training—that they are not really worth the paper that they are written on. In my view, they should not be called apprenticeships.

At a local level, a significant amount of work is under way to meet the challenges that I have spoken about, with the Bradford Economic Partnership setting out a local economic strategy with a focus on increasing the number of productive businesses in the district through investing in skills provision.

We recently had Bradford manufacturing week, which I was delighted to support. It aimed to show the young people in Bradford the many exciting opportunities in manufacturing that are right on their doorstep, to get



[*Judith Cummins*]

them thinking about the skills that they will need for the future. Over half of our secondary schools took part. In just one week more than 3,000 children crossed the doors to get that first-hand manufacturing experience in workplaces.

Another exciting area of work that is being developed locally in Bradford involves the industrial centres of excellence—or ICE—approach to post-14 careers and technical education. ICE gives business a partnership vehicle with local schools, colleges and the University of Bradford to ensure that education and learning in Bradford meet the skills demands of businesses in the local and regional economy within given sector footprints, which opens up opportunities for our young people and improves social mobility.

Those centres are good examples of how schemes that are locally led can deliver for businesses and encourage social mobility. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss them further with the Minister, but Government policy is making it more difficult for places such as Bradford to bring about a transformative change in their labour markets. I will start with the specific issues that Bradford businesses and education providers have raised with me about the operation of the apprenticeship levy.

I fully support the principles behind the levy, but its implementation has compounded the problems of underinvestment in training rather than improving the situation. As the Minister will be aware, the apprenticeship levy aims to encourage employers to invest in apprenticeship programmes, but apprenticeship starts have been significantly down since the introduction of the levy in May 2017. In July 2018, the total number of apprenticeship starts nationally was 25,200.

**Carolyn Harris** (Swansea East) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend not only on securing the debate but on her generosity in giving way. I am sure it will help the new year planning for the keep fit programme.

Skills, education and training are devolved matters in Wales, where there has been a 23% rise in the uptake of apprenticeships—obviously, we are doing something right. I wonder whether the UK Government are talking to the Welsh Government, perhaps about sharing good practice so we can make the success in Wales a success right across the United Kingdom.

**Judith Cummins:** I thank my hon. Friend for making that point, which is definitely one for the Minister to address.

As I was saying, in July 2018 there was a total of 25,200 apprenticeship starts nationally, which represents a 43% drop from July 2016. Starts in Bradford South have fallen from 1,370 in 2015-16 to just 680 in 2017-18—very nearly a 50% drop. Several Bradford firms have told me that the complexity of the system is a major barrier to entry, and that seems to be a particular problem for small and medium-sized businesses. That was clearly set out to me when I had the privilege of attending the apprenticeship awards evening at Bradford College late last year. While we were discussing the fantastic successes of apprenticeships at the college, it raised a number of difficulties facing both the college and the many small and medium-sized enterprises it works with. Many of the latter find the administrative

demands of the new apprenticeship system extremely difficult to manage, and the college itself is experiencing cash-flow difficulties, caused by changes to the apprenticeship contract and the digital payment process, with payment times having increased to an average of 14 weeks from an average of seven before the reforms. The college has had to create four new posts to help it to navigate the changes and support its employers.

In his recent Budget, the Chancellor acknowledged some of the shortcomings identified in the current apprenticeship policy. For example, he announced his intention to reduce the requirement to contribute to the costs of off-the-job training from 10% to 5% for non-levy employers, which should help a little. In Bradford South, I have levy employers asking if the same 5% reduction in fees will apply to them once they have exhausted their levy funds. They currently deliver the extra apprenticeships under Solenis, which also requires a 10% core contribution from employers.

I recognise that a new system takes time to bed in, but the Government's approach needs more than just a little fine tuning. We need a more radical overhaul of our skills policy to help places such as Bradford get the growth and prosperity we deserve. We have a situation where public policy, whether intentionally or unintentionally, has turbo-charged the London economy to the detriment of other towns and cities outside the capital. The Government need to address the failure over decades to tackle persistent regional skills imbalances. We need a mechanism to support industries and individuals in areas that face economic decline and need help to adapt to the demands of the global economy.

The jobs of the future will require people to work more closely with advanced technologies. Workers will need support to adapt and retrain, to secure decent and sustainable work; otherwise, in many places in the UK we will face a lasting legacy of low qualifications, low productivity and low pay. Yet the Government have no convincing strategic framework for identifying sectors and areas in which large numbers of jobs are at risk from technological and economic change. In fact, the apprenticeship levy contributes to further regional imbalances, as more funding is raised per head in London and the south-east than in the rest of the country. London has the lowest skills need in the country, yet the levy will raise more funds there, as the capital has both a greater proportion of workers employed by large employers and far higher pay. The Social Mobility Commission's "State of the Nation 2017: Social Mobility in Great Britain" report identifies that as an emerging risk, and the commission urges the Government to develop education and skills policies to better support disadvantaged young people in areas such as Bradford South, stating that that could be done

"by targeting any used apprenticeship levy funds at regions with fewer high-level apprenticeships".

According to the commission, apprenticeships are a more common path into employment for young people in many youth coldspot areas, where there are higher barriers to social mobility than in hotspots, but those apprenticeships are often of lower quality than in the hotspots. If we are to rebalance our economy, we urgently need reforms to the apprenticeship levy to ensure that it meets the needs of the most disadvantaged areas and those with a legacy of underinvestment, such as my constituency of Bradford South.

A debate about skills policy must not be just about how to support young people to enter the workplace; it also must consider those who are already working. To achieve a sustainable supply of skills with the flexibility to meet the ever-evolving needs of business, industry and the public sector, the UK must maximise the potential of its existing workforce. That is why the 45% reduction in spending on adult education since 2010 is so short-sighted and damaging to our economy. If Government want business and individuals to see training as an investment and not as a cost, they must lead by example. To meet the wider training need of the economy, we need more focus on how the apprenticeship levy can be used to tackle the overall skills shortage.

**Dr Dan Poulter** (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): I agree with a number of the hon. Lady's points, but while I accept what she says about individuals gaining access to education as adults, does she not agree that employers have a duty to their staff to ensure that they are properly trained, that their careers are developed, and that appropriate adaptations are made if they transition into another career or a different role in the organisation? It should not necessarily be down to the Government to do that. Employers have an important role and a moral obligation to their staff.

**Judith Cummins:** Yes, everyone has a wider responsibility to train and retain. Lifelong learning is, in fact, a mantra going back some decades.

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development comments:

"The Government should consider broadening the apprenticeship levy into a wider training levy. The training levy could be reconfigured to cover a much broader range of organisations...whereby all businesses with more than 50 employees would contribute, with larger businesses contributing more to the pot."

That would allow levy funds to be used to fund people with low qualifications to access pre-apprenticeship training.

A wider problem that has affected this country for decades is overreliance on individual learners to make informed choices about their training in an environment that is not well structured and where independent advice is not freely available. Unlike much of Europe, we do not have a strong industrial sectoral voice to drive collective action from employers. To pursue the high-skills route to business success, more effort must be made to develop that voice. The Government must no longer rely on responding to individual employers and instead work to build up strong sector skills bodies, which will be more able to forecast skills needs and encourage the collective commitment to skills that we have heard about in the debate.

Sectoral institutions should include a range of key stakeholders able to build a wider commitment through an entire industry. That model is found in other western European countries, such as Germany and France, where it is common practice for employers, civil society groups and trade unions to co-operate to achieve mutually agreed goals. Achieving that requires the Government to take both a more active and a more supportive role and to devolve greater power and responsibility to key sectoral bodies. Places such as Bradford need more tools and resource to close the productivity gap with London. Investing more in skills and devolving more to our cities would be a significant step forward in building an economy that works for everyone.

In conclusion, I ask the Minister to answer my questions about apprenticeships and skills. In particular, will the Government reduce the administrative burden and the costs of operating the apprenticeship system to the pre-May 2017 levels? What will she do to address the regional imbalances that are built into the apprenticeship levy? Does she intend to develop a strong sectoral voice to articulate and stimulate the demand for skills?

If we get the skills policy right, we can give young people the tools they need to secure high-quality jobs, and we can boost productivity and rebalance the economy so that it works for all places and all people in our country. That must be our absolute priority, and I hope that today's debate and the Minister's responses will contribute to getting that right. Finally, I would like to place on record my thanks to the Minister for her welcome interventions in helping to secure a future for Bradford College. I very much look forward to working with her.

2.49 pm

**John Howell** (Henley) (Con): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David, and it is an even greater pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bradford South (Judith Cummins). I will take advantage of the way in which she has drawn the subject so widely because I want to answer a fundamental question: how do we get students who are still at school to focus on the options of an apprenticeship and skills training rather than going to university? Those Members who know me may think that that is a rather surprising thing for me to say—I went to three universities and had attachments to two foreign universities while doing so. She will have to forgive that, but I ask the question seriously.

There are two aspects to answering that question: schools, and the method by which we get people attracted to the options of apprenticeships and skills training, which is through work placements. I will start by looking at work placements as a precursor to people going on apprenticeships. I am sure that we have all had people on work placements in our offices; I know that for much of the run-up to the summer holidays, I have a person on a work placement every week. I wonder how many people we are trying to line up to be politicians when we are supposed to be cutting back the number of MPs.

**Stephen Pound** (Ealing North) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman's eyes might care to drift towards the Gallery, where he will see a young person from St Dominic's college in Harrow—just north of my constituency, but she does live in my constituency—who is the living embodiment of the ideals and ambitions that the hon. Gentleman has just expressed.

**John Howell:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for pointing that person out, and for the way in which he described them. It is fitting to include them in the debate.

It is important to get other people involved in providing work placements—it is not just something for politicians to provide. We need to encourage small businesses to become involved in that, so that people get a feel for the entrepreneurship that is involved in setting up and running a small business. There are a couple of examples of companies in my constituency that do that, such as Williams Jet Tenders, which makes boats to go on other

[John Howell]

boats. It has a scheme of taking 10 people from the most deprived area of the constituency each year, some of whom go on to do apprenticeships. That training provides them with a lot of experience, and also with a lot of fun, because they end their experience by building little boats that they race against each other. I have been along to present the prizes to the winners, and all of that might sound like great fun, but there is also a seriousness to the skills that they learn: how to make model boats, and how to scale them up from that. Other companies provide that experience as well, including a cabinet and kitchen maker that I have also visited.

Those work placements take a whole lot of learning away from the apprenticeships. I am principally going to mention three areas of learning, the first of which is working well with other people. That may sound obvious, but for young people, working with other people and dealing with the dynamics of that is a skill that needs to be learned. Another skill that is crucial to learn and which work placements can provide is how to cope with criticism. Of course, coping with criticism is something that we as politicians take for granted, so maybe the work placements in our offices do have a purpose, but that is an important thing for people to learn. The third thing is people managing their own time, and making sure that that is part of how they approach life. Those are three examples of skills that work placements can provide, which will take away the need to pick up on those areas of learning during apprenticeships and will also help to make apprenticeships more attractive.

Having dealt with the work placement side, let me turn briefly to the schools side. Schools need to participate. We have been only partially successful in encouraging schools to encourage people to go into apprenticeships and skills training rather than to university. Certainly, among the schools in my constituency, there is a huge variety of attitudes towards encouraging students to go into apprenticeships. Some still have a very old-fashioned view of life and only measure success by the number they send to university.

**Mike Amesbury:** I am an MP but I am also a former careers adviser. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is about time that we re-establish a careers service—formerly the Connexions service—that will help people make well-informed and realistic decisions?

**John Howell:** I am open minded. I just think back to my time at university when there was a careers service. I will not tell the House the advice that I was given, but I did not follow it at all—not one iota. I am not sure whether that was down to the quality of the advice or my own sheer cussedness, but I take the hon. Gentleman's point.

It is important that schools focus on promoting apprenticeships as a legitimate option that is equal to going to university, and we need to judge where people go according to their own skills and inclinations. I am pleased to have been able to contribute on the topic of how we get people to go into apprenticeships in the first place. I think we need to put a little more finesse into the work placements that are offered around the country.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

**Sir David Amess (in the Chair):** Order. The closing speeches begin at 3.30 pm and there are five colleagues wishing to catch my eye, so I appeal to Members to share the time out, with about six or seven minutes each.

2.57 pm

**Stephen Pound (Ealing North) (Lab):** What better way could there be to start the new year than being in Westminster Hall under your benign guidance, Sir David? If there were a better way, it could only be being here to discuss matters of such moment, and I give enormous credit to my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford South (Judith Cummins) for having raised this important subject. J. B. Priestley composed endless panegyrics to the proud city of Bradford—which he called Bruddersford so as not to confuse people—and there was a time when we thought of Bradford as being exemplified by J. B. Priestley. However, my hon. Friend has now adopted that crown, and she is the spokesperson for that city.

I was delighted to hear from the hon. Member for Henley (John Howell). I was a little surprised by his comments about the more deprived areas of Henley—presumably, that is a place that is down to its last Jaguar. I had not previously thought about the teeming stews and slums of Henley, but I am here to be educated. I was also interested to hear about the careers advice that the hon. Gentleman received. I remember the careers teacher at my school encouraging me to leave at the earliest opportunity, saying that I could go into the Royal Navy at the age of 16. He did say, “By the way, they will take anybody.” One of my colleagues, I seem to remember, thought that he was being advised to become an author when the careers master said to him, “Have you ever thought about being a man of letters?” He ended up, of course, as a postman. [Interruption.] There is nothing wrong with that; there are some distinguished postmen.

**Hugh Gaffney (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (Lab)** *indicated assent.*

**Stephen Pound:** There has been a slightly unpleasant anti-London undercurrent to the debate, with talk about this proud metropolis sucking in all the apprenticeship levies and doing better than other parts of the country. I want to talk about one sector that is reflective of the whole United Kingdom, from Northern Ireland to every other part of the nation, which is the ornamental horticulture and landscaping sector. In our modern workforce, we have this extraordinary problem of a skills shortage. Lest anyone think that ornamental horticulture and landscaping is a minor add-on to the economy, it contributed £24.2 billion to GDP in 2017 and supports 568,000 jobs. It is a crucial sector, but we have a terrible skills shortage. In the absence of the hon. Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow), I pay credit to her work on the all-party parliamentary gardening and horticulture group, particularly the report it produced last year. I know the Minister is familiar with it and received several copies. I am sure she has many a spare hour in the lonely garret of the Ministry when she is looking for some exciting reading, and the APPG's report will provide that.

The great joy of horticulture, particularly in the fields of ornamental horticulture and landscaping, is that it offers a route into a skilled profession. Someone who



has an aptitude for ornamental horticulture and landscaping—they do not necessarily have to have an enormous amount of academic qualifications, although they help—can access that strand and grow within it and become virtually anything. There is no limit to what someone can achieve. Capability Brown started somewhere. I am not entirely sure where, but it was probably in London, judging from comments today.

We would like to see the Government doing a few things. The Minister will be aware of the modest Christmas wish list, which we have already sent her copies of, but we need to better promote roles in ornamental horticulture and landscaping. People do not understand what the roles are, and we can do much better. There is a lack of horticulture education in UK schools. Current careers advice—I cast no aspersions against present or former careers advisers; they are without a doubt a fine body of women and men—is not giving students knowledge about the sector, which is crying out for entry-level people to work in it. Many would love the idea of an outdoor, creative job that brings about some product at the end of the day—something that they can show and be proud of. We as Members of Parliament are often denied that pleasure, but people who work in horticulture and landscaping certainly have it. The severe skills gap has a knock-on effect for the economy and the environment. When it comes to managing the environment, we need people with knowledge, particularly in landscaping. There is so much that can be done.

I draw the Minister's attention to a mere two of the recommendations in the APPG report issued in October last year. One is to ask the Government to

“work with sector leaders to promote horticulture as a highly skilled and desirable industry to enter, through encouraging the inclusion of horticulture within the national curriculum...and providing more high-quality horticulture advice through the National Careers Service.”

Recommendation 8 was for the Government to adequately fund FE training, and I think we are as one in this Chamber on that demand. We all call for that. That recommendation also calls on the Government

“to adequately fund FE training in horticulture to ensure the consistent delivery of high-quality training...the Government should ensure the Apprenticeship Levy is more flexible...to fund the work experience requirement of the T Levels and short-term traineeships.”

I am acutely aware of the strictures of time, Sir David, and I am grateful for your typical generosity, so I will conclude. My hon. Friend the Member for Bradford South has raised a crucial issue. If we do not get things right, we will fail a future generation and a future workforce. I am probably one of the older people in the Chamber. The days when people could leave school at 15, work for the same company for 50 years, have 10 years of retirement and then drop dead are long gone. My son and daughter will probably have 15 or 20 different jobs in their lifetime. People dip in and dip out of different jobs, but they have to have the skills and training. They no longer have a job they can do simply out of sheer muscle. Those days of mass employment are gone.

Nowadays, we are a highly skilled, specialised economy, and highly skilled, specialised workers will not grow on trees. They have to be nurtured, encouraged, supported and financed and their worth has to be recognised. Today's debate fires the starting gun on that process. It

shows how, with a growing GDP and a more skilled, more flexible workforce with areas of expertise growing from FE and careers advice in schools, we can make not only the workforce happier and more productive, but the country a better place. It is not a bad ambition.

3.5 pm

**Lee Rowley** (North East Derbyshire) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I am not quite sure how I follow that tour de force, not least because towards the end of his comments, the hon. Member for Ealing North (Stephen Pound) expressed—and expanded on well—sentiments that I share, but also because I have very little to say about ornamental horticulture.

**John Howell:** To pick up on the horticulture point, Capability Brown made his name with his work at Stowe in Buckinghamshire, which is not a million miles from the Henley constituency that the hon. Member for Ealing North (Stephen Pound) so derided.

**Lee Rowley:** Excellent. I have none of the one-liners, wit or repartee of either my right hon. Friend or the hon. Gentleman, so I will move straight on to the debate as a whole.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Bradford South (Judith Cummins) on securing this valuable and necessary debate. We need to have more such discussions. It would be better to talk more about this issue than some of the other subjects we seem to obsess over in this place and elsewhere.

I want to talk about apprenticeships and skills. I thank my right hon. Friend the Minister for her time over the past few months when I have been to talk to her about apprenticeships. I am a strong supporter of what the Government are doing on apprenticeships, and the direction is very positive. A number of months ago, I had the opportunity to go to Rolls-Royce, which is a major employer in the south of my county, so I have seen what a good-quality apprenticeship programme does to raise the aspirations of people in the local area and equip them with the skills they need to succeed in the workforce for the next 50 or so years.

The Minister knows the feedback I have received from a number of people and organisations in and around my constituency. Chesterfield College is a large training provider in my part of the world. Smaller training providers, such as Stubbing Court Training, say that there have been problems with the introduction of some of the measures. Some of that is understandable—changes are never easy—but she knows some of my underlying concerns. I have passed them on to her, and I ask her to continue working to resolve them.

The debate on skills is one of the most interesting that we need to have in this place, and it speaks to a much bigger point. I was pleased when the hon. Member for Bradford South discussed the challenge of automation within five minutes of talking about skills. I see automation as a challenge and an opportunity. I wanted to congratulate the hon. Member for Ealing North on his final comments because it was refreshing to hear a speech where automation was not seen just as a problem, but as something that is coming, is inevitable—there is no point arguing about that—and is an opportunity to grasp, because it brings many opportunities for people.

[Lee Rowley]

The challenge I see is that we have to start equipping those in the workforce and those coming into the workforce for the next 50 years. That is a truism—everyone knows that. I was with a member of my family yesterday. He is 11, and he had just gone to an interview to decide what secondary school he wants to go to from December. He came back and was telling me about all the things he wants to do. It struck me that he will probably still be in the workforce in 2060 or 2070, a long time from now.

I differ slightly from the hon. Member for Bradford South on one point in her introductory remarks. She talked about the Government having a knowledge of what skills are needed and the changes to come. I am not sure we can look that far ahead—I do not suggest the hon. Lady suggested otherwise. Ultimately, for 11 and 12-year-old children, who will still be in the workforce in 2060—hopefully, I will still be in the workforce in 30 years' time—we must equip them with the skills to be able to still work and take advantage of what the workforce brings. The hon. Lady talked about automation, so I will throw in a few more statistics: the OECD estimates that 15% of jobs will be fully automated and another third partially automated; McKinsey talks about half of all tasks in the workforce being automated; the World Economic Forum talks about 7 million jobs going in our country, but potentially more than 7 million jobs being created. That is the fundamental challenge that we have to try to work through. We cannot plan for it in the traditional way. We cannot execute it from the centre. We have to equip people with the skills to be able to deal with it in the next 20, 30 or 40 years. Partly it is about core knowledge, and the Government have done an enormous amount in terms of reforms in schools over the past 10 years, but part of it is a different set of skills: flexibility, problem solving, persistence and agility. Those are the things I used to look for when I employed people in my old industry, and they are the most difficult things to work out in an interview process.

An interesting discussion needs to be had in Parliament and other forums, including in industry, about how we start codifying and understanding skills. I am not saying we will get to an NVQ level 3 in persistence or anything like that, but we have to have a better understanding of how we define and measure such things so that we can help to teach people or at least develop such skills.

**Stephen Pound:** Does the hon. Gentleman agree with me—I know this applies to you, Sir David—that anyone who has been in the scouts or guides who applies for a job, as is the case in any area that I have ever been employed in, will always get an interview? Does he not agree that that is an excellent thing to have on a CV?

**Lee Rowley:** As a former scout, I completely agree.

**Stephen Pound:** Once a scout, always a scout.

**Lee Rowley:** I am conscious of time, so I will make my other two points. The first has already been made by others, so I will not dwell on it, but it concerns the need for skills training to be as close to the workplace as possible, not because education is not an end in itself, which we must never forget, but because we need to ensure that we equip people with the right skills that are necessary in today's and tomorrow's workplace.

My hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell) talked about entrepreneurship. It is telling that when I left university in 2002, we all wanted to go and work for big companies and do well on the corporate ladder. When people come out of university now, they want to be their own boss, set up their own company and do their own thing. We have to recognise that what people want to do in the world of work is changing. When we debate skills, I hope we can consider equipping people to be able to have the skills that they will need for the next 60 years. They will need different skills—soft skills, particularly—and we need to train them in ways different from how we have trained them historically.

3.13 pm

**Emma Hardy** (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David, and to follow the hon. Member for North East Derbyshire (Lee Rowley).

I see apprenticeships as exciting. We have an exciting opportunity and a chance to put something right that has been wrong for an awfully long time. Every political party talks about parity of esteem, which often feel like words that are just trotted out. When we ask people what their children do, we find that lots of MPs' children went to university and did not go anywhere near an apprenticeship. If we are serious about wanting to create parity of esteem, we need to have parity of outcomes, which needs a really clear pathway, and I will focus my remarks on that.

One brilliant solution to achieving parity of esteem is degree apprenticeships. Someone can leave, having done an apprenticeship as a degree, and have exactly the same qualification as someone who went to university, so there we have our parity of outcomes, but there is a problem because people join a degree apprenticeship after doing A-levels. We still do not have a clear apprenticeship pathway, so that—judging by the people I have met and talked to—the people who take degree apprenticeships tend to be people whose parents have the knowledge and are perhaps from a middle-class background.

**Paul Girvan** (South Antrim) (DUP): Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Emma Hardy:** I will finish this point first. Such people see the advantage of taking a degree apprenticeship and perhaps are not the people the policy was aimed at.

**Paul Girvan:** I thank the hon. Lady for giving way. Having been an apprentice in a previous life, I can tell her the value of an apprenticeship is not necessarily seen by society today. Unless someone has a degree, they are a nothing. It is how we have interpreted it. In third-level education, someone must have a degree or they will be a pleb. We must put the emphasis back into an apprenticeship that starts at 16 with a career pathway that ultimately can give someone a degree, as I got through the course that I went on.

**Emma Hardy:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for that point. I think he will agree with me as I move on in my speech.

On the parity of outcomes, at the moment, as I said, the degree apprenticeship can be achieved only by having A-levels, so we have to look at how we build a clear apprenticeship pathway such as we see in Germany,

where someone can leave school at 16 and do a level 2 apprenticeship, which then takes them to a level 3 apprenticeship, which takes them to level 4, and if they wish they can then do a degree-level apprenticeship. We do not have that system at the moment. I am sorry to say that I disagree with the Minister, who I normally agree with: I regard T-levels as an unnecessary distraction.

At the moment we do not say GCSEs are nothing, because we see them for what they are: a tool for going through and getting A-levels, which are a tool for going through and getting a degree. Yet we dismiss level 2 apprenticeships, seeing them as a nothing qualification, or a qualification that is not viewed very highly. In part, we dismiss the qualification because we do not see level 2 apprenticeships as the tool that gets someone to a level 3 apprenticeship, which is the tool to get to level 4. We know—I include myself in this—people are ready for education at different points in their lives, and perhaps the apprenticeship pathway model that I advocate takes a lot longer than the traditional path of going through GCSEs and A-levels. Perhaps it takes a lifetime, because someone might take a level 2 apprenticeship and then work for a couple of years. Then they do a level 3 apprenticeship and work another few years. Then they do a level 4 and so on and they find it takes 10 years, and then they end up with their degree apprenticeship at the end of it. We need that pathway to be clearly defined.

I have raised this before, so the Minister will be aware that Hull College and Hull University have worked together to create a pathway for nursing so that nurses can do apprenticeships. Hull College has told 16-year-olds, “You can start on a level 2 apprenticeship at Hull College. If you pass, within five or six years you will be a fully trained nurse with a degree in nursing from Hull University.” It has been clearly set out and the college has been inundated with people wanting to apply. Why can we not look at creating such clarity for many other professions? Why can we not say to someone, “You do not need to get GCSEs at 16 and then get A-levels to go and do a nursing degree. You can go down the apprenticeship route instead. If you want to get off the conveyor belt and just get a level 4 and be a healthcare assistant instead of an apprentice nurse, that’s fine, too, because you can pop back on that conveyor belt later and get your nursing degree apprenticeship”? That is exactly what happens in Germany, where they talk about having no dead ends, because there is always an option to move forward if people want.

I am a member of the Select Committee on Education and we did a report called, “The apprenticeships ladder of opportunity”. That is what we need to have clarified by Government. I have significant concerns that we have so many young people doing a level 2 apprenticeship and they get stuck there; they do not move forward and do not progress. The Sutton Trust also found a lack of progression between the different levels of apprenticeship. A level 2 apprenticeship is not a full apprenticeship. It is a stepping stone, but not a full apprenticeship in its own right.

On the clarity of pathways, I will quote the Sutton Trust’s chief executive, who said, “on the academic route...everything is signposted, you know the options, you get supported at transition points.”

In apprenticeships,

“there are lots of dead ends...there are pitfalls. Sometimes it is a very confusing route. I think we just need to almost map out steps.”

London South Bank University has also suggested that standards

“should include reference to the anticipated career trajectory of learners”.

We need that map, and it needs to come from Government. There are practical steps that they could take to achieve it.

The Government should mandate the Institute for Apprenticeships to include clear paths to progression within apprenticeship standards; those paths should be linked to a system of progression maps created and promoted by the institute and Government, with complete clarity on how to go from a level 2 apprenticeship to a degree, if someone wishes to. They should also create a UCAS-style website to advertise higher level apprenticeships, so that apprentices working in small and medium-sized enterprises will not be disadvantaged if their employer is unable to provide a higher-level apprenticeship. The Government should encourage and promote universities that have already established that clear apprenticeship pathway. Perhaps they should say something about doing a degree apprenticeship not being enough if everyone starting the course has A-levels.

I want people to get on to degree apprenticeships through the apprenticeship route. No one will ask, when someone has their degree, whether they did an apprenticeship degree or an academic degree. They will just be pleased that they have a degree. If we want parity of esteem, the Government need to do more to create that parity and improve clarity in pathways.

3.21 pm

**Faisal Rashid** (Warrington South) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford South (Judith Cummins) for securing this important and timely debate.

The future of our country depends on how well we are able to equip younger generations to face the challenges ahead. An effective apprenticeships and skills policy is crucial to closing the productivity gap and boosting our competitiveness globally. As we face critical questions about our trading relationships with the rest of the world post-Brexit, it is important now more than ever to reflect on the skills we want the workforce of tomorrow to have. Sadly, eight years of failing to invest properly in young people. Members need not just take my word for it: at the last election, the Tories lagged 40 percentage points behind Labour among voters aged 18 to 24. That says it all. Young people know that they are being poorly prepared for a jobs market that is increasingly fragmented and insecure.

Small businesses also suffer as a result of inadequate education and training policy. Anyone with a background in business will know that having a skilled, well-trained workforce is indispensable to long-term success. However, research published by the Federation of Small Businesses suggests that too many small businesses are struggling to fill skilled jobs, with almost a third of recruiting firms facing skills shortages. In a report on England’s qualifications gap last year, the London School of Economics revealed that skilled trades comprise nearly half—43%—of all occupations reporting skill-shortage vacancies.

The apprenticeship levy is a welcome measure, but it only begins to address the scale of the problem. Measures must be taken to ensure that the levy funds apprenticeships



[*Faisal Rashid*]

of a high quality. Labour has proposed achieving that by requiring the Institute for Apprenticeships to report annually to the Secretary of State on the quality of outcomes of completed apprenticeships. In that way we can ensure that it delivers skilled workers for employers and real jobs for apprentices at the end of their training. Does the Minister support the proposals and, if not, will she clarify what measures the Government are taking to oversee the delivery of high-quality apprenticeships?

3.24 pm

**Hugh Gaffney** (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (Lab): I am grateful to be called to speak in this important debate, Sir David, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford South (Judith Cummins) on securing it.

As Members may be aware, the Scottish Government are responsible for apprenticeships and skills development policy in Scotland, but I will link my remarks to the UK. For young people who do not want to go into further or higher education, apprenticeships are a vital means to secure the skills and work experience needed in later life. As the economy continues to change, skills development opportunities become increasingly important for the reskilling and upskilling of workers. Therefore, it is vital that we get our policy on apprenticeships and skills development right, so that we cannot only help young people succeed, but encourage lifelong learning—something that I did through the trade union movement in the Post Office.

I was concerned about recent statistics about modern apprenticeships from Skills Development Scotland. Apprenticeships should be accessible to those who need them, but those statistics, covering the period April to September 2018, show that there are still issues to overcome. There is still a clear gap between men and women in the uptake of modern apprenticeships. In Scotland, only 35% of modern apprentices during the period in question were women. That is in direct contrast to the experience in England where in 2016-17 54% of apprenticeships were undertaken by women. In England, the number of apprenticeships started by women has been higher than the number started by men every year since 2010-11. Individuals from ethnic minority backgrounds were just 2.1% of modern apprentices in Scotland while the equivalent rate in England stood at 11.3%, in 2016-17.

We often hear of the difficulties that young people whose backgrounds involve experience of care have with educational attainment and securing employment. That is why it is particularly disheartening to me that just 1.7% of modern apprentices in Scotland come from such backgrounds. With 13% of modern apprentices self-identifying as having a disability or learning difficulty, it is clear that there is still much to do in Scotland to ensure that modern apprenticeships are accessible and that they reflect our country.

Skills Development Scotland has confirmed that achievement rates fell by 3% in quarter 2 of 2018 when compared with quarter 2 of 2017. Achievement rates have fallen for modern apprenticeships regardless of the participants' age, but I am particularly concerned about the 4% drop among modern apprentices aged 16 to 19.

Those young people are the future of our country, and we should not be letting them down in that way. Redundancies among modern apprentices were disproportionately concentrated in the construction sector, and made up 83% of all redundancies. It is particularly disappointing that there has been a fall in achievement rates given that there was an increase of more than 10,000 in the number of achievements in apprenticeships in England in 2016-17. In fact, it was the highest volume of achievements in any academic year. Because of the funding changes introduced by the UK Government, the number of apprenticeships started in England has started to fall. If the Scottish Government cannot tackle the issues relating to access and achievement, I fear that the number of apprenticeships in Scotland could suffer a similar decline.

In my area, North Lanarkshire, we have the second highest rate of modern apprenticeships in Scotland and almost 10% of all the female modern apprentices in Scotland, although there is still more progress to be made. I am proud of the fact that Labour-led North Lanarkshire Council's modern apprenticeship programme offers a wide range of opportunities. Apprenticeships can be undertaken in areas ranging from community arts to social services, enabling young people to develop vital skills for a successful future. As a North Lanarkshire councillor and a Member of Parliament, I am proud of our modern apprenticeship programme and will continue to ensure that it delivers for young people in our community, and helps others across the whole UK.

3.28 pm

**Marion Fellows** (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair again, Sir David, in the new year, chairing this very interesting and far-reaching debate, in which there have been widely differing views. I congratulate the hon. Member for Bradford South (Judith Cummins) on securing an important debate. I am a member of the Select Committee on Education. Many of the topics she discussed are close to my heart. I have learned very much from being on the Committee in the past three years about English education and about the differences within education.

There are huge differences between Scotland and England with regard to the ways in which modern apprentices are trained, and how apprenticeships work. In fact, when I was a further education lecturer at West Lothian College, I delivered programmes as part of modern apprenticeships, and it was always a delight when the college took on modern apprentices who went right through the programme and also picked up academic qualifications. Some also worked hard to gain a degree in their chosen subject.

It is always a pleasure to be part of people's development, and the Scottish Government feel strongly about apprenticeships and skills development in Scotland. One of the first things that happened when Tata Steel was sold was the securing of apprentices by Dalzell Works in my constituency to ensure that they were able to continue and finish their apprenticeships. It is important that Scotland is seen as a world leader in that area, so let us ensure that the figures are correct. In 2015-16, 2016-17, and 2017-18, the Scottish Government beat their own targets for apprenticeships. In England over the same period, apprenticeship targets fell, which is an absolute disgrace.

This morning the Education Committee took evidence from experts on the fourth industrial revolution. It is imperative across the UK that skills are fostered and encouraged so that we can meet the challenges of the future. I must give credit to the hon. Member for Ealing North (Stephen Pound). I did not know anything about ornamental horticulture and landscaping, but he gave such an eloquent performance that I feel I must mention it as it I sum up the debate.

Jamie Hepburn, the Minister for Business, Fair Work and Skills in Scotland, stated:

“Apprenticeships are a fantastic way for all employers to invest in their workforce and provide the skills the economy needs now and in the future... We are continuing to enhance the apprenticeship opportunities available to provide the right balance of skills to meet the needs of employers and the economy, including prioritising higher skilled apprenticeships and STEM occupations.”

Some Members have mentioned schools. Last year I had the pleasure of attending a meeting at Dalziel High School in Motherwell along with the Deputy First Minister, John Swinney. Prizes were given to students who were doing work placements. Those placements were not just for one or two weeks a year—pupils went from that school every week to work with Morgan Stanley in Glasgow, or the engineering firm WorleyParsons, which does a lot of work in the energy sector in Scotland and across the UK. The enthusiasm and experience that those young people gained from that weekly commitment was outstanding, and they fed that back into the school. There is an ongoing programme between that school and education and industry trusts in Scotland, and they are all to be commended on their work.

I do not think anyone in this Chamber underestimates the issues involved, but as the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Emma Hardy) said, this is about parity of esteem. When, years ago, I did my teaching qualification in further education, I made a comparative study between vocational education in Scotland and in Germany, although because there was not yet a Scottish Parliament, it was really about UK-wide education. The lack of esteem, especially in a country such as Scotland whose engineers are renowned all over the world, given to people who worked with their hands was amazing. We still need to break down those barriers and show parents, students and pupils that there is a good future for them if they take on an apprenticeship. Indeed, last year I saw the enthusiasm and interest of apprentices at Gateshead College who were doing degree apprenticeships. The fact that they had to persuade their parents that it was a good idea to do those courses is testament to the work that still needs to be done.

I thank all those who have contributed to the debate. I have learned a lot. I realise that many issues are still to be covered, so I will let the hon. Member for Blackpool South (Gordon Marsden) sum up on behalf of the Labour party and ask hard questions of the Minister.

3.34 pm

**Gordon Marsden** (Blackpool South) (Lab): It is a delight to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David, and if it is not too late, I wish you and everyone here a happy new year. We have had a superbly balanced and broad-ranging debate. We must thank my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford South (Judith Cummins) not simply, as she put it, for making this a wide-ranging debate, but for her strong and important points. She gave a powerful critique of the current apprenticeship

programme, and outlined the direction in which it needs to go to assist somewhere such as Bradford, which, as many have said, has a fantastic history but needs a powerful future as well.

I was impressed by the huge range of contributions from colleagues across the House. The hon. Member for Henley (John Howell) spoke about the importance of work placements. After a voyage around his witticisms, my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing North (Stephen Pound) found more fertile ground in horticulture, for which we thank him. The hon. Member for North East Derbyshire (Lee Rowley) rightly spoke about the need to look to the future and different sorts of skills, and showed an intelligent understanding of where the tensions are between such skill sets. My ever-forceful colleague, my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Emma Hardy), talked about apprenticeship pathways to get to degree apprenticeships and spoke strongly about the importance of level 2 in terms of progression—I shall come to that later in my remarks.

My hon. Friend the Member for Warrington South (Faisal Rashid) raised concerns about how the Government will have a lost generation if they do not properly prepare for apprenticeships, and said that the Institute for Apprenticeships should be focused on outcomes and be supported. My hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill (Hugh Gaffney) spoke about the importance of ethnic minorities not missing out in Scotland, and he raised some significant concerns. Finally, the hon. Member for Motherwell and Wishaw (Marion Fellows) shared her experiences as a former FE tutor and lecturer and spoke about the need to promote modern apprenticeships. All those contributions have added to this debate.

We know that we are entering a period of extreme uncertainty regarding our skills base because of a cocktail of challenges: Brexit, automation—I take that point from the hon. Member for North East Derbyshire, which is why I said “challenge” rather than “problem”, but it nevertheless focuses our minds strongly—and the damage already done by the neglect of older as well as younger people in adult education, the dramatic fall in take-up by adult learners, and cuts to the adult skills budget. If we are now faced with the impending scenario of a no-deal Brexit, the need for home-grown skills is strengthened yet further.

Despite consistent warnings from ourselves, and the university and FE sectors, the Government have been neglectful of the impending damage—especially through the drift to no deal—that Brexit could cause to our world-class FE colleges and universities, and to skills as a whole. This is an issue for FE in particular, because of the deep engagement of community projects that are funded via the EU. Thousands of UK jobs, and tens of millions of pounds that the UK earns from our EU links with universities, further education colleges and training providers, are in jeopardy as a result. The Government need to get to grips urgently with spelling out how their shared prosperity fund will replace the funding from the European Social Fund and the Research Development Fund, on which our community-focused higher education institutions and colleges so rely.

What is the Department for Education doing—the Minister will have heard me speak about this before—to ensure that the needs of skills and apprenticeships are

[Gordon Marsden]

at the top table? Why have we seen so little proactivity? The Secretary of State seems to have thought that Erasmus was a second-level issue. That is what I have been told, but I hope the Minister will reassure us that it is not a second-level issue, because it is crucial to the skills processes that we need, whether in Bradford or Blackpool.

The already growing skills shortages in areas such as the health service are becoming catastrophic. We heard the national health service plans yesterday. That was all well and good, but the unanimous comment in the media has been about where the 100,000 extra jobs will come from. Where will those people come from if we do not have a progressive, integrated policy? We have a Department—it is new year, so I will try to be charitable to the Minister—that is struggling with the consequences of nursing bursaries being scrapped. I entirely support the Royal College of Nursing's campaign in this area, and have heard from constituents who have been seconded via the NHS to Blackpool hospital about some of their concerns. We have world-class colleges and providers, but they are being consistently let down by cuts to budgets and funding streams. Unfortunately, apart from the eventual money pledged for the introduction of T-levels, there has been no reversal to those damaging reductions made by the Government.

The Minister urged MPs and the sector to lobby before the Chancellor's Budget. They did, but they got precisely nowhere. It is imperative that we use apprenticeships and our skills network to help people be trained, but we have to fund them properly. We are being told to look at the spending review, but as the former Minister David Willetts observed on Saturday, when talking about the Augar review, the chances at the moment of the Chancellor focusing his eye on education as opposed to the NHS appear to be minimal.

Fine words we have had plenty of, but they butter no parsnips. That is particularly important in smaller towns and cities, such as Bradford, Blackpool and many of the places that Members who have spoken today represent, the people of which feel that they have been let down. We hear rumours that the Augar recommendations will pin all hopes and money on the cut in university fees. I sincerely hope that the Minister, in whatever capacity she is able to, will raise her voice against the focus simply on higher education, to the detriment of further education.

One of the potential avenues that we need to explore to achieve all that is, of course, the devolved skills and adult education budget implications. There are clear opportunities via those new structures that could be utilised, and should be, if we are to have proper progression in the devolution of adult skills funding. We need a much bigger debate about the devolution of broader apprenticeships than we have had so far.

We need proper infrastructure and long-term thinking. The Government have been poleaxed by Brexit, and are looking only to scrape to 2020 in their funding and policies. While they do that, our new national education service will look at devolving apprenticeships and other skills funding, not just the adult education budget, and our lifelong learning commission will expose and explore new ways of collaborating on the ground with the third sector and the unions to get those skills up and running.

Skills devolution is not just a smart thing to do economically; it is the right thing to do for community growth and cohesion. If apprenticeships are to have strong, positive outcomes for local economies and workforces, far more young people need to get to the starting place to begin with. It is important to grasp the potential for high-quality apprenticeships in the service sector. As others have said, that means supporting our small and medium-sized enterprises and starts at level 2, and ensuring a properly funded and promoted traineeship programme.

We have been banging on about that to a succession of Government Skills Ministers for two years; the current Minister is the third to hear me speak on it. The latest statistics from the Department for Education show a significant drop in level 2 apprenticeships—just 161,000 starts at level 2 in 2017, down from 260,000. The proportion of overall starts has fallen to its lowest level yet. As Mark Dawe of the Association of Employment and Learning Providers said,

“major mistakes in the implementation of the levy have resulted in a serious undermining of the government's social mobility agenda”.

He also said:

“Level two starts are now the biggest issue we face”.

I can only make reference to the briefing that Members have had from the British Hospitality Association about the importance of progression in that area from level 2 and onwards. Recently I was glad to welcome representatives of Stonegate to Parliament, and a person in my constituency who has gone from being a barperson to running the newly refurbished Manchester hotel, which will be reopened shortly.

Level 2 apprenticeships have fallen, but we have seen a huge rise in management apprenticeships. I do not know what the real story is there. Does the Minister? Has the Government's failure on level 2 been a market consequence of the way that they sold the levy? I do not know; perhaps the Minister can enlighten us. What we know from the Sutton Trust is that about a third of those apprenticeships are converting existing employees and skills. If that is the case, we are in an even more dire position than the Government's figures show.

Anything that simply rebadges or validates normal training will not get us where we need to go. To create that step change we must ensure that people can get to the starting point, because level 3 is one of the most telling points for SMEs or self-employment. Whether someone is a hairdresser—I hope that the Minister has managed to get the Secretary of State off the unfortunate prejudices about hairdressing in his Battersea speech—a social care provider, a brickie, an electrician or a plumber, those are the people we need, and the skills that we need. Level 3 is a de facto licence to practise. That is why it is so important that the Government should not neglect traineeships.

There are issues regarding the overspend. The Minister knows that the Institute for Apprenticeship's chief financial officer recently presented a forecast of a £500 million overspend. Can she tell us whether those figures are accurate? The Education Committee published an all-round critique of the Government's apprenticeship record, and highlighted the importance of not only apprenticeships, but apprentices. That is a long-overdue priority for the Government. I know that the Minister agrees about the



importance of world skills, skills competitions and skills champions. She has banged on about it, and it is very good that she has, but her Department has not always seemed to share the same enthusiasm for taking on board the opinions of apprentices. I urge her to do so, and to utilise the talents of IFA's panel.

That is the right way to promote the social mobility that we will need in the 2020s, when bespoke skills and enabling ones will have to combine in people's lives with more traditional qualifications. We need to encourage young people to take up their curiosity for future jobs and apprenticeships at a much earlier age. We have been saying that for some time. It needs hardwiring into careers advice to go beyond the Baker clause and to have a sustained, holistic strategy.

The Government's consistent failure to support under-represented groups, whether black, Asian and minority ethnic, people with disabilities or care leavers, has to be addressed. We would address it directly by giving it strong positioning in our new national education service. We have been very clear that if we are to get to the right position on T-levels, they cannot be seen simply as a competitor with A-levels. The Sainsbury review pointed in the right direction in that area, but unfortunately the Government have ignored that holistic approach and turned it into a beauty contest.

The concerns that we have heard today about regulations not being fulfilled in key new pathways—employers say they are not currently—and there not being the number of work placements illustrate the point. It is important that we get T-levels going properly, but they must be part of a broader strategy. That is the problem with so much of what the Government have told us. We are not short of potential "ladders of opportunity", as the Minister's predecessor, the right hon. Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon), put it, but we now need more resources, simplifications and long-term strategies—not the short-term targets that have tied the Government in knots and led to the issues that my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford South raised in this excellent debate.

3.48 pm

**The Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills (Anne Milton):** It is a pleasure to serve under you today, Sir David. I wish all hon. Members a happy new year. I say to the shadow Minister that I do not feel tied up in knots.

**Gordon Marsden:** Not personally.

**Anne Milton:** Not personally, certainly. I feel quite clear about what I am trying to achieve. I congratulate the hon. Member for Bradford South (Judith Cummins) on securing the debate. I wish I had more time, but I do not. I will debate this matter weekly if that is what Members want, because there could be nothing more important for the productivity and success not just of this country, but of individuals.

I am incredibly fortunate in my job. I get to see so many young people who are passionate and incredibly enthusiastic about the careers that they get through apprenticeships. Their sense of enthusiasm strengthens my faith that we are on the right road. It tells us not only that the direction of travel is right and that parity of esteem between the academic and technical routes is

achievable, but that apprenticeships open an alternative door that would not otherwise exist for people—often bright and very gifted young people, but also older people—for whom school and exams did not work.

T-levels and apprenticeships will form the basis of our new technical offer, building the skills of the population. They will be mirror images—one predominantly work-based and the other predominantly study-based, but both leading to skilled employment and opportunities for further study up to and beyond degree level, through apprenticeships or otherwise.

The hon. Member for Bradford South is absolutely right that Bradford is a great city, but 15% with no qualifications is quite a shocking figure in comparison with the national average. She raised the issue of apprenticeships not being worth the paper they were written on, but that was what sat behind all the reforms. We have brought in money from the levy, protected the term, mandated 20% off-the-job training and introduced end-point assessment.

The hon. Lady is right that apprenticeship starts are down, but this is not just about numbers; it is about quality. Before the reforms, a lot of people doing apprenticeships did not even know that they were on them. It was a way of bringing in cheap labour, and we wanted to change that. It is not surprising that the starts went down to begin with, because it was a very big change, but they are now rising, and that rise has been significant at level 4, level 5 and above. I urge the hon. Lady and her businesses in Bradford to contact the National Apprenticeship Service, which I know will be very happy to work with her and with businesses locally.

We are bringing non-levy paying small and medium-sized enterprises into the apprenticeship system. I assure the hon. Lady that I am working closely with the Federation of Small Businesses to ensure that we get it right for SMEs, which often find it quite difficult to navigate the new system. I point out that the money raised by the levy is available for redistribution to non-levy payers, so money raised through the levy in London might well end up being redistributed to smaller employers in Bradford, Hull or anywhere else in the country. From April, large levy payers will be able to transfer 25% of their levy pot without restriction, so the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Emma Hardy) might like to have a word with hon. Members for London constituencies to see whether that money can be redistributed.

The hon. Member for Bradford South also mentioned the risk to workers from automation. Some 35% of jobs are set to go in the next 10 years, so the Chancellor has announced the national retraining scheme, a joint venture between the TUC, the CBI and the Government to ensure that we can upskill lower-skilled workers. We are doing much to ensure that this works, especially for workers who may have had a bad experience of education or for whom undertaking more training might cause practical as well as financial problems. We need to ensure that lower-skilled workers get the skills they need and that business gets them as well.

I am glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell) has lots of university degrees to make up for the fact that unfortunately I do not have any. He is right that schools play a critical role, but

[*Anne Milton*]

schools do not work for everyone, and apprenticeships are often a vital route for young and older people to get a second chance.

I praise the role of unionlearn, which I should have mentioned earlier and which often offers excellent in-work training. The Government give it quite a substantial amount of money, and it will be important to the national retraining scheme. I must also mention work experience, because the 45 to 60-day industry placement is a critical part of the new T-levels. The careers strategy has the Gatsby benchmarks at its heart, so that schools can measure their success. Meaningful encounters with the world of work are an important part of that, and the Careers and Enterprise Company is doing a great job of linking schools to local employers.

Doing a school exam or maths homework makes sense if students can see the jobs that will be out there when they leave school—otherwise it is just another exam or another boring class. For those going into a career in STEM—Science, technology, engineering and maths—there is nothing not to like about apprenticeships, which give the skills and work experience needed. Some engineering companies have cut their graduate schemes and are now offering only apprenticeships at level 2 and up to level 3.

The hon. Member for Ealing North (Stephen Pound) made me smile, as he always does, and mentioned horticulture and landscaping. Only today, I saw some fantastic examples of the apprenticeships that the national parks are offering. I would be very happy to work with him and the all-party gardening and horticulture group. Landscaping is one of the disciplines tested at the WorldSkills competition, which I was privileged to see in Abu Dhabi. He might like to visit the WorldSkills website and see the amazing work of landscapers at the competition.

My hon. Friend the Member for North East Derbyshire (Lee Rowley) spoke about the skills gap, which the skills advisory panels will be looking at to give us a clearer picture. The reason why apprenticeships are getting such traction is that employers want more than just knowledge; they want skills as well. Many are moving away from graduate schemes, because a degree apprenticeship, for instance, combines both knowledge and skills.

**Gordon Marsden:** Will the Minister give way?

**Anne Milton:** Yes, but briefly, because the hon. Gentleman is taking my time.

**Gordon Marsden:** I am grateful. The Minister mentions the skills advisory panels; the reason why we need them is that in the previous Parliament the Government abolished the UK Commission for Employment and Skills. Does the Minister regret that the commission is no longer there to give the Department a holistic view?

**Anne Milton:** I do not have regrets. What matters is what we do next, and that we make sure we identify the skills we need. In case I do not have time later, let me

note that the hon. Gentleman mentioned devolving skills budgets. In fact, skills budgets are devolved down to the lowest possible level: to local employers. Firms in Bradford and Hull—the levy payers—have the money at their disposal, and we will redistribute it to SMEs.

Time is short, and I do not have time to mention everything, but the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle mentioned nursing, a perfect example of the pathway for progression that I want to see from level 2 right up to level 6. In construction, an employer in Gosport has done a wonderful map that shows young people where they can progress—right up to project manager and beyond. When I was in Bristol, where a lot of work is being done on diversity in apprenticeships, I saw what looked like a tube map, where people can see where they can get on and off their route. Of course, people can go in other directions: they might well do a level 2 in business admin and then go into nursing or end up doing a level 6 in a completely different discipline. That is exactly the area that I want to concentrate on. I spent a lot of time getting business working with the levy and getting the system up and running, but now what matters to me is progression.

With respect to the drop in level 2 apprenticeships, which was mentioned earlier, we are not absolutely sure what is behind the figures. Some 90%<sup>1</sup> of starts are still at levels 2 and 3, and of course employment is high, but we need to dig deeper. What matters to me is the people I meet, like the young man I met who got chucked out of college twice, got a level 2 apprenticeship with Virgin Media, skipped level 3, did a level 4—

**Judith Cummins rose—**

**Anne Milton:** I know—you have 30 seconds.

That young man skipped level 5 and is now doing a level 6. He said to me, “I am a miracle.” That is what this is about: giving people that second chance. I am sorry that I do not have time to say any more.

3.59 pm

**Judith Cummins:** I am really grateful to all hon. Members who took part in the debate. I agree with everybody who said that this is such an important subject and that we should concentrate much more on it, because it is about the future of our country, of our children and of our economy.

The Minister mentioned the national retraining scheme, a joint initiative with the TUC and the CBI. I look forward to seeing the details of that scheme, which will be really important.

When I said that some apprenticeships were not worth the paper they are written on, I did say “some”—I commented that I meant those apprenticeships with little or no training.

It is fantastic that we all agreed on the urgency of getting our skills policy right, to ensure that our economy delivers for everybody in all places. The jobs and skills mismatch is not down to individuals on the supply side. We have to stimulate and organise demand for skills through the Government empowering sectors and regions; it cannot just rest on the shoulders of individuals.

*Motion lapsed ( Standing Order No. 10(6) ).*

## Armed Forces: Angus

[SIOBHAIN McDONAGH *in the Chair*]

4 pm

**Kirstene Hair** (Angus) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the future of the armed forces in Angus.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairwomanship, Ms McDonagh. I just want to say that I am overcoming a flu virus, so my delivery may not be as clear as it might have otherwise been.

Over the last century and more, the history of Angus has been intertwined with the armed forces. In 1913, the first operational military aerodrome in Britain was established at Montrose. That station served as a vital base, first for the Royal Flying Corps and then for the RAF, through two world wars. More recently, in 1938, what was then known as HMS Condor was opened as a base for the Fleet Air Arm near Arbroath. More than 80 years on, Condor remains the home of the armed forces in Angus and has become an integral part of Angus life. Condor contributes to Angus's economy, and those who are based there are welcomed into the local community.

The past eight decades have seen Condor and the personnel based there contribute to the defence of Angus and the entire United Kingdom. Condor endured bombing during the second world war, and between 1954 and 1971 served as home to the Royal Navy Aircraft Engineering Training School. Since 1971, as RM Condor, it has been home to the Royal Marines of 45 Commando. In that time, 45 Commando has, among other operations, served multiple tours in Northern Ireland during the troubles, yomped across the Falklands to fight for the liberation of Port Stanley and protected Kurds from Saddam Hussein in the first Gulf war. More recently, it has served with great distinction in Afghanistan, working under tremendous pressure to bring greater peace and stability to the region.

It was during those more recent conflicts that, in 2003, 45 Commando received the freedom of Arbroath and Angus—a small token of gratitude from the people of Angus, who are keenly aware of the sacrifice that 45 Commando and the armed forces more generally have made to keep this country safe. The true extent of that regard was further demonstrated in 2011 when the unit and the local community raised more than £250,000 for the establishment of a woodlands garden in memory of the 13 service personnel who made the ultimate sacrifice for their country as part of Operation Herrick.

In early 2017, the people of Arbroath turned out in their droves to celebrate 45 years since 45 Commando moved to Condor, just as they had turned out to celebrate the return from conflict many times before. At that celebration, the then Commanding Officer of 45 Commando, Lieutenant Colonel Tony Turner, said that 45 Commando had been “privileged over the years to have had such great support from the local community of Arbroath and Angus”

and that that shared history is what makes 45 Commando's organisation and its connection to Arbroath “so unique”. That view is shared by the base's current commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Duncan Forbes.

**Douglas Ross** (Moray) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that the great respect given to the armed forces in Angus is replicated across the country? In Moray, with RAF Lossiemouth and 39 Engineers at Kinloss, we have the same community spirit that supports the armed forces. As my hon. Friend said, the armed forces do not just protect our country. They also have great involvement in the local communities where they are stationed.

**Kirstene Hair:** My hon. Friend is absolutely correct. It is not just the way in which the armed forces serve our nation—they also serve our communities and are an integral part of those communities. I will go on to explain how they are fully integrated into Arbroath and the wider Angus area.

Fundamentally, it is clear to me that Condor, and 45 Commando's presence there, works. It works for Angus, it works for 45 Commando and it works for our military capabilities as a nation.

I am glad to have worked recently with this Conservative UK Government to ensure that armed forces personnel based at Condor and across Scotland were able to receive compensation protecting them from the Scottish Government's income tax rises. I hope that, in the upcoming reprioritisation exercise of the better defence estate programme, I can once again work successfully with Ministers to support our brave servicemen and women. There should be no doubt that I welcome the programme, and that I firmly believe that the armed forces, and the use of the defence estate, should be as efficient and effective as possible. Everybody would agree with that.

Recent years have demonstrated how turbulent the world can be, how threats can materialise and subside quickly, and how our military should therefore be as well placed as possible to deal with all eventualities. I believe in a strong, cost-effective military, but I also believe, as a Conservative, that a long-standing fruitful relationship should be treasured and preserved, and so I look at the last half century, where 45 Commando has, from its base at Condor and its home in Angus, served so effectively and admirably in theatres around the world, protecting this country while helping to grow the local economy of a thankful and welcoming county.

**Stephen Gethins** (North East Fife) (SNP): I thank the hon. Lady for securing this debate. She will have similar concerns to me, given that we come from the same part of the world. Does she agree that military personnel are best served when we take into account the needs of the whole family, such as schooling in a local community? It is crucial that family-friendly facilities are considered in any future investment, which is a point that has been acknowledged by our local paper, *The Courier*.

**Kirstene Hair:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. Condor includes and welcomes not only the family of personnel into the base, but also the wider community. He is absolutely right that it is a vital asset that each base should have.

It is clear to me that Condor should remain home to 45 Commando as part of this country's defence infrastructure, and I hope that that is also the view of the Ministry of Defence—I and thousands of people across Angus would more than welcome an additional assurance from the Minister today that that is the case,



[Kirstene Hair]

which would reassure us of the continued presence of a pillar of our community and our economy. As a minimum, the forthcoming review should confirm that RM Condor will at least be maintained in its current form. That would not only allow the existing and successful relationship between 45 Commando, Angus, and the Ministry of Defence to continue, but would also secure the future of the Arbroath Division of the Royal Marines Volunteer Cadet Corps.

The Royal Marines cadets are a great opportunity for young people in Angus to develop skills and attitudes that will stand them in good stead for a lifetime. Meeting twice a week, they make use of Condor's facilities. I understand they held their first, if rather cold, camp out at the beginning of last December. The foundation of the Arbroath Division of the RMVCC in December 2017 has further supported a long-standing relationship between RM Condor and multiple cadet groups. The impeccable reputation of the base means that demand for places in these groups is rightly high. In 2018, intakes took place in both August and October, and recruitment for a third intake is currently under way.

In addition, 45 Commando's assault engineers and students from Dundee and Angus College recently collaborated to transform one of the hangers into a vital training asset. I know the Secretary of State was incredibly impressed at that innovation during his visit to the base last year. Moreover, there are the plethora of football, skiing, rugby, and competitive boxing clubs that make use of Condor's facilities. Those benefits, both social and cultural, are further evidence of why the base and personnel should stay. However, the reprioritisation should commit to maintaining 45 Commando's presence in Condor.

**Bill Grant** (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Con): I am sure my hon. Friend would agree that today's military personnel are a fighting force to be reckoned with, but they are more than that, in terms of military aid to the civil community for things such as firefighting, dealing with adverse weather conditions, flooding and so on. We should commend them for the good work they do throughout the United Kingdom, including in Scotland.

**Kirstene Hair:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that they go above and beyond the role they are asked to do.

The reprioritisation exercise should commit to ensuring that Condor can continue to provide all the facilities that 45 Commando needs to continue to operate as effectively as it does today. We need clarity on the future of the base. I recognise the importance of an efficient defence estate, and nobody is calling for the Ministry of Defence to hold on to land that it does not need and cannot put to better use. Although the airstrip at Condor has been out of use for some time, the wider airfield and hangars are vital to many of 45 Commando's training objectives, including driver training, combat training and small arms firing.

Confirmation that 45 Commando will remain at Condor will be welcome, and I would be pleased to hear that backed up by firm commitments on the airfield. There is concern that, even if 45 Commando's future at Condor is confirmed for now, over-zealous cuts to the airfield

will compromise its ability to operate effectively. The review must not suggest confirming the future of 45 Commando at Condor with one hand, while the other make decisions that might eventually force it to move. I am sure that it does not need to be stated that, should that transpire, it will have a negative impact on the base's personnel, their families and the wider community.

The review should include clear, practical steps towards securing Condor's long-term future as the home of 45 Commando. The Ministry of Defence should take a long-term approach to the review, and it should consider how greater investment in Condor can ensure that 45 Commando has a stable home, with all the facilities it needs, for decades to come, and how that investment can save the Ministry from greater costs in future.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing the debate. At the moment, recruitment to the Army is very low. Newspaper reports today say that 20% of Army personnel are unfit to go to theatres of war. Clearly the hon. Lady is outlining that her local detachment is very capable of going to war. Does she agree that, when the soldiers can deliver something effectively to the Army and to the Ministry of Defence for overseas activities, every consideration must be given to retaining the base and to recruitment?

**Kirstene Hair:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. The issue is twofold: it is about keeping our fantastic personnel on board as well as making new recruits. The Ministry of Defence is doing a huge swathe of work on recruitment, which we obviously need to do continually to attract the brightest and best into our armed forces.

The review should also consider what more Condor can contribute to our country's future defence infrastructure on top of serving as a home to 45 Commando. The Minister has heard multiple representations on behalf of Condor from me and from people across Angus over the past 18 months. He knows that this issue is close to my heart and the hearts of my constituents. I hope he recognises from the Ministry's perspective the common-sense case for Condor, and reflects it in his response.

**Bob Stewart** (Beckenham) (Con): I make no apologies for mentioning the huge military tradition in Angus. We must remember that it is the home of the 26th regiment of the Army—the Cameronians—which was disbanded in 1968 because it refused to amalgamate. It was one of two regiments of the British Army that said, "We're not amalgamating; we're the Cameronians. We are a fighting force—we come from Angus, and we're Scottish. We are not disbanding." Good for them.

**Kirstene Hair:** I saw that the Minister was listening avidly to the case that my hon. Friend put across on my behalf.

I have made the case for keeping a well-established base in an area with a long and proud military history, where 45 Commando has been truly welcomed into the local community, and where the cadets have added a new dimension to that unique relationship between military and community. The base has worked well for decades for the personnel stationed there. Provided support is maintained, it can continue to do so for decades to come.

4.14 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Tobias Ellwood):** It is a pleasure to respond to this debate I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Angus (Kirstene Hair) on securing the debate and I commend her commitment, diligence and persistence in supporting both the Royal Marines and RM Condor in her constituency, which is the home of 45 Commando. I had the pleasure of visiting the base only a few months ago to see the incredible work that is being done by Lieutenant Colonel Forbes and his fantastic unit, as well as other assets based up there.

Before discussing RM Condor, I would like to acknowledge the critical and unique role that the Royal Marines play in the wider spectrum of our armed forces capability. Formed in 1664, during the reign of Charles II, they celebrate their 355th birthday this year. The Royal Marines have much to be proud of in their long history: playing a vital role in Lord Nelson's victory at Trafalgar; securing and defending the Rock of Gibraltar in 1704; the infamous raid on Zeebrugge in 1918, which earned two Royal Marines the Victoria Cross; as well as the D-day landings at Normandy, where 17,500 Royal Marines took part in the largest amphibious operation in history. More recently, they were essential to the recapture of the Falkland Islands in 1982.

Today the Royal Marines are the UK's specialised commando force—an elite unit held at very high readiness and trained for worldwide rapid response. They can deal with a wide spectrum of threats and security challenges, and operate in often dangerous and extremely difficult circumstances, including amphibious operations, littoral strikes and humanitarian relief as well as specialist mountain and cold weather warfare and jungle counter-insurgency. When diplomacy fails, the Royal Marines provide Government with an impressive spectrum of hard-power options with which we can respond. On behalf of a grateful nation, I thank every Royal Marine who has earned the coveted green beret.

**Bob Stewart:** I thank the Minister for allowing me to point out, as the secretary of the all-party parliamentary group on Gibraltar and as a real friend of the Royal Marines, it is the only unit in our armed forces that has a place name on its badge. It says "Gibraltar", because that is where the unit made its name.

**Mr Ellwood:** While serving as a regular officer, I had the pleasure to be based in Gibraltar, and I became very familiar with the treaty of Utrecht and the role that the Royal Marines played in securing the Rock. May it forever remain British. Gibraltarians are very proud people, and we have a strong relationship with the Royal Gibraltar Regiment.

Looking to the future, the 2015 strategic defence and security review mapped out our commitment to the Royal Marines. I am pleased to say that following the modernising defence programme, the future of HMS Bulwark and HMS Albion as amphibious workhorses has been confirmed. The Royal Marines winter deployment programme in Norway will continue, as will their training with US counterparts. We will shortly see women join the ranks of the Royal Marines in ground close-combat roles for the first time.

Turning to the base, my hon. Friend the Member for Angus will be aware that the Royal Navy first forged a valuable relationship with Angus during the last war. The Fleet Air Arm occupied the base in 1940 as a training field to train aircrew in aircraft carrier deck landing operations. In 1954, the base became the home of the Royal Navy aircraft engineering training school. In 1971, as my hon. Friend mentioned, the base became the home of 45 Commando and was renamed RM Condor. Today it also houses 7 (Sphinx) Battery, which is part of 29 Commando Regiment Royal Artillery, 2 Signal Regiment, 30 Commando Information Exploitation Group, and the Royal Military Police detachment. It is also home to a number of cadet operations, so it is vital for us to encourage recognition and understanding of what our armed forces do, and perhaps to introduce the idea that a career in the armed forces—specifically the marines—is worth pursuing.

Turning to the future, colleagues will be aware of the wider need to rationalise our defence real estate. The Ministry of Defence owns 3% of land across the United Kingdom, much of which is surplus to our requirements. We have conducted a wide-ranging study into what can be utilised, what needs to be continued, what is vital for training, what is needed for the future and what we can dispense with. We are transforming the estate into one that better supports the future needs of our armed forces. We will be investing £4 billion over the next 10 years to create a smaller, more modern and more capability-focused estate.

On our military presence in Angus, I can confirm that there are no plans to dispose of RM Condor as an operational base. As part of our review, we have been investigating how best to ensure that 45 Commando continues to have access to the facilities it requires to live, work and train. We are considering whether there are opportunities to undertake more defence tasks. What more can we add to our military capability in that neck of the woods to ensure we make the most of that important facility?

The MOD is investing not just in Angus but in Scotland as a whole, as other hon. Members have said. Wider afield, we have the Clyde naval base—another location I was pleased to visit not long ago—which will soon be home to all the UK submarines in the submarine centre of specialisation. The first of nine P-8 maritime patrol aircraft will be arriving in Scotland very soon. Boeing and the UK Government are working together to build a new £100 million operational support and training base in RAF Lossiemouth. In essence, Scotland is important to the defence of the United Kingdom—not just our military capability but our procurement. The Type 26 and our offshore patrol vessels are being built in Scotland, too.

**Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP):** The Minister will know that during the independence referendum campaign, the Ministry of Defence made two promises about Scotland. It promised 12,500 regular personnel based in Scotland—the Government are way off that target at the minute—and a frigate factory based on the Clyde, which still has not appeared. When does he expect those promises to be fulfilled?

**Mr Ellwood:** The hon. Gentleman will be aware of the pressures on us in recruitment and retention. It is a competitive environment. Per head, our footprint in Scotland is higher than anywhere else in the United

[Mr Ellwood]

Kingdom, and Scotland does very well indeed from the investment we make, despite the extra taxation that the Scottish National party has sadly decided to inflict on our armed forces personnel—[*Interruption.*] The hon. Gentleman is signalling, “Carry on, carry on,” but he knows exactly what I am talking about. My hon. Friend the Member for Angus raised that important issue. We have had to step in and fill the gap to prevent the impact it would have had on individual soldiers, sailors and air personnel if it had been allowed to go ahead without our reacting to it.

**Stephen Gethins:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr Ellwood:** We are wandering off the subject of Angus, but I will give way very briefly if the hon. Gentleman’s intervention relates to Angus. I do not want to have a debate about taxation in Scotland. The SNP has lost the argument. We have had to fill the taxation gap. Is the hon. Gentleman sitting down, or does he still want to intervene?

**Stephen Gethins:** As the Minister is aware, I cannot stand up at the same time as him. He raised the issue of taxation. The military personnel in my area make a fantastic contribution, as I know the Minister recognises. If he is talking about the pay gap for higher earners, will he make it up to those who live elsewhere in the UK who are at the lower end of the pay scale and would benefit from a higher income in Scotland?

**Mr Ellwood:** You will call me out of order shortly, Ms McDonagh, but I will just respond to that point. We need to ensure that people do not suffer, no matter

where they are based in the United Kingdom, and people moving to Scotland would have suffered had we not intervened to make up the difference. They support and represent their country, whether they are in Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales or England. That is the bottom line, and that is what should matter. With your permission, Ms McDonagh, I would like to continue.

Across our estate, we will continue to combine military and infrastructure expertise to transform the places where our armed forces live, work, train and operate, but we know that we cannot do that alone. We have touched on the importance of working with our stakeholders. As we continue with our basing requirements, we will engage constructively with all relevant stakeholders at every level to ensure that sites are considered for use in a way that benefits defence and the surrounding local communities.

In summary, RM Condor plays a vital role in Scotland’s defence footprint and the defence of the United Kingdom. On a point that was made in an intervention, from where I sit in the Ministry of Defence, I see that the world is becoming more dangerous, not less. It is important that our defence posture grows to match our desires and capabilities to help shape the world as it becomes more dangerous. I fully acknowledge the impact that the changes that we are making to our real estate will have on local communities, but I reiterate our commitment to 45 Commando: our intention is to keep it in RM Condor.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Angus for her commitment and support for our brave Royal Marines and their families, who do so much to support those in uniform. I hope she will be satisfied with the assurances I have given her today.

*Question put and agreed to.*



## Uganda: Democracy

**Siobhain McDonagh (in the Chair):** While hon. Members take their places, they may notice that the monitors are not working. I assure them that if there is a Division, the Doorkeepers will come in straight away and let us know. We are anticipating one at about 4.55 pm, so the debate may be interrupted.

4.30 pm

**Dr Paul Williams (Stockton South) (Lab):** I beg to move,

That this House has considered democracy in Uganda.

Serious concerns have been raised internationally about the Ugandan Government systematically undermining democracy in their country. MPs have been arrested, institutions that should protect the democratic rights of citizens are being weakened, and the voices of ordinary Ugandans are being ignored. The United Kingdom is a friend of Uganda—we are important partners in trade, development and security—and I am a friend of Uganda too. Uganda and the UK have a shared past, and I hope that we will have a strong and prosperous shared future together as well.

At the start of this debate, it is important to ask what the UK's interest in Uganda is and whether that gives us a legitimate right to make any comment about its democracy. I firmly believe that Uganda should be valued as an equal partner to the UK, but it has not always been an equal partnership. Our relationship began in 1894, and until 1962 Uganda was a British protectorate, as it was known then. Now Uganda is an independent sovereign nation, and it has been throughout my lifetime. It has a constitution that describes a balance of power between an executive, a legislature and other independent bodies. I respect the Ugandan constitution—it is right for Uganda and the Ugandan people. It protects the Ugandan people, and is the rock on which Ugandan democracy is built. The relationship between our two countries should always respect the Ugandan constitution.

**John Howell (Henley) (Con):** The hon. Gentleman makes some good points. I wonder whether he has seen the Ugandan press coverage of this debate, which has essentially approached the whole of the subject from a position asking, "Why is the British Parliament trying to tell us what to do in our own Parliament? What gives them the right to do that?" Does that not show that we face an uphill struggle in getting our points across in the measured way he describes? How will we do that?

**Dr Williams:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. Having seen that press coverage, I thought it right to ask what our legitimate interest is and to establish why our relationship is important and how Ugandan democracy impacts on that relationship. I hope to develop that argument as I progress through my speech.

Our relationship is one in which we have worked together, for example to respond to the refugee crisis from South Sudan. It is a relationship in which we trade with each other and in which the UK provides development assistance to the people of Uganda. As countries, we have shared goals and shared interests in those areas.

I also have a personal interest in Uganda. In 2006, I moved to Uganda, where I spent more than four years living and working in a rural part of the country in Kanungu district, next to the fantastically named Bwindi Impenetrable Forest. I worked as a doctor with local health workers and the local community to transform a small health centre into a fantastic, thriving hospital and community health programme. I did this without pay, as a Voluntary Service Overseas volunteer, and played my small part and used my skills to leave a sustainable healthcare system. In case anyone watching from outside wonders—I am sure a few people are watching—I no longer have a stake in Uganda, whether through financial interests or otherwise. I am, however, a friend of the country, and I have many Ugandan friends. I want to speak today in that spirit of friendship and as an equal partner.

Living for a long time in a different culture gives you particular insight. I learned to speak some of the language, Runyankole-Rukiga, although not very well, and I learned a lot about local cultures and beliefs. I saw many of the successes of President Museveni's National Resistance Movement Government. I saw significant efforts to improve education, with the ambitious programme of universal education, which was really positive. I saw economic growth, albeit in a country with significant inequalities. Ugandans are slowly getting richer, which is a good thing too. I saw growth in infrastructure, the remarkable spread of mobile phones, improvements to road networks, and improvements to power. Those should help the future economy to grow and help everyone to become more prosperous.

I also saw things that did not work well, however. The Government-run health service, which failed to get the basics right, did not work well in the area that I lived in. Health worker morale was low and absenteeism was extremely high. There was a centrally run system to supply drugs, but a combination of underfunding, theft and bad planning meant that supplies often ran out. As people had little confidence in the institutions of government to deliver the healthcare that they needed, they had to take matters into their own hands. Patients went to private drug shops, while health workers took second jobs. The poorest people were left behind, getting no care and suffering devastating consequences. That failure of the Ugandan health service is not because of the people—there are many fantastic, talented Ugandan health workers—but because of the system, which relies on patronage and is, sadly, riddled with corruption and centralised decision making that leads to paralysis.

While living in Uganda, I also got to witness how the political process worked. Locally, I was introduced to GISOs—Government internal security officers—living in every community. Ostensibly, they are there to collect evidence of people trying to destabilise the country, but in practice that extends to any act of political opposition to the President. Alongside every local council leader sits a resident district commissioner—or RDC—the President's own appointed person, who monitors everything happening in that district. That is done in the name of security, but RDCs are used to gather intelligence and stop political dissent.

I learned that the Internal Security Organisation is there to protect the President. Legitimate criticism of the policies of the President have been deliberately conflated with criticism of the state. The state has

[Dr Paul Williams]

become personalised. Ugandans see that system for themselves—they do not need me to point it out. Some people know no different: this month, President Museveni will have been in power for 33 years. Three quarters of people in the country have never lived under a different leader. Ugandan people see that the institutions of their democracy are slowly being eroded.

First, the Government have closed down critical media outlets. There are credible reports that television stations were interrupted during the 2016 elections when results favouring the opposition were being reported. There are also credible reports that social media, including Facebook and Twitter, are shut down by the Government during sensitive times.

Secondly, the Government have used the military to attack Parliament. When MPs were debating the extension of presidential term limits, Parliament was attacked and MPs, including Betty Namboozee, were beaten by armed forces. Thirdly, there is evidence of serious human rights abuses, including serious and credible reports about a 2016 attack on the palace of King Charles Mumbere in Kasese, and the massacre of 150 civilians by Ugandan forces. According to those reports, the soldier who led that attack has been promoted, and no independent investigation has taken place. I hope that the Minister will explain the Government's position on that attack.

Fourthly, elections have been described, in diplomatic language, as

“short of being free and fair”.

Serious allegations have been made about the conduct of elections in Uganda over many years, but the most recent EU report on the 2016 presidential election made 30 recommendations that should be enacted before the next election in 2021. They include taking clear steps to differentiate the state from the ruling party and to strengthen the independence of the electoral commission, and systematic checks on the integrity of votes. As of March 2018, none of those EU recommendations had been implemented. There are credible stories of vote-rigging, with the police preventing access to “rigging houses”, and electoral bribery is common. Ugandan politicians routinely hand out money or gifts at election rallies.

The interference in elections does not happen only on the day of an election. I have friends who stood for elected office in Uganda. They were subjected to constant low-level intimidation. Police or soldiers were stationed outside their home, and they were followed. After they visited villages to talk to people, soldiers went to threaten those people with reprisals if they voted against the Government. Furthermore, radio stations, the main media in most areas, are owned by Government-backed politicians and report clearly biased information. Perhaps most disturbingly of all, people who engage with politics are subjected to arbitrary arrest and detention. The institutions that are supposed to protect democracy, the police and the military, are used to undermine it. Finally, the Public Order Management Act passed in 2013 has further diminished the political space, requiring police approval if three or more people want to gather to discuss political issues. What kind of democracy curtails politics in that way?

Many Ugandan opposition politicians have struggled bravely to use the democratic process to win power. I do not have time to mention them all, but I will draw

attention to two such people. Kizza Besigye has stood for President on three occasions. He has been arrested, beaten and harassed so many times that he has lost count. I had the pleasure of meeting Dr Besigye when he visited our Parliament last year. His sacrifices in the pursuit of democracy in Uganda should be lauded.

I also want to mention Robert Kyagulanyi, also known as Bobi Wine. He is a young, charismatic musician with a large popular following. He was elected to the Ugandan Parliament at about the same time that I was elected to the UK Parliament. While I, in a friendly way, get to be critical of our Government without harassment, Bobi has been the target of totally undemocratic behaviour by his. In August last year, he and four other MPs were arrested by the military while campaigning for a by-election. His driver was shot dead, and he was severely beaten by soldiers before being brought to court on trumped-up charges that were later dropped. Bobi Wine was eventually handed over to the police and released, but that was just another example of the Ugandan Government using the military to prevent democratically elected politicians from doing their job.

Why are all such attacks on democracy important? They are important for the Ugandan people, the people who might one day want to see a different Government in their country. They have no hope of ever seeing a different Government if this one undermines democracy to cling on to power. The attacks are also important because of international standards and accountability. Uganda is a partner to our country in the United Nations, in the Commonwealth and, in multilateral relationships, through the European Union; and partners hold each other to international standards. The attacks are also important because they undermine the ability of the UK and the Ugandan people to work together on shared goals.

The attacks on democracy also allow a small group of people to retain power, a group of people who are illegally benefitting from that power and patronage. The corruption has meant that the UK's Department for International Development has stopped direct budgetary support to the Government of Uganda. In 2012, €12 million was channelled out of the aid budgets from Ireland, Denmark and Norway directly into the bank accounts of officials working in the Prime Minister's office. We now have to provide our UK support through private sector and non-governmental organisations. We cannot pretend that that is a good thing—it is always better to work with Governments—but, to be honest, we know that if we want to help the people of Uganda, we cannot give money to their current Government.

**Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con):** When I worked in aid in Uganda, we ensured that the aid got to the people by delivering it ourselves, refusing to give it to any officials. We took it directly to the villagers or the people who required it. I know that is difficult, but I am sure that the hon. Gentleman agrees.

**Dr Williams:** It is a terrible state of affairs. If we want development to be sustainable, that is much more likely to happen through a democratically elected Government and by building the institutions within a country. Some people are so desperate, however, that they still need aid, and we cannot trust their Government to give that aid. I thank the hon. Gentleman for highlighting that point.

Transparency International ranks Uganda as 151st out of 180 countries in the world for corruption. That is worse than Kenya, which is 143rd, much worse than Tanzania at 107th or Ethiopia at 103rd, while Rwanda is ranked as high as 48th. In 2013, Transparency International stated:

“Corruption in Uganda is widespread and seen as one of the greatest obstacles to the country’s economic development as well as to the provision of quality public services...Such corruption challenges are exacerbated by weak law enforcement, which fuels a culture of impunity, particularly with regards to high-ranking officials involved in corruption schemes.”

The attacks on democracy, as well as undermining our shared development objectives, are important because Britain wants to provide military support to the country of Uganda. We want Uganda to have secure borders and to contribute to peace in Somalia. We cannot have that, however, unless we have confidence in Uganda’s democracy and rule of law. I ask the Minister: when there are questions about the Ugandan army’s use of cluster bombs in South Sudan, when the army is used to enter Parliament and, allegedly, to massacre people in Kasese, or when special forces are used to hunt down and arrest politicians campaigning in a by-election, how can we be sure that the people whom we are training engage only in peacekeeping activities?

**Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con):** I welcome what the hon. Gentleman is saying, and I thank him for bringing the issue before the House. Will he also, however, pay great tribute to those Ugandan soldiers who have given their lives in Mogadishu and wider Somalia in the cause of peacekeeping? Very brave men and women have done so to bring peace to that country.

**Dr Williams:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for making that point. I join him in paying real tribute to all the east African forces working in Somalia for the peacekeeping mission.

We need to know that the UK is not enabling the atrocities being committed within the country of Uganda by Ugandan forces. Of course, that would never be our intention, and I am sure that it would be argued that our training of its military forces helps them to become more professional and to meet international standards, but when soldiers are given orders from the top, they have to follow those orders. When the Ugandan Government deliberately use the military to undermine democracy, it is right for the UK to look carefully at our involvement.

Before he became President, Yoweri Museveni published a book called “What is Africa’s Problem?”, in which he wrote:

“The problem of Africa in general and Uganda in particular is not the people but leaders who want to overstay in power.”

I want to see a Uganda where it is possible for the Ugandan people, should they want a change of Government, to achieve that through democratic means.

Opposition politicians find themselves in an impossible position. It is hard to build good policies and to get widespread support for them when the democratic space is so curtailed. Between now and the next election in 2021, it is crucial that a united opposition builds a potentially winning manifesto with popular policies, that opposition politicians are allowed to campaign freely and enthuse the people of Uganda, and that the

opposition is given an equal chance to persuade people that they have an alternative platform for Government, on a level playing field.

There is no level playing field, however, because so many profoundly undemocratic occurrences have become normalised in Uganda. In a democracy, it is simply not acceptable for the military to arrest, beat and torture opposition politicians, for soldiers to enter Parliament and use physical force against MPs, or for elections to be rigged. Uganda’s democracy is under threat. The institutions that in a normal democracy would have the power to hold a Government to account have been systematically undermined, intimidated, bullied and cajoled by Government. Let no one be fooled: Uganda has a military Government in civilian clothes.

How can the UK, as a friend to the Ugandan people, best help to support their democracy? We are already supporting good governance and anti-corruption initiatives through the Department for International Development—I am sure the Minister will talk more about that—but when democratic institutions are systematically undermined, is that enough? Ugandan opposition leaders are asking the UK Government to place targeted sanctions on Uganda, to freeze the assets of Ugandan officials who are known for violations and abuses of human rights, to enforce a travel ban on Uganda’s leaders who are known for corruption and violation of human rights, and for Britain to condemn in the strongest terms the attacks on and abuse of Ugandan parliamentarians and all the activists inside and outside Uganda.

I would like the Minister to respond to those requests. I do not necessarily believe that all those things are needed. I certainly would not want to do anything that put at risk our relationship with the people of Uganda. Sanctions would be a last resort, but I understand why people are calling for them. Unless significant change happens in Uganda, the UK should take no option off the table.

I end by addressing the people of Uganda, some of whom are in the Public Gallery. We want the UK to work with them on security, sustainable development and business growth, but we are watching their Government closely. Our support for their Government comes with conditions. Members of Parliament such as myself and my colleagues here today will ask our Government to invest in their country if there is a thriving democracy and international standards are met. The United Kingdom must be on the side of the Ugandan people.

Democracy—the means by which we debate and create laws—is a process that requires the diligent engagement of citizens. Democracy fails when people cannot criticise their leaders, or if they do not feel confident that they can throw them out of office if they are not doing a good job. A healthy democracy can unlock so much potential in a country. But right now, the hopes of the Ugandan people are not being met by the people who govern them. That is why I say to the Ugandan people, whether in this Chamber in London or watching on their phone screens in Kampala: I am with you. We are with you.

We are watching and hoping for a brighter future for the Ugandan people. There are democrats across the world who know that that is possible, and we offer our solidarity in their fight for a Uganda governed by and in the interests of the Ugandan people—a Uganda guided by the unrestricted voices of its people. We are with



[Dr Paul Williams]

them because that is what a truly democratic Uganda could be: prosperous, peaceful and secure. If they work for it and their institutions are protected and defended, nothing can stand in the way of the millions who are desperate for change.

4.52 pm

**Mrs Pauline Latham** (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): It is very good to serve under your chairmanship, Ms McDonagh—I think it may be the first time in eight years that I have done so. I do not disagree with a word that the hon. Member for Stockton South (Dr Williams) said. He has lived there and has been steeped in the culture—he knows exactly what happens there. I, too, am a friend of Uganda.

4.53 pm

*Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.*

5.6 pm

*On resuming—*

**Siobhain McDonagh (in the Chair)**: We restart. I apologise, but I am now imposing time limits of four minutes for all speakers.

**Mrs Latham**: Thank you very much Ms McDonagh. As I was saying, I am a friend of Uganda. I have been to Uganda about 15 times and have even spent personal holidays there. I love the country and have found the people incredibly friendly.

I find the lack of democracy disturbing. The President and his troupe, so to speak, are making sure that they win the elections, which I do not believe are free and fair. As the hon. Member for Stockton South said, they go out and pay villagers to vote for them. I know that that happens. When we send observers for the election, the deals have already been done. The people feel intimidated and that they must vote for Museveni and his MPs.

I have personal experience. I have a friend who was a Member of Parliament—not when I first met him, but he became a Member of Parliament. He had to contest that election because it was done badly and it was shown in the High Court that he had won. He won the election again, but recently lost it. He is a medical doctor and since then he practices medicine privately—Museveni will not employ him because he is from the wrong party. He has been looking after the people that he used to represent in his home area for free. He has been treating them for nothing, giving them drugs and looking after what were his constituents. He has been beaten up and he has been put in prison. I have seen photographs of the beatings. The only reason he is still alive is that he managed to get himself transferred to hospital.

I have always said that people who put themselves up for election for opposition parties in countries like Uganda are incredibly brave. The worst that can happen to us in this country is that we lose an election. The worst that can happen over there is that they die. What is worse is that they die because the state is beating them, punishing them and ultimately could kill them.

We should be very careful about how we give money and the relationships we have with the Government of

Uganda. I am very pleased that international development money has been reduced and we are not giving it directly to the Government, but to third party organisations. We need to monitor that extremely carefully. If we do not, the money will get into the wrong hands and will be used for the wrong reasons.

I am concerned about the whole idea of democracy in Uganda. Uganda needs to prosper and it needs a good democratic system. It should have a good democratic system, but it does not, because it is abused. Until the abuse stops, we will not be able to stop elections being rigged. That is the truth of it and there is no point in beating about the bush. The elections are genuinely rigged. The hon. Gentleman spoke about political parties not being able to meet in groups of more than three. That is ludicrous. How can there be a democratic process when people are not able to meet in groups of more than three? It is just ridiculous to have to get the state's permission to be able to do that—and why would the state give it? It does not want big rallies.

Uganda is not like here, where we might have a church hall rally. They have huge rallies in the villages, because the only way the people can meet their candidates is to go out and see them. It is important that they do that so that they can weigh up one against the other, as happens here. That is not happening properly in Uganda anymore and we need a proper democratic system to be fair to the people there. There are so many things wrong in the Ugandan Parliament and the Ugandan system that we need to monitor them very carefully.

5.10 pm

**David Linden** (Glasgow East) (SNP): It is a pleasure to see you in the chair, as always, Ms McDonagh. I warmly congratulate the hon. Member for Stockton South (Dr Williams) on a passionate speech and pay tribute to his previous work in Uganda.

I visited Uganda as part of a Westminster Foundation for Democracy trip in February last year, facilitating training for young candidates. It was there that I observed a number of things that gave me concern about the situation for democracy in Uganda. One of my first observations on going to observe proceedings in the Parliament was that the military has seats in the Parliament. I was shocked and horrified when I saw someone in military uniform speaking at the Dispatch Box. I cannot possibly imagine having military in the House of Commons. I think it sends a very deep signal. The hon. Gentleman spoke about a military Government in civilian clothing, but the reality is that we saw them in military clothing in the Ugandan Parliament, and that is alarming.

I spent a couple of days facilitating training for young candidates for the People's Progressive party. One young guy that I met was taking part as the candidate for the PPP in the Jinja East by-election, which took place in March this year. That young guy, Mugaya Paul Geraldson, is now a good friend of mine. For the two days that I was there in an official capacity I facilitated the training, and on my free day I travelled at my own expense from Kampala out to Jinja East, largely to be a friend to Paul and go around as he was doing his rallies. One thing I observed was that there were hundreds of people turning out to his rallies—he was a young candidate who projected hope, ambition and energy. On election day he polled 48 votes, but there were hundreds of people at his rallies.

The final observation I offer—I am keen for the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) to get to speak as well—is that at the second of the two rallies I attended with Mugaya Paul, I was speaking to some of the people in that village when I was quickly bundled into a car by the people I was there with, because Museveni's thugs had turned up and made it clear in no uncertain terms that the rally was alarming to the Government and that this young candidate was a threat to Museveni's forces. That is deeply worrying.

I wanted to come here today and place on record a real experience of the suppression of democracy in Uganda. What that young candidate, who I hope will have another run at office, experienced in the course of that election was nothing short of appalling. I welcome the comments by the hon. Member for Stockton South today, and I hope the Minister takes on board my personal experiences. I leave hon. Members with that view of the military in Parliament. Surely that does not represent a good sign for democracy in any country in the world.

5.13 pm

**Alex Sobel** (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms McDonagh. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton South (Dr Williams), who made a powerful and eloquent speech. His long association with Uganda puts him in a position to be an authoritative advocate for human rights and democracy there, and I thank him for bringing this debate to the Chamber.

The Ugandan people have long suffered from tyrants who have committed crimes against their own people. The name Idi Amin will live long in infamy. The rule of Milton Obote was also mired in human rights abuses, with Amnesty International estimating that the regime had been responsible for more than 300,000 civilian deaths across Uganda. After Obote, Museveni became President in 1986. He said in his acceptance speech:

“The people of Africa, the people of Uganda, are entitled to a democratic government. It is not a favour from any regime. The sovereign people must be the public, not the government.”

Those are his own words—words that he should heed now.

President Museveni's tenure has always been problematic, but his attempts to constrain democracy have been creeping. First came the repealing of the two-term limit on the presidency, which was introduced in 1995 under his own presidency. The lifting of the term limit led Bob Geldof to say:

“Get a grip Museveni. Your time is up, go away”—

not untypical of Bob Geldof, we might think. The arrest of the main opposition leader Kizza Besigye, as my hon. Friend mentioned, in the lead-up to the third presidential election was another stain on an election that Museveni should not have been contesting. In December 2017 he succeeded in getting the presidential age limit of 75 removed, just as he was approaching that age himself. The hallmark of a dictator is stripping away the impediments to his becoming leader for life, and that is exactly what Museveni has done.

In 2017, shortly after I was elected, I had the pleasure of being invited to a meeting of Ugandan exiles in the UK who support the main opposition party, Forum for Democratic Change. I was invited by my old friend Jimmy Sydney, who is here today and who became a

social entrepreneur in Leeds after leaving Uganda. At that event I met Nandala Mafabi and through him found out about the conditions under which Ugandan MPs have to function. Nandala told me how the Parliament had been entered by Government troops, who had arrested MPs opposed to the life presidency; their symbol of a red hat and ribbon made it easier for the troops to spot them. I sat there imagining that happening to us here, today—troops coming in and stopping us having this debate because the Government did not like what we had to say. I found it unbelievable. It still is unbelievable to me that that could have happened in a country that calls itself a democracy and that MPs could be arrested in Parliament for exercising their democratic rights. This is surely a sign that democracy has died.

Just a couple of weeks after that event, I heard that Nandala had been arrested and spent two nights in the cells. His alleged crime was that he was part of a group of protestors demonstrating against the proposed amendment of the constitution to remove the presidential age limit. That is just the story of one MP; my hon. Friend told the stories of other MPs and the hon. Member for Glasgow East (David Linden) told that of yet another.

We must heed the words of the Ugandan community in the UK. Will the Minister commit to meeting their requests? I echo the requests made by my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton South for the Government to place targeted sanctions on Uganda, including on military materials; to freeze assets of Ugandan officials known for violations of human rights and abuses of power; to enforce a travel ban on Ugandan leaders known for corruption and violations of human rights; to condemn in the strongest terms the attacks and abuse of Ugandan parliamentarians and all activists, whether in or outside Uganda, including in this country, and to apply conditionality to aid to the Ugandan Government.

5.17 pm

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Member for Stockton South (Dr Williams) on bringing this debate to the House. I speak as the chair of the all-party parliamentary group for international freedom of religion or belief and as my party's spokesperson on human rights. I hear some incredibly disturbing stories regarding breaches of human rights, and the stories coming from Uganda most certainly bring a chill. I am a friend of Uganda and its people, but when I see wrongs, they must be spoken of in this place and the voice of its people heard. We are the voice for the voiceless, for those discriminated against, abused, attacked or brutalised.

As a democratically elected Member, I have had my share of social media attacks on the run-up to election. Unfounded or grossly exaggerated tales, media spin—you name it, I have seen it. I accept it because there is a reason people say politics is a dirty game, and no family member is safe from the mud-slinging, but when I read the stories of the so-called elections in Uganda, my skin crawled. When I realised that the UK Government have no way to be certain that UK relief funding is not being spent on training forces that go on to arrest and torture elected Ugandan MPs, my skin crawled some more and I must admit I questioned our ongoing support of Uganda.

I must be abundantly clear here. I am not questioning the relief that is given to on-the-ground bodies for humanitarian aid. Between December 2016 and February

[Jim Shannon]

2018, we provided food for over 1 million people, supported 64,000 women and 146,000 under-fives with immunisation and food supplements; ensured that 2,000 children have access to education services; ensured that 73% of the refugee population in Uganda accessed water through sustainable water systems, at an average of 17 litres per day; and provided relief items—blankets, kitchen sets, jerry cans and mosquito nets—to 11,000 people. We also challenge UN agencies to reform and to ensure that they deliver effectively for the most vulnerable and provide value for money for the UK taxpayer. We are clear in what we say here.

As of March 2018, contributions to the global goals and other Government commitments have achieved 248,000 children under 5, women and adolescent girls being reached through nutrition-related interventions; 572,000 additional women and girls being provided with modern methods of family planning; 56,000 children being supported to gain a decent education; and 130,000 people being given sustainable access to clean water and/or sanitation. That is right and proper, but a Department for International Development report outlined that only 25% of projected aid to Uganda goes to humanitarian projects. It is clear that a huge amount of aid goes elsewhere, which raises questions. We in this House have every right to ask those questions and to seek the answers. How much of the money is used for the training of troops and officers? How do we justify training a military that seems to do simply what the President demands, without any evidential base? That is completely incredulous and unacceptable. How can we, as a true democracy, turn a blind eye to the absolute desecration of democracy, and support a Government who allow—indeed, carry out—abuse and beatings of elected representatives for opposing the Government?

The hon. Member for Stockton South referred to the alleged massacre, which I did not know about. Let us in this House do something about that today. I am proud that we help those who cannot help themselves, which we highlight in debates all the time. However, our role is not to prop up or support regimes that flagrantly disregard the basic principles of democracy and seek merely to wear a cloak of democracy over a decrepit body of dictatorship.

There are questions to be answered. I look to the Minister, for whom I have great respect, to assuage my fears, and the fears of everyone here, and outline how we will ensure that every penny of funding for Uganda is for humanitarian aid and not for training an army to be used against any dissenting voices, which is completely unacceptable.

**Siobhain McDonagh (in the Chair):** I call Chris Law, spokesperson for the Scottish National party. Convention gives you five minutes.

5.21 pm

**Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms McDonagh. I thank the hon. Member for Stockton South (Dr Williams) for such an eloquent and powerful speech, particularly when he said that the state has become personalised under President Museveni.

As we have heard, President Museveni has held power in Uganda since January 1986 through brute force, election-rigging and corruption. In 2005, Ugandans voted to return to a multi-party political system, but the

presidential elections held the following year were marred by intimidation, violence and voter disenfranchisement—features that remain present in Ugandan political life and were also clearly noted in the 2016 general election. Museveni has most recently been accused of heavy-handed tactics in dealing with political opposition. In August last year, a group of opposition MPs led by pop star-turned-MP Bobi Wine were arrested while campaigning at a parliamentary by-election and subsequently tortured. The UK has addressed this issue before and must be prepared to do so again. In 2005, the UK diverted £15 million of aid meant for the Ugandan Government because of alleged human rights violations, and withheld an additional £5 million until fair, multi-party elections were held.

I recently visited Uganda with award-winning playwright, friend and former colleague—from when I worked in film making—Jaimini Jethwa, who is from my city of Dundee. Her play, “The Last Queen of Scotland”, explores Asian identity in a Scottish context and tells her story as a young child refugee who in 1971, along with her family and 60,000 other Asians, was given only 90 days’ notice to leave the country by its then-ruler Idi Amin. During that visit I was assured that Uganda had come a very long way since the early 1970s under Idi Amin, during whose ruthless eight-year regime an estimated 300,000 civilians were massacred. I learned a lot about the people, listened to many stories and made some great friends, but it is clear that Uganda still has a long way to go in its democratic journey to ensuring an electoral system capable of enabling all citizens to participate peacefully in politics, free of intimidation and violence.

I will turn to the US and the UK’s relationship with Uganda. The United States has long turned a blind eye to human rights violations in Uganda, primarily because of its military and economic interests in the region. However, the historical relationship between Uganda and the UK means that the UK has both the power and the responsibility to uphold and support democracy and human rights, and at the same time, through its special relationship with the US, influence US policy on Uganda. Will the Minister tell us what recent discussions have been had, either by DFID or the Foreign Office, with the US on improving democracy in Uganda, and what changes, if any, the US has made to its foreign policy in Uganda to improve the situation on the ground?

Uganda also hosts 1 million refugees, mostly from South Sudan. It is the third-largest refugee-hosting nation in the world. I discovered during a more recent visit, with the International Development Committee last November, that it has one of the most progressive attitudes to immigration, as refugees have the ability to work and settle in Uganda. This open-door policy has been seen as a role model throughout the world. However, the number of refugees is expected to continue to increase. Support for refugees is the largest financial contribution that DFID makes in Uganda and, owing to the sensitivity of the situation, we need to ensure that that stays in place, to prevent escalation or humanitarian crisis. I strongly suggest to the Minister that the continuation of humanitarian aid to Uganda is vital and must continue. What steps are being taken by the UK Government to ensure that aid to Uganda is used responsibly, and that breaches of the democratic process are addressed?

Furthermore, it was recently confirmed that the Ugandan armed forces have received intelligence training provided by the UK, and there is concern that Ugandan forces



trained at Sandhurst may have been used in the arrest of opposition politicians. Only a year ago, I stood in this Chamber speaking out against UK Government funding of Burmese military training programmes—the same military that went on to commit a relentless and systematic campaign of violence against the Rohingya Muslims described by the UN as a

“textbook example of ethnic cleansing”.

Will the Minister tell us how the Government can be certain that UK Government money is not being spent on training forces who go on to arrest and torture elected Ugandan MPs?

Finally, the UK has a strong historical relationship with Uganda in the form of the Commonwealth and, today, in the form of aid. That relationship has previously been leveraged to support a stronger democracy in Uganda. The UK should be prepared to do so again, to ensure that democracy and the rule of the law are protected.

**Siobhain McDonagh (in the Chair):** I call the Labour Front-Bench spokesperson, Liz McInnes. Convention gives you five minutes as well.

5.26 pm

**Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms McDonagh. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton South (Dr Williams) for securing the debate and for his eloquent description of the political situation in Uganda. Uganda is clearly a country about which he has a great deal of knowledge, arising from the time that he spent living and working there as a doctor, as he described.

There is no doubt that there are real problems with the democratic process in Uganda, as my hon. Friend has clearly outlined, particularly with President Museveni's record on the oppression, imprisonment and torture of political opponents. The President has changed the constitution, scrapping the presidential age limit so that he can stand in the 2021 elections, when he will be 76 years of age. However, as a young radical in the 1980s, he publicly scorned African rulers who clung to power and was involved in the rebellions that toppled Idi Amin and Milton Obote. Now, after more than 30 years in office, he is clearly clinging pretty hard himself.

In 1986, when he was sworn in as President, Museveni was seen by the west as one of a new generation of African leaders. He proclaimed upon election that Uganda would return to democracy. It is clear that the President's views have undergone a change since then. I think we can all agree that the imprisonment and torture of opposition activists has no place in a democracy.

The treatment of musician-turned-politician Bobi Wine has brought the Museveni regime to the attention of the west. As we have heard, Bobi Wine was arrested while campaigning last August and was badly injured while in detention. Three people were killed and around 100 injured in the unrest that followed Wine's arrest. The international music community united in their condemnation of Wine's treatment, with Chris Martin, Chrissie Hynde, Brian Eno, Damon Albarn and Femi Kuti among the 80 signatories of a statement strongly condemning the arrest, imprisonment and life-threatening physical attack by Ugandan Government forces on Bobi Wine.

Uganda is falling down on its commitment to human rights. It is a member of the United Nations and the African Union. It has ratified many UN human rights

conventions and has thus made binding international commitments to adhere to the standards laid down in universal human rights documents. Press freedom is also threatened in Uganda, with the country coming 117th of 180 in the World Press Freedom Index. It has actually fallen since 2017, showing that the situation is getting worse.

It is reported that acts of intimidation and violence against reporters are an almost daily occurrence in Uganda, with many instances of journalists being arrested when covering stories, particularly around opposition politics. One example is that of Reuters photographer James Akena, who was beaten by Uganda People's Defence Force soldiers while photographing protests against the treatment of Bobi Wine.

Uganda also, notoriously, has draconian anti-LGBT laws, with both male and female homosexual activity being illegal and liable to lead to imprisonment on charges of gross indecency. Activists who tried to open Uganda's first LGBT centre in October last year were warned by the Minister for Ethics and Integrity that opening such a centre would be a criminal act. Uganda is a Member of the Commonwealth and as such has a commitment to the protection of human rights, freedom of expression and equality of opportunity. Ironically, these commitments were reviewed and agreed as part of the core criteria for Commonwealth membership under the Kampala communiqué, which was formulated at the 2007 Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting held in Uganda.

We must also consider the role of the Department for International Development in Uganda, which is providing £100 million in aid in 2018-19, which goes to support the many refugees from countries such as the DRC and South Sudan, education and family planning services, and supporting Uganda's anti-corruption and accountability institutions. I hope that when the Minister responds she will be able to outline what pressure we can bring to bear on Uganda to fulfil its commitments as a member of the Commonwealth and how bilateral aid from DFID is helping in the fight against corruption.

5.31 pm

**The Minister for Africa (Harriett Baldwin):** It is very good to serve under your chairmanship, Ms McDonagh. I add my congratulations to the hon. Member for Stockton South (Dr Williams) on securing this debate. In all the contributions to this debate, the strong friendships that exist between parliamentarians in the UK and parliamentarians in Uganda, between people in the UK and people in Uganda, have come through loud and clear. He set the tone of the debate in that spirit of friendship. I pay tribute to his work, over many years, providing healthcare to the corner of Uganda that he so descriptively told us about. A number of hon. Members spoke with great personal passion and from experience through their own links to, and friendship with, Uganda. As I go through my remarks, I will try to pick up on the questions asked in the debate.

The UK shares Uganda's ambition to move from low-income to middle-income status. As long-term friends and partners, we believe that Uganda's success really matters to us in the UK. Our strong, genuine friendship and partnership enables us to develop a wide range of mutual interests and to speak frankly to each other about issues

[*Harriett Baldwin*]

of mutual concern, whether in a bilateral context or in the Commonwealth meetings. In recent years, political contact has been revitalised. President Museveni visited the UK twice last year, not only for the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting, but for the illegal wildlife trade conference. Over the last two years, 11 UK Ministers have travelled to Uganda, including myself, and I know that the Select Committee on International Development was there very recently as well.

First, I want to pick up on the point that the hon. Member for Stockton South made about the Kasese massacre and bring him up to date on that. In March 2017, the UK, along with EU missions, released a statement deploring the violence and calling for a comprehensive independent investigation. The UK and EU partners continue to raise concerns over the lack of progress on the investigation with the Government of Uganda, including in the recent article 8 dialogue with President Museveni.

When I visited in October, I met some of the more than 1 million refugees, who have been referred to in the debate. Uganda has a very progressive refugee policy. In Uganda, 82% of refugees are women and children. The country enables those refugees to live in much the same way as its own citizens. When I was in Uganda, I was pleased to announce up to £210 million of funding to help those refugees and to help Uganda to provide refugees with nutrition, vaccinations and schooling. I also saw how the new biometric system for refugee registration is helping to verify refugee status and reduce fraud.

A number of hon. Members raised the question of how we deliver aid within Uganda. I reassure colleagues that this is always done with trusted partners. Wherever we find concerns, as we did recently with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights report, we take steps to suspend future payments until we are sure that the method by which we are delivering our support is free from corruption. We are very concerned when we discover that there has been a reduction in the money that is getting to the frontline, to those who need it most.

On the point about the conditionality of aid, I beg to differ with the hon. Member for Leeds North West (Alex Sobel), because we allocate based on need and reaching the very poorest. That is the spirit in which we deliver our development assistance. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) asked about the proportions in terms of the percentages. I reassure colleagues that there is no Department for International Development money spent on any military training. Some 40% of what we spend goes to human development, including education. Some impressive statistics were read out and are available on our website. Nearly 30% is spent on economic development. About 25% is spent on humanitarian assistance and about 6% is spent on addressing governance and security—if I have time, I shall go into more detail on that. About 1% is spent on climate and the environment.

We believe that Uganda is making important efforts to help to address the conflicts from which those refugees have fled. We welcome Uganda's role in brokering the 2018 South Sudan peace deal, for example, the success of which will depend on Uganda's continuing work to

support its implementation. We should also remember that Uganda was the first country to provide peacekeepers to the African Union mission to Somalia. Uganda remains the largest contributor of troops to the AMISOM mission. I pay tribute to Ugandan peacekeepers, who work for security and stability in Somalia, often at great personal risk. Colleagues may wish to enquire further about the work of the Ministry of Defence in this area, but the training that we do is to support those missions. The work that we do alongside the United States is to train the troops for the AMISOM mission and to provide some counter-improvised explosive device capability. There are frequent P3 meetings to discuss that joint work, but that is the focus of the training. All of that training includes a human rights training element.

Regarding trade and development, we are working hard in partnership with Uganda to boost its economic development, improve healthcare and education, and create jobs, all of which are needed if Uganda is to realise the huge potential of its young and growing population. We are doing that through DFID's economic development programme and by providing UK export finance. In terms of export finance, we have already provided £210 million through the Department for International Trade for the construction of Kabaale international airport, and UK companies are helping to deliver nearly \$1 billion-worth of infrastructure projects in Uganda, with an emphasis on championing local content and skills transfer. In his first year, Lord Popat, the trade envoy, has seen an increase in trade between our countries of 60%.

Our continued support, and our desire to increase UK investment in Uganda, will rely on strong institutions that uphold the rule of law and democratic principles, which gets to the heart of today's debate; that deliver professional, expert advice to support the business environment; and that tackle corruption. That would benefit all Uganda's citizens, not only foreign investors.

In terms of the wider democratic issues that have been raised, clearly, as a sovereign, democratic nation, Uganda's political and economic choices are matters for the Ugandan Government and people. As the hon. Member for Stockton South has advocated, however, we believe that coherent and effective institutions will underpin Uganda's development. As a parliamentarian, I pay tribute to the examples that have been given and the bravery of people who put their names forward for Parliament.

That is why, during the 2016 presidential election, the UK worked with the international community to support the electoral environment in Uganda. Our programmes will continue to support democratic accountability at local and national levels ahead of the next round of elections. It is also why we have spent more than £30 million since 2014 on helping to strengthen the institutions of Government that buttress democratic freedoms and advocate the equal treatment of all Ugandans under the terms of their constitution and laws.

Clearly, a free and accountable civil society is a vital part of any successful democracy. We salute the resilience of the media sector and the willingness of journalists, bloggers and citizens to voice their opinions. I urge the Ugandan Government to embrace and encourage such genuine meaningful debate.

Similarly, democratically elected representatives must be free to voice their opinions during election campaigns and once they have been elected. We heard the concern

of Ugandan MPs from across the political spectrum expressed in a parliamentary debate last month about the treatment of Mr Kyagulanyi, and their calls for him to be able to operate freely and for an investigation into the cancellation of a number of his concerts. That follows his arrest and that of other opposition figures, and allegations of torture by the Ugandan security forces, at the time of the Arua by-election in August 2018.

Our high commissioner joined EU colleagues in calling on the Ugandan Government, political parties and civil society to work together to investigate the allegations swiftly and transparently, in accordance with the rule of law, and to emphasise that there could be no impunity. As a long-standing and close partner of Uganda, we will continue to emphasise that strong institutions and a

functioning democracy are essential to its aspirations for trade, investment, jobs and growth. We will continue to raise concerns with the Ugandan Government, while building a long-term partnership that supports those aspirations.

I am a bit confused about the time remaining, but if I have more time, there is more that I could add.

**Siobhain McDonagh (in the Chair):** Unfortunately, the debate has finished; it is slightly confusing. I apologise to Dr Paul Williams for not being able to wind up.

5.43 pm

*Motion lapsed, and sitting adjourned without Question put (Standing Order No. 10(14)).*





# Westminster Hall

Wednesday 9 January 2019

[MR LAURENCE ROBERTSON *in the Chair*]

## Diabetes

9.30 am

**Sir John Hayes** (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered diabetes.

What a delight it is to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Robertson. C. S. Lewis, the great Christian writer, said:

“Courage is not simply one of the virtues, but the form of every virtue at the testing point.”

Every day, our constituents—people across Britain—are tested by the challenges that are the effects of diabetes, which is the fastest growing health crisis of our time. There is barely a family in Britain that has not been touched by it. As so many elderly ladies do, my late mother contracted type 2 diabetes when she reached her 70s. I spoke to colleagues from across the House in preparation for this debate, and many of them, including one this morning, said that they had a family member who had been affected by the disease.

In the last 20 years, the number of people in the UK living with diabetes has doubled, reaching 4.6 million. Every day, 700,000 people are dealing with the worst effects, and 700 people are newly diagnosed as suffering from some kind of diabetes. Amazingly, that is one person every two minutes, so this debate is not only necessary and apposite; rather, I would go one further and say that it is essential.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds** (Torfaen) (Lab): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Sir John Hayes:** I shall just finish the next exciting sentence and then I will happily give way. By 2025, there could be as many as 5 million people living with diabetes in the UK.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for giving way and congratulate him on securing this debate. The statistic for Wales is that one person in 14 is affected. Does he agree that, going forward, we must look at prevention—seeing the warning signs and looking at lifestyle changes—as well as having excellent treatment for those who are formally diagnosed?

**Sir John Hayes:** Absolutely. I will deal with that during my speech. Information that leads to a better understanding of risk, which in turn leads to prevention, is critical, particularly with respect to type 2 diabetes, which is the type that I mentioned earlier when I referred to my late mother.

I spoke of hundreds of thousands of people who suffer from type 1 diabetes—about 500,000 at the moment, but that could easily rise to 700,000—but of course 90% of sufferers are type 2 diabetics, and prevention is particularly critical in their case.

**John Howell** (Henley) (Con): My right hon. Friend is making a very strong case. Is he aware of the new research into the treatment of type 2 diabetes, which suggests that a change of diet can eradicate it, giving the person a clean bill of health?

**Sir John Hayes:** I was going to refer to the achievements of the deputy leader of the Labour party, the hon. Member for West Bromwich East (Tom Watson), later in my speech, but my hon. Friend obliges me to highlight them earlier than I had planned. He is a model example of someone who, having contracted type 2 diabetes, adjusted their lifestyle and diet, lost large amounts of weight, and fought back against—indeed, fought off—type 2 diabetes, exactly as my hon. Friend suggests. Many other hon. Members, including some in the Chamber today, are living with diabetes. Remarkably, our Prime Minister not only manages to hold down her job with immense dedication and determination, but manages type 1 diabetes simultaneously. I spoke about every family and every constituency, but many Members of this House have personal experience of dealing with both type 1 and type 2 diabetes.

During the debate, I will focus on three areas in which we can make real progress: the human and financial cost of diabetes; how education and technology can enable self-management and improve outcomes for both type 1 and type 2; and how, in the case of type 2 diabetes, intervention on societal and individual levels can prevent the onset and mitigate the effects of such a serious problem.

To prevent just a fraction of the complications arising from diabetes would have a big impact on the national health service, generating significant savings as well as fundamentally reducing pain and distress for individuals. Every week in England, over 160 lower-limb amputations result directly from the effects of diabetes, so the ability to provide high-quality diabetic foot care is of particular concern. The recently published NHS long-term plan makes a renewed commitment to the diabetes transformation fund, and I know that that will be welcomed by the whole diabetes community.

I hope that the Minister will set out what steps the Government are taking to encourage the use of education and technology to better support people in self-managing their diabetes, as that will reduce the burden of diabetes both on the individual and on the NHS. A few years ago, a family came to my constituency surgery, with a tiny, wonderful little girl. She was just about to start school. She had already been diagnosed as a type 1 diabetic. That little girl, Faith Robinson, was wearing technology that allowed her glucose to be monitored and insulin to be administered to her—that was absolutely necessary because she was so young. The family came to me with a request, which I will pass on to the Minister so that he can work with colleagues across Government to ensure that this happens routinely for all constituents who need it. They asked that Faith receive one-to-one support at school to manage that technology. The little girl was under five, and needed people at the school she was about to attend to understand the condition and how to deal with the challenges that she faced.

I estimate that there are constituents across the country in similar circumstances, with very young sufferers who need that kind of care and support. I invite the Minister not necessarily to comment today—I do not want to

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catch him out; that is not my intention—but to reflect on that and to say more about what can be done for that little girl, who I was able to help in that circumstance, and for many others like her.

**Mr Philip Dunne** (Ludlow) (Con): I not only congratulate my right hon. Friend on securing the debate but thank him for allowing me to intervene on that point. My second daughter was two and a half when she was diagnosed as an insulin-dependent type 1 diabetic. I very much empathise with the story that he has just told us about his constituent. My daughter was barely able to describe her feelings because she was only just talking at the time, which was really quite challenging for the clinicians treating her, as she was unable to describe the impact of treatment and how she felt.

I agree with my right hon. Friend that the introduction of technology—both a result and part of the significant research efforts in this country by charities and the Medical Research Council—is leading to opportunities in treatment provision, in particular the flash glucose monitoring device, which I know the Government will introduce across the country in a more even way than in the past. That is very welcome, but it remains subject to clinical guidance. I urge the Minister to look at that guidance and the attributes required for people to have access to those devices, because they remain quite restricted.

**Sir John Hayes:** With the insight and acumen that characterised my right hon. Friend's ministerial career, he has identified a point that I was going to make later. With his permission, I will amplify that in my speech. I was aware of his personal circumstances and of his expertise as a result of having a daughter with diabetes. He will recognise that the average sufferer spends about three hours a year with a healthcare professional. Self-management is therefore critical and, in turn, technology is essential to such self-management. We cannot expect a healthcare professional to be on call every time someone needs support or the kind of treatment that is routine for someone such as my right hon. Friend's young daughter. I entirely endorse his remarks. The Minister will have heard them and will respond accordingly.

In essence, I want a world in which all people with diabetes have access to the right information, advice and training, not just at the point of diagnosis but throughout their lives. People will say, "Well, of course, we all want the very best, and we all want the ideal," but if we do not aim for the very best, we will get something very much less than that, so I make no apologies for being definitive in my determination to aim for that ideal. It is critical that we as parliamentarians should look to more distant horizons than sometimes the prevailing powers in Government—as I know from my long experience of that—would encourage us to do. Such debates as this allow us to do that in a cross-party way, for this is not about party political knockabout but about something much more fundamental.

Only if we can achieve the ideal will people be well placed to gain confidence and to cope as the Prime Minister does—as I have described—and as the deputy leader of the Labour party does. They can manage their condition and do not have their lives inhibited by it, and so believe that their opportunities are unaffected by the condition.

To ensure the early uptake of education, it must be provided in a useful format: digitally and through every kind of agency, whether that is schools working with health professionals, or local authorities, which have a responsibility for public health following the Health and Social Care Act 2012, stepping up to the mark too. I shall say a little more about the co-ordination of that, although the Minister is already aware of my concerns. It is about ensuring that our public health effort on diabetes is co-ordinated, consistent and collaborative. That is vital, for reasons already mentioned by colleagues in interventions.

I welcome the commitment in the NHS long-term plan, as I said, to expand the support on offer for people with type 1 and type 2 diabetes, including through the provision of structured education.

**Sue Hayman** (Workington) (Lab): The right hon. Gentleman is making incredibly important points. He mentioned the deputy leader of the Labour party, who turned his life around through diet and exercise—nutrition. That is an incredibly important issue in my constituency. Throughout west Cumbria, we have serious levels of diabetes, health deprivation and obesity. I thank the right hon. Gentleman for making what is an incredibly important point about bringing together health education at a very young age, and I encourage the Government to invest in that.

**Sir John Hayes:** I hope that the Minister, in respect of that excellent intervention and my earlier remarks, will say how he will ensure that that kind of vital education is provided in a format and at a point that works for everyone. This is about getting to people by a means and at a place that will penetrate, have effect and be comprehensible. The objectives in the long-term plan are right, but how we deliver those objectives has become the vital next step.

We have already spoken in this debate about technology. A flexible approach to the provision of technology, as well as education and support, is critical. Once equipped with information and skills, people must have access to, and the choice from, a range of technologies to help them to manage their condition in everyday life, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr Dunne) mentioned a few minutes ago. For people with type 2 diabetes, that is about ensuring access to the required number of glucose test strips. In the rapidly developing world of type 1 technology, insulin pumps and continuous glucose monitors can radically transform lives.

Decisions on which technologies are available should be made with reference to advice from clinicians, patients and, perhaps most importantly, health economists, who will help to determine value to the NHS.

**Mr Edward Vaizey** (Wantage) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**Sir John Hayes:** I will give way, but I want to make my point before I do so, and it might well inform and inspire my right hon. Friend's intervention: it concerns me that, in contrast to medicines, medical devices and now digital solutions do not have clear processes for appraisal and subsequent funding once approved.

**Mr Vaizey:** My right hon. Friend has indeed inspired me. I do not have diabetes, but I tried a FreeStyle Libre sensor because a constituent of mine is involved in the



company. Given my right hon. Friend's remarks, he seems to agree with me that a robust process of cost-benefit analysis would show that the more people who were issued with that device, the more the health service would save in the long term from people being able to avoid catastrophic incidents because they could monitor their glucose levels much more effectively.

**Sir John Hayes:** I agree entirely with my right hon. Friend. In the modern idiom, we need to be technology-neutral about that, because the field is changing rapidly. As new technology comes on stream and improves, we need to be sufficiently responsive to and flexible about those changes to ensure that people get the very best, latest technology available to them, for the reasons he gave.

The limits on self-management by the restrictions on technology inhibit people's wellbeing, confidence and, thereby, opportunities. I want to ensure that the provision of technology is consistent throughout the country. There are suggestions that such provision is patchy, that some places are better than others and that some of our constituencies are not getting all that they deserve. The Minister will not want that, because he is an extremely diligent and resourceful Minister—I know that from previous experience—and I want him to tell us how he will ensure that the technology is appraised properly, is delivered consistently and, accordingly, will change lives beneficially.

**Mr Dunne:** My right hon. Friend is being generous with his time. May I elaborate a little more on that specific point to give an indication to the Minister of the specifics that might cause difficulty between different clinical commissioning group areas? In my experience, those who are allowed to have clinical access to a glucose monitoring device already need to have their blood sugar levels under control—in single digits, below nine. For many people, however, the monitoring device is the one thing that gives them the ability to get better control of their blood sugar glucose levels. Therefore, if they do not get access to it until they are under control, it does not have the immediate benefit to their lifestyles that it would if the regime were slightly more permissive in the allocation of the devices.

**Sir John Hayes:** My right hon. Friend makes a very shrewd point about cause and effect. In Scotland, for example, both the processes leading to allocation and the actual allocation of technology are much more routine, as he suggests should be the case. I hope the Minister will tell us today or subsequently how he will ensure that that becomes true for the whole of our kingdom—that the very principles set out by my right hon. Friend become embedded in the way in which we approach technology, ensuring that it is allocated according to need.

We all agree that the resources should be targeted to secure optimal outcomes for the 4.6 million people who have been diagnosed with the condition. In addition to those diagnosed, however, one in three adults in the UK has pre-diabetes and might be at risk of developing type 2 diabetes if they do not change their lifestyle—a point made by a number of Members in interventions. About three in five cases of type 2 diabetes can be

prevented or delayed. A focus on preventing the onset of diabetes should be of paramount importance. G. K. Chesterton said:

“It isn't that they can't see the solution. It is that they can't see the problem.”

By seeing the problem, the solution will be implicit, because many more people will never develop type 2 diabetes if they make those adjustments to their lifestyle.

There is a dilemma, though: is it better that 50,000 people get a perfect solution and are prevented from having diabetes, or that 5 million people reduce their risk marginally? Let me set that out more clearly. Is it better that a small number of people achieve what the deputy leader of the Labour party, the hon. Member for West Bromwich East, has done—losing immense amounts of weight, changing their lifestyle and completely revising their diet? Or is it better that a very much larger number of people make a smaller change, lose less weight and change their lifestyle more marginally, but by so doing significantly reduce their risk of developing type 2 diabetes?

That is a challenge in health education; it affects many aspects of the health service's work. It probably means that, rather than seeing this issue purely from a clinical perspective, we have to democratise the diabetes debate, spread the word much more widely and get many more people to lose a couple of inches off their waist, to lose a stone or half a stone. That effect would be immense in reducing the risk of diabetes, not for tens of thousands but for millions of people.

If the figures I have brought forward are so—I have cited them only because I have learnt them from Diabetes UK and others who have helped me to prepare for this debate—we would change the lives of very large numbers of constituents in a way they would be able to manage, understand, comprehend and act upon reasonably quickly. I want the Minister to reflect on the dilemma I have described; it may not be quite so much of an either/or as I have painted it, but we need a democratic debate about that, which is part of the reason I have brought this debate to the House. Certainly we need an open and grown-up conversation about some of those measures and how we go about tackling what I have described as a crisis.

I do not want to speak forever, Mr Robertson—I know you and others in the Chamber will be disappointed to hear me say that. That will cause disappointment and even alarm among some, but I want others to contribute the debate. However, I have a couple of other points to make so I will move on—having taken a number of interventions already, I hope colleagues will bear with me.

I have been fascinated to read about research funded by Diabetes UK that proves that remission is possible. I would like to take the time to congratulate the hon. Member for West Bromwich East once again and to say that I hope many more people will recognise that remission is a real possibility for them by making changes in what they do.

Part of the issue is how lives more generally have changed. My father cycled five miles to work and five miles home every day, but now most people do not do that. Once many more people worked in manual jobs—my father had a physique like Charles Atlas, but the nearest I have come to Charles Atlas is reading an atlas. Part of the problem is the way we live now; far fewer people exercise implicitly in the way he did, and it seems that

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junk food is more appealing to many people than eating fresh, healthy produce—indeed, that has been recognised by successive Governments as significant for health outcomes.

Evidence shows the best way to reduce the risk of diabetes is through a healthy diet, being physically active and reducing weight. That can be facilitated through societal approaches and targeted individual interventions. Technology, including digital services to support lifestyle changes, is increasingly critical in diabetes prevention. To be sustainable, methods to prevent type 2 diabetes should focus on individual behaviour change, not just short-term activity levels.

We recently learned that, by their 10th birthday, the average child in the UK has consumed 18 years' worth of sugar. That means they consume 2,800 more sugar cubes per year than recommended levels. The current food chain has become badly distorted. Basic knowledge that my parents' generation took for granted about how to buy, cook, prepare and store food has steadily but alarmingly declined.

We have allowed soulless supermarkets to drive needless overconsumption of packaged, processed, passive, perturbing products, and it is time that the greed and carelessness of corporate multinational food retailers gave way to a better model. It is not a coincidence, it is something considerably more than that; as local food retailers have declined—people knew from whom they were buying, understood what they were buying and where it came from—the consumption of processed, packaged ready meals has grown. We need to rebalance the food chain in favour of locally produced, healthy produce and to re-educate people about how to buy, cook, eat and enjoy it.

**Luke Graham** (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): I will certainly give no lectures on buying and cooking food, but will my right hon. Friend join me in supporting Diabetes UK's Food Upfront campaign, which calls for a front-of-pack traffic light system to ensure that the content and nutritional value of processed foods are much clearer for people who are suffering from diabetes, and for a whole other range of dietary and nutritional needs?

**Sir John Hayes:** Entirely; in fact, I call on the Minister to do just that: will he introduce a mandatory front-of-pack traffic light labelling system, which is supported not only by my hon. Friend but by 83% of the population when asked whether that should happen? The Minister will be in tune with popular opinion; he will become something of a popular hero by responding to my hon. Friend's request, which I amplify.

**Mr Vaizey:** We have Belisha beacons—could this not be the moment for Brine indicators?

**Sir John Hayes:** It could indeed. Not only that—I wonder whether we might consider a watershed on the advertising of junk food. Wherever children go, they face adverts suggesting that they eat all kinds of foods. As children, we never ate those things, did we? We were not exposed to the same kind of seductive, alluring advertising suggesting that children should consume that kind of food. There is an argument for cracking down, and Government have a role to play. Again, that

kind of watershed on junk food advertising is supported by 76% of the population. The Minister would be a double hero if he did that.

Fitness matters, too. There must be a focus on exercise, given that studies illustrate that regular exercise pays dividends in respect of health and wellbeing, including diabetes. That is why we should not build on playing fields, close down sports halls and concrete over green spaces where people walk, play, run and enjoy all the opportunities to get healthy.

There is a link between poverty and ill health, as Members in the Chamber know very well. Although 6.6% of Britons have diabetes, that percentage falls markedly in wealthy areas. In Richmond upon Thames, 3.6% of residents have diabetes; in Bradford, the number rises to 10.4%. In south Lincolnshire, where my constituency is located, 7.3% of people have been diagnosed as diabetic. Such health inequalities must be addressed. It is with that in mind that I have campaigned so hard for the protection and maintenance of our parks and green spaces, which are often the only places that communities in less advantaged areas have to exercise, play sport and get healthy. In the case of diabetes prevention, do we perhaps take too puritanical an approach by rigidly pursuing individual outcomes? As I said, contrast that with what I described as the democratisation of the debate and the wider view that I have begun to outline today.

I commend, finally, the work of Government and the NHS on moving towards a fresh approach to diabetes in the NHS long-term plan, with a commitment to double the number of diabetes prevention programmes to 200,000 places. None the less, hon. Members will agree that that is a fraction of the 12.9 million people who are at high risk. Will my hon. Friend the Minister say how he plans to take a measured approach and appraise the evidence for all available solutions that might reach the wider population, beyond those targeted special programmes for that relatively small number—well, 200,000 is not a tiny number, but it is a relatively small proportion of the total number of people at risk of contracting diabetes?

Much commendable progress has been made, but it is now time for the Government to do several things. First, they must intensify their public information campaign and encourage everyone to speak about their own type 2 diabetes with their healthcare professional. Secondly, they should ensure that healthcare professionals offer a range of proven solutions, be that education or technology to enable self-management, or the resource to facilitate prevention at scale. Thirdly, they should continually review a rapidly changing environment and update the House on the tough political decisions being made to tackle this crisis of immense proportions. Politicians can no longer afford to abnegate their responsibility to a so-called expert class driven by bureaucracy. Too much is at stake. I know that the Minister will not be able to respond now to all my points, but I invite him to meet me and other concerned colleagues once he has had a chance to reflect on some of the issues, so that we can take the debate forward.

I began with C. S. Lewis, and I will end with him as well:

“We all want progress...If you are on the wrong road progress means doing an about-turn and walking back to the right road and in that case the man who turns back soonest is the most progressive man.”

I do not think we are entirely on the wrong road, but we must be honest about what more we can do. That is not for our own interests or sake, and it is not even for the Minister's heroic reputation, which I championed earlier. It is for all those who are suffering, or who might suffer, from the crippling illness that is diabetes.

10.1 am

**Mr George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab):** I congratulate the right hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes) on giving us the opportunity to debate this subject, and on the comprehensive way he introduced it. He rightly spoke about the potential of technology—I will say more about that in a moment—and about the distinction between those who deal with type 1 diabetes and those with type 2 diabetes. It is important always to make that distinction, because type 1 diabetes is an autoimmune condition over which the person involved has no control. It is not a lifestyle-related problem; someone is born with a predisposition to diabetes and something—we do not really understand what—will trigger it at some point in their life, often at a young age. There is also increasing incidence of people developing type 1 diabetes at an older age, which is a relatively new phenomenon. I will confine my remarks to type 1 diabetes and consider what can be done to help people better to manage their condition.

The Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation is working with Cambridge University to develop an artificial pancreas. The problem with type 1 diabetes is that the pancreas does not work to produce the required levels of insulin—indeed, in most cases it produces no insulin at all. Currently, a person can have a device for continuous blood glucose monitoring, and if it is judged that the condition is not being managed satisfactorily, they can also have an insulin pump. Those are two separate devices; the beauty of the artificial pancreas is that through an algorithm the two are linked, so while the person receives continuous blood glucose level monitoring, the algorithm also enables the insulin pump to respond to a requirement for additional insulin, depending on the blood glucose level. The potential is enormous, and I commend the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation for its work. The technology the right hon. Gentleman referred to is now close to being so good that type 1 diabetes will become much easier to manage, which is important.

Before Christmas, I secured an Adjournment debate on the development of the artificial pancreas in which I mentioned the fact that people are now devising their own artificial pancreases. It seems mostly to involve young people who, in some cases, are technologically savvy enough to devise their own algorithms and link a blood glucose monitoring device to a pump. They are devising those devices in their bedrooms or other normal settings. Someone who is a bit older contacted me after the debate and said, "I didn't devise this in my bedroom. I'm an engineer and I did it on the kitchen table." The point is that people are capable of doing such things. I am not saying that that is the way forward, because although many of those devices work and people are pleased with the results of the things they have devised, it cannot be right that they are being left to create such devices on their own without them being quality assured

and tested by people who are competent to do so. It shows, however, the potential of what people can do for themselves.

We should not fool ourselves into believing that technology will resolve all the problems, because the situation is difficult, particularly for some young people. Think about when we were teenagers: no matter how well disciplined or well behaved people are, the lifestyle of a teenager does not easily lend itself to monitoring a diabetic condition. Going out with a group of friends for a meal or drink and having to adjust one's insulin level with an injection can be awkward. Young people also face challenges with the way their condition is perceived by their peer group. In some instances, people confuse type 1 and type 2 diabetes and young people in school get bullied on the basis that they have brought their diabetes on themselves because they eat too much sugar. I have seen examples of that. An autoimmune condition is not triggered by one's lifestyle at all, yet people get bullied on that basis and it is important that they receive the necessary support.

One of my worries—I hope the Minister will try to address this when he responds to the debate—is that there is often a need for psychological, or even in some cases psychiatric, support because the challenges of being a young diabetic are such that people need other support. Schools, by the way, need better training in supporting pupils with diabetes. There have been examples of young people becoming hypoglycaemic and, when they have tried to raise their need to deal with it with the teacher, being told off and humiliated because they happen to have that condition at that time.

**Luke Graham:** The right hon. Gentleman makes a valid point. I have friends and family members with diabetes, and there are tell-tale signs. At the moment there is a great schools initiative to encourage teachers and students to do CPR and first aid; perhaps spotting the tell-tale signs of a hypo could be included in that package, and promoted in schools. Will he join me in supporting that?

**Mr Howarth:** Yes. I will not labour the point, but the hon. Gentleman is right. I would add that quite often teachers are left with such responsibilities, although they have enough challenges in their working life, but there is a need for someone in the school to have the expertise and to be trained to deal with young people with type 1 diabetes.

I know that I assured you, Mr Robertson, that I would try to be briefer than I have been, but I am coming to the end of my remarks, and the matter is important. I join the right hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings in saying that it would be useful to have a meeting with the Minister to discuss the matter in more depth and get his thoughts on how to move forward. There is much that we can do to make people's lives better. I hope that the debate will inform that process, and that we will be able to move forward on the basis of consensus across the House. The Minister faces challenges, and Members of this House will want to share the burden of them.

**Mr Laurence Robertson (in the Chair):** I am looking to call the Scottish National party spokesman at 10.28, and we have two more hon. Members wanting to speak, so please bear that in mind.



10.11 am

**Andrew Selous** (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak in this important debate, because diabetes is so significant in the UK. There are 4.6 million people with diabetes and on current projections we are on track to have more than 5 million people suffering from it by 2025. Ninety per cent. of people with diabetes have type 2, and being overweight or obese accounts for 80% to 85% of a person's risk of developing the condition, so I shall focus my remarks on what is causing the hugely unwelcome surge in diabetes across the UK and, more importantly, what we need to do about it.

The shocking fact is that a quarter of children go into primary school reception overweight or obese. By the time that they leave, one third are overweight or obese. They are being educated, but overall they are becoming less healthy, which has worrying implications for their future life chances. In the UK at the moment, 30% of all children and 60% of adults are overweight or obese. The worry is that that has become almost normalised. People do not notice it and do not think it is a problem. To me, that is a huge social justice issue. Obesity rates are twice as high in the most deprived communities as in the least deprived. My right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes) made that point eloquently in his opening remarks.

I was particularly impressed by the remarks of our wonderful chief medical officer, Dame Sally Davies, just before Christmas. She hit hard at a number of targets and came out with some important truths. She had the food industry in her sights—she said that it benefits from selling unhealthy food, that it does not pay for the harm it does, and that it clearly has not done enough. She raised the fact there is added sugar in baby milk and baby foods, for goodness' sake. What is the justification for that, other than to put babies and very young children towards a life of sugar addiction? That is scandalous and we should call it out. Frankly, the Government should ban it as soon as they are able, and if we have to leave the European Union to do so it should be an early priority at the beginning of April.

I did not come into public life just to ban things. The corollary, of course, is that we need to make the healthy choice the easy choice, and to be all about promoting wonderful, healthy, delicious, nutritious—often British—food. My right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings made that point well, too. Dame Sally Davies discussed whether there might be a need for price subsidies for fruit and vegetables. Let us make fruit and vegetables—good food that will not cause obesity and diabetes—more accessible, available and affordable to our constituents. That could be done through the taxation system. Dame Sally also called for sugary milk drinks to come within the soft drinks industry levy, which is entirely sensible.

It is worth looking at some of the foods currently on supermarket shelves. Taking children's breakfast cereals as an example, 37 grams out of 100 grams of Kellogg's Frosties are sugar. The figure for Kellogg's Crunchy Nut cornflakes is 35.3 grams per 100 grams. For Kellogg's Coco Pops it has come down a little bit, but there are still 30.9 grams of sugar per 100 grams. Those are pretty appalling figures, when we think how much sugar that is.

In 2017, some own brands were not much better. Lidl Golden Balls had 36 grams of sugar per 100 grams. Aldi Sugar Frosted Flakes had 35 grams per 100 grams. Tesco Frosted Flakes had 34.9 grams. Those are Public Health England figures and some relate to August 2017, while some, such as the Kellogg's ones, are current. We need to call that out. Not enough progress is being made, and unless healthier food is available for our constituents we shall not turn the supertanker around. We know from Public Health England that chocolate confectionery and biscuits between them account for more than 300,000 tonnes of sugar going into our diet every year. That is more than from all the other food categories put together.

My first plea is that we should do more with food manufacturers. They need to get with the programme and to know that many of us in the House have them in our sights. I am a Conservative and believe in the free market. I do not want the state to produce our food. However, there is a serious challenge, because we all pay for the NHS through our taxes and the food industry is causing a large part of the problem. Dr Chris Marshall, one of my best local GPs, had to defend the diabetes prevalence in his area and what was happening about it, but it is not fair to blame GPs when so much is stacked against them because of the food industry, among other things. The food industry needs to raise its game. It has been getting away with too much for too long and the Government need to play hard ball with it.

Active travel is another area I want to consider. I came to the House of Commons on a bicycle this morning, because I could. For our children, when we design new housing estates, let us make sure they can bicycle or walk to school. Let us get more cycling and walking in cities. That is a design and planning issue. Officials and a Minister from the Department of Health and Social Care are here for the debate. We need a cross-Government strategy to build in active and healthy travel for children and adults to help the situation.

Calorie information is also relevant. Public Health England tells us that women should eat up to 2,000 calories a day and that men should eat up to 2,500. I wonder whether anyone here knows how many calories they had for breakfast, or how many they will have for lunch or supper. What is the point of giving us that daily total if none of us has a clue how much we eat? Here is a suggestion. For people who are waiting 10 minutes to see the doctor, why not have on the surgery wall examples of the different meals that the British public mainly eat, with a rough idea of how many calories there are in them? Would not that be a start to education? It would be free, easy, and a good use of the surgery wall in a public space where we all sit and wait. Why do not we try to get some of that public information out there so that we can do something and know what we are doing?

We have talked about schools. I do not blame teachers, who have more than enough to do trying to teach children, but they have a public education role. Given that we have gone from one quarter of children to one third being overweight or obese, there should be much more emphasis on providing proper education to children on food when they are taught to cook.

We must also look to Parliament. There has rightly been a move, which I am sure you approve of, Mr Robertson, to make this a more plastic-free Parliament. I approve

of that and it is right, but the information in our catering outlets about their offerings is not as good. Let us set an example on our own doorstep.

10.20 am

**James Duddridge** (Rochford and Southend East) (Con): I too congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes) on this excellent debate. The contributions have shown that we could have spoken at much greater length, given the breadth of issues faced.

I will talk from a personal perspective. Two years ago I received a phone call from my doctor's receptionist, who said that the doctor would see me at 4 o'clock. Not catching on, I thought that was somewhat strange as I had not requested an appointment. I explained that I was in the House of Commons and very busy. She said, "Well, how about 9 o'clock tomorrow morning?" I agreed to go along on Friday, thinking that perhaps there was some issue that was going to be raised with me as a Member of Parliament.

I had forgotten entirely that I had had a regular blood test following quite a serious illness. A few years ago, I was in hospital for the best part of a year, in and out, and at one point none of my internal organs, including my pancreas, was working. I was obviously on quite a lot of painkillers. One of the many things the doctor had evidently said was that I could be diagnosed as diabetic in the future but, to be honest, during that period of my life I was pretty much out of it on painkillers, so I did not listen particularly.

I was completely aghast when I turned up at the doctor's and he said, "You're diabetic, and at the end of this meeting I will probably have to inject you with some insulin and you may be on insulin for the rest of your life, but there are other options." In the end, he decided that he would try to manage it through other drugs initially and I never went on to an injection regime, but it was quite scary.

It was also, I thought, quite embarrassing. I felt rather guilty and perhaps stupid for having been obese. Ironically, because of my illness, I was quite thin having come out of hospital. I had lost about five stone in total, so I was not a typical case, but I had eaten too much and not exercised enough. I am now getting back on track and staying on track, but when, as Members of Parliament, something happens to us, we have an insight into what our constituents are suffering from and their experiences.

There was a call in the debate for the best possible solutions. I would argue that we need a lot more diversity and that there is no one-size-fits-all solution. Diabetes is complex. A distinction has rightly been made between type 1, type 2 and juvenile diabetes, and while I have not spent the time on it that others have, there is a medical case for making further divisions in diabetes, particularly within type 2, for reasons that I suspect we do not fully understand.

On prevention, if I could have talked to my younger self and continued to exercise through my late 20s and 30s as I had as a child, I would perhaps not have the problems I have now. My diabetes is very much under control, and I praise the work of diabetes nurses around the UK, who have a little more time than the doctors and can coach people and point them in the right

direction. For example, they mentioned a book to me, "Carbs & Cals", which has pictures of typical meals and typical sizes and goes through the grams of carbs and the calorie intake—exactly like the type of poster that my hon. Friend the Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) wanted to see in doctors' surgeries.

We should have diversity because some things have worked for me and some things have not. The shock of being diagnosed as diabetic made me change my ways. For months I would not touch chocolate and I would have no carbohydrates whatsoever. I went on a course about diet for diabetics that took a slightly different approach, which I went on to adopt, counting carbs and managing things precisely. Personally, that did not work for me and abstinence from sugar or carbohydrates worked better, but maybe for others it is different.

Exercise, for me, has worked well. I am hoping to run the London marathon, but whenever I do something such as that I question it. If I speak to anyone who has run a marathon, they talk about the big meal beforehand and say, "Make sure you have plenty of carbs the night before—lots of pasta and so forth that will release slowly." One of the benefits I find in doing that is that I understand a little more about how carbohydrates are broken down, not just theoretically, but personally, and how my body reacts to carbohydrates and sugar.

When I left the doctor's surgery I had the prick test for glucose. I ended up having three different machines, one of which eventually linked up to my iPhone. I do not now need to do a prick test on a regular basis, but I find it useful as a way of understanding my short-term glucose as well as the six-monthly blood test that I do. Personally, as a type 2 diabetic, while I do not need to monitor my glucose on an hour-by-hour basis, I would find it useful to have something on me for a week so that I could see the effect of having a tiny bit of cereal this morning, or the difference in my glucose if I have had two glasses of wine the night before. What is the difference between running five miles and 10 miles? How many carbohydrates should I have to compensate? We need a lot more diversity in provision over time.

Having outed myself as a diabetic—as I said, one should not feel shame about it, but I did for quite a while—and spoken about it in the House of Commons, I hope that I, like a number of hon. Members, can be an advocate for diabetics across the country, understand not only my condition but those of others, and help to improve the situation over time. I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings for raising this incredibly important issue in the House.

10.27 am

**Martyn Day** (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Robertson. I thank the right hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes) for securing the debate, for his very knowledgeable introduction and for the consensual nature of the debate that has taken place.

We have had a number of contributions; I will just touch briefly on the main speakers. The right hon. Member for Knowsley (Mr Howarth) reminded us of the importance of recognising the two different types of diabetes, which cannot be emphasised enough. I was

[*Martyn Day*]

also interested in his comments on the artificial pancreas. The hon. Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) raised the risk of diabetes being normalised and the impact of obesity, and the food industry's contribution to exacerbating the problem. The figures he quoted on sugar intakes were genuinely frightening and should be a lesson to us all. The hon. Member for Rochford and Southend East (James Duddridge) gave his personal experience of his diabetes being under control. The very interesting thought of what we would say to our younger selves is one that we need to take out to our constituents in order to make an impact on the problem.

Health, of course, is a devolved matter. Consequently, it seldom features in my casework as a Member of this Parliament. That said, many of my friends have diabetes, either type 1 or type 2. It is the fastest growing health threat of our time and a critical public health matter. Diabetes is increasing rapidly, and one person in 20 in Scotland is now diagnosed with the condition—I stress diagnosed, because there will be many others who are undiagnosed. The latest figures published by Diabetes UK show that more than 3.5 million people in the UK were living with a diagnosis of diabetes in 2016-17, with just less than 290,000 of them in Scotland. Diabetes UK also reported that if nothing changes, more than 5 million people in the UK will have it by 2025. That is a figure that a number of people have used, and it is worth repeating to emphasise the impact of this health crisis.

In the Forth Valley area, which covers part of my constituency, more than 14,500 people are living with diabetes and there are more than 9,000 people with diabetes in West Lothian, which covers the other part. That helps to put the issue into perspective across a number of constituencies.

It is estimated that more than one person in 16 across the UK has diabetes, either diagnosed or undiagnosed, and it is worth remembering that around 80% of diabetes complications are preventable. I believe that in Scotland around 10% of NHS spending goes on diabetes—I think the English figure is fairly similar. If 80% of that is preventable, think how much we could save by tackling this problem, in addition to the benefit to people's lifestyles that could be achieved. Many of those complications are preventable or can at least be significantly delayed through early detection, good care and access to appropriate self-management tools and resources, of which access to diabetes technologies is a fundamental part.

When I last spoke about diabetes, a couple of years ago, we talked about technologies. I confess that at that time I had not really witnessed much of them first hand, so I was pleased over the festive break when I saw one of my friends, Paul Kingsley, who has lived with diabetes for some time. He has a Libre patch sensor and an insulin pump. He showed me how that worked, which was interesting to see. It has made a real change to his life. I can remember when he had to do the prick tests and take his needles with him everywhere he went. Technology is making a big difference to people's lives.

With the challenge of the increasing numbers of people with diabetes, access to the technology to help those living with the disease becomes ever more important. There are 19,000 new cases of diabetes diagnosed every

year in Scotland and numbers are set to increase year on year, particularly with rising levels of obesity. Early results from ongoing research, led by Mike Lean at the University of Glasgow and Roy Taylor at Newcastle University, showed that it is possible for some people to put their type 2 diabetes into remission using a low-calorie, diet-based, weight management programme, delivered by their GP. I believe that, as a result of those promising results, NHS England has committed to piloting a remission programme for 5,000 people with type 2 diabetes in 2019, and the Scottish Government, through their "A Healthier Future" plan, pledged £42 million to the prevention, early detection and early intervention of type 2 diabetes. There is a lot we can learn from each other from these processes and as the results of these tests come out.

NHS boards in Scotland will be able use that funding to deliver programmes to prevent type 2 diabetes and to put it into remission. One such programme that receives funding from NHS Forth Valley is the Braveheart Association, a Scottish charitable incorporated organisation based at Falkirk Community Hospital. The Braveheart programmes have been designed to provide resources to support and improve the health and wellbeing of Falkirk communities. They create community-led activities and outreach health services to improve the health of local people. One of the initiatives is Braveheart Plus peer support groups, which focus on those living with type 2 diabetes and coronary heart disease. One beneficiary of Braveheart's walking project is a lad called Ali, a sufferer of heart disease and diabetes, who was initially reluctant to take part. Through participation, he now leads his own bi-weekly group, enjoys meeting new people and is able to manage his health conditions much better.

There is little doubt that eating a poor diet and being overweight or obese cause serious health problems, such as type 2 diabetes, cancer and heart disease, and it is clear that we must take decisive action. The SNP has an ambition to halve childhood obesity in Scotland by 2030, which is one reason the Scottish Government are consulting with the public, and food and retail industries on restricting in-store marketing and promotion of foods high in fat, sugar or salt, with little or no nutritional benefit. That is very important; I think we have all been tempted.

**Andrew Selous:** On that point, does the hon. Gentleman agree that it would be good to hear from the Minister about when we will get the consultation on the 9 pm watershed and on promotions? Both are promised, but we do not yet have a date for them.

**Martyn Day:** I fully agree; that would be very useful to have.

I think we have all been guilty of impulse purchases when out shopping. It is always worse if we shop when hungry and there is a temptation to get fast food and a quick fix. We are all more than capable of cooking good quality meals, but convenience and lifestyle often get in the way of that. There is a lot we could do if there was a better marketing regime. The consultation in Scotland is part of the diet and healthy weight delivery plan, which will inform an assessment of impact and possible legislation.

No debate these days can be complete without some reference to Brexit, and why should this one be any exception?



**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Steve Brine):** We were so close.

**Martyn Day:** Yes, but it had to come in, given the requirement to stockpile insulin. Diabetes charities have warned that lives could be put at risk without reliable supplies of insulin, as the UK imports the vast majority of its stocks of the medicines. In response, stockpiles have been increased, which is good. Dan Howarth, the head of care at Diabetes UK, said in September:

“Insulin and other diabetes medication aren’t optional extras for the millions of people in the UK who rely on them. It’s incredibly important that the companies involved in their production and distribution, and those involved in guaranteeing their entry into the UK, work together so that supply continues uninterrupted.”

I would be grateful for reassurances from the Minister that that will indeed happen and about how long our supplies will last should we face the worst-case scenario.

10.35 am

**Mrs Sharon Hodgson** (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship this morning, Mr Robertson.

I thank the right hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes) for securing this important debate, especially after the excesses of Christmas—in which I am sure we all indulged, which is relevant to the topic we are discussing—and for his characteristically informative, entertaining and articulate opening speech. I also thank all right hon. and hon. Members who have taken part: my right hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley (Mr Howarth), the hon. Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous), who is co-chair of all-party parliamentary group on obesity and does excellent work in this area, and the hon. Members for Rochford and Southend East (James Duddridge) and for Linlithgow and East Falkirk (Martyn Day). They made excellent contributions.

As we have heard—I will repeat these facts because they are worth saying again—there are 4.6 million people living with diabetes. Over the last 20 years, the number of people diagnosed has more than doubled. Every day, around 700 people—one person every two minutes—are diagnosed with diabetes, which is really quite shocking. Diabetes UK estimates that if nothing changes, more than 5 million people will have diabetes in the UK by 2025. That is why this debate is so important, and I am pleased to be here to discuss treatment, remission and prevention.

I start with treatment and care. Once a patient has been diagnosed, it is crucial that they get the right treatment and care for them. Technology can play a role in that, particularly for people with type 1 diabetes. New technologies mean that patients can be treated and monitored, which can help to reduce diabetes-related complications in the long term. However, access to those technologies is subject to a postcode lottery, as are many other things. I have heard of huge variation of availability and use across the country. I was pleased to see the Government commit to making life-changing flash glucose monitors available for patients with type 1 diabetes by April 2019. Will the Minister please also ensure that basic technologies, such as test strips and meters, are available to all patients who clinically need them across the country? We cannot just say that everyone with type 2 diabetes would clinically need them—although

I have bought myself one and they are good for monitoring—but if people need them clinically, they should be available, not subject to a postcode lottery.

Such technology can be redundant if patients do not know how to use it, or do not know enough about their condition and how to manage it. That is why educational courses, such as the one that the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend East said he attended after his diagnosis, should be widely available, to give patients the knowledge, skills, support and independence to look after their own health. I was pleased to see that get a mention in the long-term plan earlier this week. Can the Minister please elaborate on when he expects the “structured education and digital self-management tools” to be expanded?

It is crucial that patients know about their diabetes and the health risks associated with it. According to Diabetes UK, there are over 160 lower-limb amputations every week in England that are a direct result of diabetes. As someone with type 2 diabetes, I find that really scary. Four out of five of those cases could have been prevented. Local foot care teams help to prevent thousands of amputations each year, but diabetes-related amputation is now at an all-time high. Does the Minister have any strategy to reverse that trend?

Finally on treatment and care, one person in six occupying a hospital bed has diabetes; at some sites it is as many as one in four. The majority of patients with diabetes are admitted for treatment of a different condition, but while in hospital their diabetes should not be ignored. When diabetes is not adequately cared for in hospitals, harm can result from the in-patient stay. Acute or long-term conditions can develop further, adding further costs to the NHS and complications for the patients.

The long-term plan includes a welcome commitment to introducing diabetes in-patient specialist nursing teams to improve recovery and to reduce lengths of stay and readmission rates. Will the Minister indicate when he expects that to begin? Will he also assure us that those teams will be available in all hospitals across the country?

On remission, as we have heard, my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich East (Tom Watson) has been very vocal about his own transformation—it has been huge—and the remission of his diabetes owing to exercise and changes in his diet. He has done a fantastic job, as we have all acknowledged, and I wish him all the best. Diet changes, when I stick to them, have also helped me in my management of my diabetes. When I have totally cut out sugar and reduced all carbs, as the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend East said helped him, that has made a massive difference. While there is currently no evidence that diabetes can be completely cured, even by changes to diet and lifestyle—I am told that once someone is diabetic they always will be—people can take steps to control, reduce or even reverse symptoms of diabetes, and to put their diabetes into remission.

As we heard from the hon. Member for Linlithgow and East Falkirk, research and trials by Professor Roy Taylor of Newcastle University—I am very proud that a north-east university is leading the way on this—have found that a low-calorie diet of 800 calories a day, which is low but manageable, can actually reverse diabetes, which was recently listed by MadeAtUni as one of the

[Mrs Sharon Hodgson]

UK's 100 best breakthroughs in health. That is certainly an area that needs to be explored further. However, not everyone can make those changes on their own, and patients must have access to medical support and dietary advice if they wish to try. The NHS has confirmed that it will pilot diabetes remission services in England and Scotland. Some places are already rolling out the service informally. For example, I know that some GPs in Tyneside are piloting this model. Will the Minister please tell us when expects those pilots to begin?

On prevention, 12.3 million people are now at an increased risk of developing type 2 diabetes. Of course, not all of those will go on to develop diabetes, but such a high number of people at risk is deeply concerning. Type 2 diabetes has several risk factors, but as the hon. Member for South West Bedfordshire highlighted, being overweight or obese accounts for as much as 80% to 85% of someone's overall risk of developing the condition.

Almost two in every three people in the UK are either overweight or obese. I am obviously one of the two at the moment. I strive and hope to be like the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend East, who said he is now the one out of those three. I congratulate him on that. I am back on a diet and cutting out sugar and carbs again and trying my best. However, if it was easy, nobody would be overweight. It is hard, and Christmas is not the best time to try to diet. This is why the nudge theories introduced by Public Health England are very welcome, along with proper traffic light food labelling and the "Eatwell plate", for example.

However, we have to acknowledge that our society has become increasingly obesogenic and sedentary, and we have to address that as soon as possible, starting with the next generation in particular. In that regard, the Government launched the second childhood obesity plan last year, which I hope will help to tackle this problem if they implement all the policies within it and do not only consult on them. Clear calorie labelling and introducing a 9 pm watershed for adverts for food and drink that are high in fat, salt and sugar are two steps that the Opposition would introduce if in government, to help to reduce the high level of obesity in this country.

However, it is not all about diet, as Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson is always telling me, but about exercise, too. Inactive children become inactive adults, which increases their risk of long-term conditions. According to ukactive, only 50% of seven-year-olds meet recommended physical activity guidelines. We therefore need to make sure that children have the space and resources to participate in sports, activities and play, which will benefit them in a host of ways, not just their health.

Nor should we forget the over-55s—or anybody, actually. According to ukactive, a total of £80.5 million could be achieved in NHS and healthcare savings on diabetes if one third of inactive over-55s were supported to be active over the next 10 years. The Secretary of State says that prevention is better than cure, and I think that that figure alone shows that it is.

The long-term plan committed

"to fund a doubling of the NHS Diabetes Prevention Programme over the next five years, including a new digital option to widen patient choice and target inequality."

That must target people from black, Asian and minority ethnic groups, who are six times more likely to develop type 2 diabetes. We must ensure that any prevention programme reaches those communities as a matter of urgency.

To conclude, people with diabetes are sadly at greater risk of serious but largely preventable complications. For example, they are twice as likely to have a heart attack or a stroke. For those of us here who suffer from diabetes, that is a sobering fact. We must ensure that their diabetes is properly managed and cared for, so as to avoid those serious complications. What the Government do next as part of the long-term plan will be beneficial to those with diabetes, and I know that patients, campaigners and all of us here will keep a close eye on developments.

10.47 am

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Steve Brine):** It is nice to see you in the Chair, Mr Robertson. I thank all Members for their contributions and my right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes) for securing the debate. He introduced it with his usual flourish, and I know that people watching will have been interested in what he said and the issues that he raised.

We have to keep these issues high on the agenda. They affect a lot of people and we talk about them a lot in Parliament; I cannot think of a Health oral questions that I have been involved in as a Minister when diabetes has not come up. There is a reason for that: because it affects so many of us and our constituents. We must keep raising it.

This is a timely debate. We published the long-term plan for the NHS on Monday. Diabetes features prominently in the plan, which is no accident. We would expect it to, and if it did not, we would have a debate on why not. However, more than that, the plan has a strong focus on prevention and on building a health service for the needs of the 21st century that supports people to manage their own health—not only for diabetes but across the piece—and wellbeing.

We really support that agenda in this Department and with this Secretary of State. That matters for patients—our constituents—with diabetes and others. Chris Askew is a very good man and chief executive of Diabetes UK, and his welcome for the long-term plan and the diabetes sections within it greatly attests to that.

We have heard some excellent contributions. I very much enjoyed listening to the intervention from my right hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (Mr Vaizey) and his suggestion about Brine labelling; my right hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr Dunne), who gave us insights about his two-year-old daughter; and my hon. Friend the Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous), who talked about the food industry and child obesity. We also heard speeches from the right hon. Member for Knowsley (Mr Howarth), who talked about an artificial pancreas, which was very interesting, and from the hon. Member for Workington (Sue Hayman). I should be able to cover all those items. If I do not cover everyone's points, I will of course write to them, as is my usual practice.

I have to say that I particularly enjoyed the contribution from my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend East (James Duddridge). It was a very powerful and insightful speech, as it always is from him, and it was delivered from the heart. He made the very good point that we are all different. That is one of the challenges not just for diabetes care, but for healthcare generally. Healthcare is not an exact science. I say that not as a doctor, but as someone who spends a lot of time with doctors.

My hon. Friend also made a point about the complexity of diabetes. In reality, it is a spectrum. We have heard a lot of talk this morning about type 1 diabetes—from the right hon. Member for Knowsley, for instance—and about type 2 diabetes from many others. But increasingly we hear about—it is not a new term—type 1.5 diabetes, otherwise known as LADA, or latent autoimmune diabetes in adults. As I understand it, that is not a clinical definition, but is generally used to describe a slow-onset form of type 1 diabetes that is often mistaken for type 2 diabetes. There are many support services for that condition, and people are increasingly talking to their doctors about it. There is lots of clinical debate around it, but the topic has been around since the 1970s. That goes to the heart of my hon. Friend's point. Diabetes is a complex condition. There is a spectrum for diabetes, as there is for many other conditions.

I, too, pay tribute to the NHS staff, to the diabetes nurses and the doctors, but also to the support groups. My constituency has the Winchester and Eastleigh diabetes support group, which I spoke to recently. We will all have those groups in our constituencies. As MPs, we are very used to having in front of us people who are far more expert on the subject than we are—every single one of my constituency surgeries is an example of that—but never is that more true than when we talk to people with diabetes, who have a great and expert knowledge of their condition and the management of it. If they do not, we need to help them to have better, expert knowledge of their condition, because that is as much in our interest as it is in theirs.

There are a couple of points to touch on. My right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings, in introducing the debate, and my hon. Friend the Member for South West Bedfordshire touched on the food and drink industry and healthier eating. It is important that we build on the world-leading action set out in both chapters of our childhood obesity plan. We have already seen real success. More than half of all drinks in the scope of the soft drinks industry levy are being reformulated. That is equivalent to removing some 45 million kg of sugar every year, as a result of the so-called sugar tax. And some products in the sugar reduction programme are exceeding their first-year targets. For example, a 6% reduction is being achieved for yoghurts.

We will consider further use of the tax system to promote healthy food—the challenge that my hon. Friend put to me. He mentioned sugary milky drinks. The Treasury was very clear, when former Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne launched the sugar tax, that in 2020—next year—we would review the sugar levy and whether to extend it to milky drinks. As the Minister, I for one will certainly be welcoming that.

As part of chapter 2, we have already held consultations on ending the sale of energy drinks to children and on calorie labelling in restaurants. We are reviewing the feedback and will formally respond in due course. We will very shortly be launching consultations on restricting promotions of fatty and sugary products by location and price, and we will be consulting on further restrictions, including a 9 pm watershed, at the earliest opportunity, with the aim of limiting children's exposure to sugary and fatty food advertising and driving further reformulation. What I will say, in answer to the challenge that I have been given on those products, is that not everyone agrees that we should do this. Let us be honest: there are people in our party who do not. I challenge them to look at the challenge that we have in our country with obesity and what it is costing our country and our health service. If we believe in a publicly funded health service, we believe in a public health system that challenges these kinds of condition, so I say to my hon. Friends: keep raising the issue in the House. Next Tuesday they will have an opportunity to do so.

Alongside that, we are committed to exploring what can be done on food labelling when we leave the European Union. My hon. Friend the Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Luke Graham), who is no longer in his place, raised traffic light labelling. We cannot do that as a member state, but we will soon be free. Some companies have decided to take it on themselves. Kellogg's, the cereal manufacturer, which has been mentioned this morning, announced just before Christmas that it intends to do that. I welcome that and give credit to Kellogg's for doing it.

Wherever possible, the aim is of course to prevent type 2 diabetes from developing in the first place, which is emphasised in the NHS long-term plan. I am very pleased that NHS England and Public Health England, for which I have responsibility, and Diabetes UK, working hand in glove, have had great success in working on what is the first diabetes prevention programme to be delivered at scale nationwide anywhere in the world.

**Andrew Selous:** Will the Minister give way?

**Steve Brine:** Very briefly—be quick.

**Andrew Selous:** I, too, am very pleased that Kellogg's has brought in traffic light labelling, but does the Minister agree that, with Kellogg's Frosties at 37 grams of sugar per 100 grams, there is much more to do as far as Kellogg's is concerned?

**Steve Brine:** Not only do I agree with my hon. Friend, but the company would agree with him. It is very aware of how much pressure that I and the Government are putting on it to change its products. I would say that it is top of my Christmas card list. Many other manufacturers have not yet made it on to my list, and I ask them to step up and raise their game to the level of the best. I am sure that they can.

In 2018-19, the diabetes prevention programme achieved full national roll-out, making England the first country in the world to achieve full geographical coverage. That is a great achievement, and the figures are good. As set out in the long-term plan, NHS England intends to double the capacity of the programme up to 200,000 people per annum by 2023-24. As my right hon. Friend the Member



[*Steve Brine*]

for South Holland and The Deepings said, it is a modest number in context, but it is also a big number. This is still the largest diabetes prevention programme of its kind. He asked whether we keep these things under constant review and whether we have the ambition to go further. You bet we do, and I think we need to.

There has been much talk this morning about technology. We are also developing an online, self-management support tool called HeLP, comprising a structured education course that has content focused on maintaining a healthy lifestyle for people with type 2 diabetes. That includes content on weight management and alcohol reduction—that can of course help with many health challenges—and cognitive behavioural therapy related to diabetes-related distress. NHSE hopes, once the tool has been developed, to roll it out in the summer of this year.

**Sir John Hayes:** In my opening remarks, I called for a new system for appraising technology and ensuring that it is allocated according to need and consistently across the country. On education, it does seem to me that there is a littered landscape. We have Public Health England, the NHS and local authorities. That littered landscape could easily lead to complication, confusion and even, possibly, contradiction, so will the Minister look at that, too?

**Steve Brine:** Of course I will look at it. I talk to Public Health England regularly about all these matters, and I take my right hon. Friend's challenge on board. In the time that we have, I cannot respond in any more detail, but I totally take his challenge on board.

There are public health campaigns such as One You, the behavioural change campaign aimed at people in the 40-to-60 age bracket—sadly, that now includes me—and designed to motivate people to take steps to improve their health through action on the main risk factors, such as smoking, inactivity, obesity and alcohol, which will help to reduce the risk of developing type 2 diabetes.

I would like to say so much more, but as ever in the House of Commons there is no time to do so. What I will say is this. We have great ambition in the long-term plan. The long-term plan is a living document, a document that we will build on—we have ambitions to go even further—but I hope that the Government and I, as the Public Health Minister, have shown our commitment to improving outcomes for people with diabetes and living with it through treatment, but also to helping to prevent people from developing it in the first place. Our constituents demand that from us, and our health service, if we believe in it as a publicly funded, free at the point of use health service, which we do, needs us to deliver on that, and we will.

10.58 am

**Sir John Hayes:** I think that this has been, as the Minister generously said, a useful debate, but I hope that it is also the start of a process, rather than the end of a story. That process should involve, exactly as the right hon. Member for Knowsley (Mr Howarth) recommended, a continuing dialogue with Government. I hope that the Minister will agree to the meeting that I suggested with a small delegation of colleagues, so that we can explore further the matters raised briefly today. There are real issues in relation to prevention and education, as I hinted a moment ago, but also with regard to treatment, as the Minister has acknowledged. The long-term plan puts the strategy in place. We now need to ensure that that strategy is delivered in a way that brings relief from need for constituents across this country. That need is illustrated by the commitment of all those who have contributed to this debate. I am immensely grateful for your stewardship of it, Mr Robertson, for all the contributions and for the Minister's typically robust but sensitive response to the remarks made this morning.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered diabetes.

## RMB Chivenor: Planned Closure

11 am

**Peter Heaton-Jones** (North Devon) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the planned closure of RMB Chivenor.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Robertson. I thank the other hon. Members who have taken the time to take part during the busy parliamentary schedule. In the 10 minutes or so for which I intend to speak, I will make the point that we should reverse the announcement originally made in November 2016 to close the Royal Marines base at Chivenor in my constituency.

For those who do not have an encyclopaedic knowledge of such things, I will say exactly what we are talking about and why it is important. RMB Chivenor has been a part of the military landscape of North Devon and this country since May 1940. Prior to that, it was a civil airfield, but it was taken over by the RAF as the second world war kicked in. It played a vital role in our air defences during the second world war.

The proud military history of RMB Chivenor has continued ever since. It is now a Royal Marines base, home to a number of vital regiments. It seems to me that, in the world in which we live, which I think most people would agree is an uncertain one, now is not the time to consider the closure of such a vital and historic military base.

RMB Chivenor is home principally to 3 Commando Brigade. It is unique in a number of ways. First, it is home to branches of all three of our armed services. The Royal Marines—the principal force there—and the Commando Logistic Regiment use the unique environment, which I will speak about a bit more, in a way in which no other environment could be used. They use it for training, practice and maintenance, and they are able to do so because of the unique facilities that that location brings. It is also home to 24 Commando Regiment of the Royal Engineers, which carries out an absolutely vital role in the maintenance of the infrastructure and hardware on which our military relies. Completing the link to its historical background, it is home to a significant RAF contingent as well.

The second reason I believe RMB Chivenor is unique is its location. It is on the side of the estuary and contains sand dunes, wide open spaces and, crucially, access to a waterfront. It is a huge space that simply does not exist elsewhere. There is no other space, in my estimation, that would allow the Royal Engineers and particularly the Royal Marines to carry out their vital work.

As I mentioned, in November 2016, as part of the defence establishment's review, the then Secretary of State for Defence, my right hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Sir Michael Fallon), announced in the House that RMB Chivenor would be closing. The community of North Devon immediately mobilised—as it is so good at doing—effective campaigns to try to reverse the closure decision. I asked a question in the House on that first day as soon as the announcement was made, and have continued to push ever since.

I want to make it clear at an early point in my remarks that this has been a non-political and cross-party campaign. Many local councils, political parties, business

organisations, economic groups and residents' groups right across North Devon have been involved in the campaign to seek to reverse the closure of RMB Chivenor. All the local authorities have played a part: Devon County Council and North Devon Council, which are the principal authorities; and the local councils of Barnstaple Town Council, Braunton Parish Council and Heanton Punchardon Parish Council, which is the small parish in which RMB Chivenor actually sits. All those councils have campaigned hard to reverse this decision, as have many business groups and local residents. However, it is incumbent on me as the MP, with the unique access that gives me to Ministers and Parliament, to be the voice of the North Devon community, which I have done. I believe the Minister bears the scars of that to this day, as do many of his colleagues in the Ministry of Defence.

The campaign immediately swung into action and the then Secretary of State accepted my invitation to visit RMB Chivenor. I convened a roundtable of many of the organisations that I have just mentioned. The then Secretary of State somewhat took us by surprise when he told us that the closure of RMB Chivenor is “not a done deal”. That has given us hope.

However, time is now slipping away. It is now two years and two months since that original closure decision was made. The North Devon community and I feel that it is time to put an end to this uncertainty. The strength of feeling has not gone away in the long period since the original announcement; if anything, it has increased. There are now more people making the argument for reversing the closure of RMB Chivenor and there are a number of arguments as to why it is so important.

I have touched on why in my view, for military reasons, we must preserve the unique environment of RMB Chivenor as a military base. However, I do not seek to advance that argument today—it is an argument for the military, civil servants and Defence Ministers. As North Devon's representative, I seek to make a very clear argument that the hit to the local economy of North Devon would be very difficult for our local community to accept or stomach.

Quantifying the economic advancement that RMB Chivenor gives North Devon is difficult. Some 1,200 military personnel are based at Chivenor at any one time, but that can fluctuate due to military needs, logistics and whatever operations might be ongoing. It is absolutely clear, however, that the families based at Chivenor play an enormous role in the local community. They send their children to local schools. They spend their money in local shops. They avail themselves of local service industries and businesses. The spouses of military personnel based at RMB Chivenor work in other jobs in the local community.

The effect on the local economy of North Devon, although difficult to quantify, undoubtedly would be serious. I am afraid to say that the uncertainty that we have had to put up with since November 2016 is only adding to that sense of uncertainty. It is time to put a stop to that. It is time to ensure that we keep RMB Chivenor open to ensure the long-term good of the area's economy, the military personnel based there and the community in which they play such a major role and, I believe, the long-term military good of the job that RMB Chivenor does.

**Rebecca Pow** (Taunton Deane) (Con): I gave my hon. Friend notice that I would intervene. I could not reiterate more strongly the points he is making. The same applies as strongly if not more strongly to Norton Manor Camp in Taunton, where 40 Commando is based. Economy-wise, society-wise and location-wise, there is a strong case for that camp remaining. It has been there for more than 23 years and has had significant investment from this and other Governments. It plays a huge part in our local economy. A new welfare centre, which cost up to £1 million, is about to open. We also have a new rehab and gym centre, which is well positioned for the Marines.

We need to look closely at why we would ever consider closing that camp, which also has the sword of Damocles hanging over it—it may close in 2028. Talking of swords, it is being awarded the Firmin sword of peace, which shows how revered those professional teams of people are.

**Mr Laurence Robertson (in the Chair):** Order. Interventions must be brief.

**Rebecca Pow:** Does my hon. Friend agree that it needs a rethink?

**Peter Heaton-Jones:** I could not have said it better myself—and I would not dare to. My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Many of the arguments that she advances for her base, as strongly as she always has, apply precisely to RMB Chivenor.

**Luke Pollard** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Peter Heaton-Jones:** Of course I will give way to a fellow Devon MP.

**Luke Pollard:** I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate. This is a day of talking about the Royal Marines. The uncertainty that he spoke about is important. Does he agree that it is a cancer for morale not only in Taunton and Chivenor, but in Stonehouse Barracks and across the south-west? That is why we need certainty from the Minister about the future long-term basing arrangements for the superb Royal Marines.

**Peter Heaton-Jones:** As always, the hon. Gentleman speaks passionately for his constituency, which I completely understand and which I seek to do for my constituency as well. The two are intimately linked, because the original plan put forward by the Ministry of Defence would move some of the work done in Chivenor in my constituency, and in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow), to his in Plymouth. There might be a slight conflict of interest between us, but we want the same thing: an end to the uncertainty. I suspect what that looks like is slightly different for us, but I want an end to the uncertainty, as does he, and as does my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton Deane, because that is causing the damage. We need a final decision, which should be that RMB Chivenor is saved.

The base provides employment not only for the military personnel based there but for people from the local community, so it is a significant boost to the local

economy in terms of direct spending, the supply chain and local employment. Local public services such as the school I mentioned where many of the children of service personnel are educated would suffer a significant hit given the formula for per pupil funding.

We must look at the military and international situation. The world is becoming a less certain place. There are challenges to the foundations that have kept the peace, by and large, in the post-war period. Rivals are pushing us further. In such a climate, the Royal Marines are vital. Their flexibility and expertise are invaluable and must be preserved.

It is said that amateurs talk about tactics, but professionals study logistics. RMB Chivenor is home to the Commando Logistic Regiment and 24 Commando Regiment Royal Engineers, which are vital in any combat scenario. Again, RMB Chivenor provides them with a unique environment as a training ground. The landing beaches, the dunes and the estuary provide a unique combination of facilities for practising seaborne landings.

I want to give the Minister ample time to respond, so there are three key questions we need to ask. First, given the relatively small amount that the base costs to run, does it make financial sense to close it? Secondly, given the unique environment that it provides for all the work that is undertaken there, does it make logistical sense to close it? Thirdly, given the role it plays in the defence of our country, does it make military sense to close it? I believe the answers are clear.

I have raised the issue in the House on many occasions. Until now, the answer from the Ministry of Defence has been a pretty straight bat. A statement was issued by the MOD to the BBC on 3 January, in which an MOD spokesperson said:

“It remains the intention to continue with the release of sites set out in the Better Defence Estate Strategy announcement in Autumn 2016.”

In other words, the plan is for the closure to go ahead. I thank the Minister and say to him that it is time to put a stop to this. It is time to reverse the closure decision, end the uncertainty and save RMB Chivenor.

11.15 am

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Tobias Ellwood):** It is a pleasure to respond to the debate. As is customary, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for North Devon (Peter Heaton-Jones) on securing the debate in Westminster Hall and on what he has done to represent his constituents and the armed forces by passionately making a case, lobbying and campaigning to get answers and discover what will happen to an important asset for our defence posture. He will be aware that the base sits in a wider frame of more than 90 sites that are being considered, and that there is a programme—a timetable—for us to release the news, for understandable commercial reasons. I will expand on that later. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend's work and I thank him for the invitation to visit Chivenor. I was hugely impressed by what I saw there and that has very much influenced the decisions that I hope to expand on later.

My hon. Friend spoke about the role that military bases have, not just as important defence assets but as sizeable communities that provide homes, jobs and a way of life, and whose supply chains link with the local



economy. They are a living organism that has a symbiotic relationship with the wider community. The base—the garrison or whichever military establishment it sits in—develops a bond with the local community, as is the case with Chivenor, as he described.

Many of our military establishments have been in a place for so long that they help to define the area and add to its reputation, so it is always with some trepidation that any Defence Minister would try to tamper with or affect the size or longevity of a garrison, fully appreciating the strength of feeling and pride that local communities have for our military. A local bond is developed with service personnel and it is understandable that hon. Members would wish to ensure the long-term future of military bases in their constituencies, but hon. Members will also be aware of the wider need to rationalise our defence real estate.

The MOD owns 3% of the UK. We need to spend our limited defence budget—as much as I would like it to rise—wisely. It is simply not possible to retain in perpetuity that huge defence real estate, which is a legacy of the sea, land and air assets required to fight two world wars. We have been advised to conduct a wide-ranging study into MOD land, with a view to transforming our estate into one that better supports the future needs of our armed forces. With that comes more bespoke investment. We will be investing more than £4 billion in the next 10 years to create smaller, more modern and capability-focused bases and garrisons. I hope that hon. Members understand that it is important for such studies to be led by the armed forces, taking into account the issues and views of stakeholders.

**Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): The Minister has done more than most to flag up the need for more investment in defence. Can he assure us that, where contraction takes place for the reasons that he has explained, contingency plans are in place so that, if this country should regrettably ever find itself involved in a major conflict, expansion could equally easily occur?

**Mr Ellwood:** My right hon. Friend, who is the Chair of the Defence Committee, makes such an important point. That is why Chivenor is interesting, because it has an airstrip, which is built on a flood plain. Do we want to lose that asset? We saw what happened at Heathrow yesterday. If things actually go in the direction that he suggests, it is important that we choose wisely which parts of our real estate that we close down and which parts we might need in the near or long-term future.

**Rebecca Pow:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr Ellwood:** I am conscious of time and I have a lot to get through; I will give way for a very brief intervention.

**Rebecca Pow:** I will be very brief. One of the reasons the bases are really important in the south-west, and it is a reason they should not all be moved to Plymouth, is in attracting personnel to work for the Royal Marines. In Taunton and Chivenor, we draw from the midlands region, and much as we think Plymouth is a great base, is it potentially too far away and may therefore detract?

**Mr Ellwood:** I will not get into a debate about various aspects of the estate. The south-west does very well from the Royal Marines' perspective and indeed from the armed forces' perspective as well. I go back to the point that we have to make these difficult decisions on the basis of what is best for the armed forces, as well as for the wider communities. However, I have heard my hon. Friend's point, and no doubt we will discuss it further in tonight's Adjournment debate in the main Chamber.

Before I turn to the base at Chivenor itself, as I did in yesterday's debate about RM Condor I will first pay tribute to the Royal Marines as a whole, because I would like to acknowledge their critical—indeed, unique—role, which my hon. Friend the Member for North Devon also acknowledged, in the wider spectrum of the armed forces' capability.

The Royal Marines were formed in the reign of Charles II in 1664; they will celebrate their 355th birthday this year and they have much to be proud of. They played a vital role in Lord Nelson's victory at Trafalgar; earlier, in 1704, they had secured and defended the Rock of Gibraltar. Of course, there was also the infamous raid on Zeebrugge in 1918, in which two Royal Marines earned the Victoria Cross; and the Royal Marines were there at the D-Day landings, when 17,500 Royal Marines took part in the largest amphibious operation in history. More recently, in 1982 they were essential in the recapture of the Falkland Islands.

Today, the Royal Marines are the UK's specialised commando force, our elite unit that is held at very high readiness and trained for worldwide rapid response. They are able to deal with a wide spectrum of threats and security challenges, and often operate in extremely difficult and dangerous circumstances, from amphibious operations to littoral strikes to humanitarian operations, as well as being specialists in mountain and cold weather warfare, and jungle insurgency. When diplomacy fails, it is the Royal Marines that provide the UK with a wide spectrum of hard power options with which we can respond. On behalf of a grateful nation, I say to all the Royal Marines who have earned that coveted green beret, "Thank you."

Looking to the future, the strategic defence and security review 2015 mapped out our commitment to the Royal Marines themselves, and I am pleased to say that, following the recent modernising defence programme, the future of HMS Bulwark and HMS Albion, which have been the subject of many Westminster Hall debates, has now been confirmed; the Royal Marines' winter deployment programmes in Norway will continue, as will their training with their US counterparts; and shortly we will see women joining the ranks of the Royal Marines in close-combat ground roles for the very first time.

RMB Chivenor is located—as my hon. Friend the Member for North Devon said—on the beautiful north Devon coastline between the town of Barnstaple and the village of Braunton. It started life as a civilian airfield in the 1930s. It then became RAF Chivenor in 1940 and was used as a coastal command station. After the war, the station was largely used for training, and that training role continued until the 1960s. In 1974, the RAF formed 2 Tactical Weapons Unit, flying BAE Hawks from Chivenor until 1994, when the airfield was

[*Mr Ellwood*]

handed over to the Royal Marines, although the RAF presence continued for a number of years, as RMB Chivenor was also the base for search and rescue flights.

As my hon. Friend also highlighted, today RMB Chivenor is home to over 1,200 personnel from all three services, who make up the Commando Logistic Regiment Royal Marines. It is also home to 24 Commando Regiment Royal Engineers. Those based at Chivenor provide the second-line combat support to the force, which is a critical role. They provide invaluable support—the constant re-supply chain that is needed for any final phase of an operation. For the initial 30 days of any operation, they are able to provide essential supplies for the frontline commando units by the transfer of stores from ship to shore, making the force totally self-sufficient. That is what is so unique about 3 Commando Brigade. It is widely acknowledged that a force's combat capability and ability to achieve its commander's objectives are defined by its ability to support itself logistically on operations. That is exactly what the base achieves.

At RMB Chivenor, we have been studying how best to ensure that the base is able to continue to have access to the facilities that the personnel there require to live, work and train. However, we have also been investigating the opportunities to make best use of the Royal Marines bases and Royal Navy bases across the south-west, which my hon. Friend mentioned earlier, to ensure that we make the most of our facilities to create the best possible future for base laydown for the Royal Marines across the country. Our intent remains to rationalise the number of Royal Marines barracks that we have in the south-west, but we recognise that the Ministry of Defence does not exist in isolation. As we continue with our plans, we will engage with relevant stakeholders at every level to ensure that sites are considered for use in a way that benefits defence and the surrounding local communities.

With regard to RMB Chivenor, we recognise the benefits of retaining a Royal Marines presence there. I make it very, very clear that RMB Chivenor will continue to have a role to play. However, I invite my hon. Friend

to listen to the next oral statement on the MOD's defence estate plans, which is coming round the corner very soon.

I know that my hon. Friend wants answers, as do the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard) and, no doubt, my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis), the Chair of the Defence Committee. However, I ask him to appreciate the process that we must go through in the MOD as part of the wider rationalisation of over 90 sites, to ensure that we are able to move assets around the country, and so that we know which assets are best to continue and which are best to close, which are best to endorse and which are best to amalgamate. These are very tough decisions indeed.

Although my hon. Friend has said that in more than two years no answer has been given, we need to get this process right and we must ensure that the right decisions are made. I hope that he can read between the lines of what I am saying, but I can provide no further details today. I simply say now that more details will be coming in the next few weeks.

I will end by underlining a point that has been made a couple of times in this short debate. Our world is getting more dangerous and more complex, and ever fewer nations have the ability and desire to help to shape the world on the international stage. When it comes to hard power, it is the people in our armed forces who allow our Government to step forward and stand up to those who wish us harm. Critical to that is the role of the Royal Marines, and critical to the work of the Royal Marines is their logistical capability. I hope that my hon. Friend is as satisfied as he can be at this stage by the response that I have given him today. Again, I invite him to listen to the next oral statement on the defence real estate, when I will be able to expand in more detail on the formal future of RMB Chivenor, an important asset to Britain.

*Question put and agreed to.*

11.28 am

*Sitting suspended.*

## Bailiffs: Regulatory Reform

[MR NIGEL EVANS *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

**Emma Reynolds** (Wolverhampton North East) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered bailiff regulatory reform.

As ever, Mr Evans, it is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, and I wish all hon. Members a happy new year. As we embark on a year that will be dominated by Brexit—as we saw in the Chamber just a minute ago—it is good to focus on another concern of our constituents. I called for this debate on reforming the regulation of bailiffs because a shocking case of aggressive behaviour by bailiffs in my own constituency was presented to me at an advice surgery, and I have heard countless other examples from hon. Members and from the charities involved. I thank my local paper, which published an article on the topic over the Christmas period, and members of the public who got in touch with me.

My main message to the Minister is that we simply cannot let bailiffs become a law unto themselves. The Government need to take urgent action against bailiffs who break the rules, behave aggressively and act with apparent impunity. According to the evidence presented by Citizens Advice, StepChange and other organisations, this is not just a few bad apples, but a widespread problem. Although I welcome the call for evidence that the Government announced last year, I stress to the Minister that we are not discussing a minority of bailiffs, and I urge her and her Department to recognise that. After all, we have to face up to the scale of the challenge if we are to find the right solutions.

Some 2.2 million people in England and Wales have been contacted by a bailiff in the past two years. The regulations that the Government introduced in 2014 are welcome, but there are huge problems with the lack of enforcement. Since the introduction of those reforms, Citizens Advice has recorded a 24% increase in problems with bailiffs. One person in three who has experience of bailiffs has seen them breaking the rules, and 40% have suffered intimidation. Unfortunately, the fee structure has created a perverse incentive for bailiffs to make visits and reject repayment offers, which we have seen time and again, as they can charge fees of £235 for every debt they collect in person.

I first became aware of the severity of this problem last year, when a disabled constituent came to see me at an advice surgery. Let us imagine for a moment being in her shoes: you and your partner are just getting up. You hear a knock at the door. Your partner goes to answer it. You hear loud voices, then feet on the stairs. A total stranger strides into your bedroom. You are absolutely terrified. The first thing he does is pick up your purse and take out all the cash. You think you are being burgled, but you are not: you are being visited by bailiffs. My constituent's experience, unfortunately, is not an isolated case. Another man told me that bailiffs used humiliation in front of his neighbours to gain entry to his home. He said:

“They tried to push their way into my house saying they have a right to. When I asked to see the court papers the bailiff said—you have already had them and he would only discuss the case in the house. He then started shouting so that other people”

including his neighbours

“could hear him—this was obviously to embarrass us”

and to intimidate the man.

**Mr Ranil Jayawardena** (North East Hampshire) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this important debate on an issue that is faced by people across the country. Regarding the point she has just raised, does she agree that the current regulations give perfectly innocent people no opportunity whatsoever to prevent a visit by bailiffs or verify the authenticity of visiting bailiffs when they are not the debtor concerned? One of my constituents faced that situation—a traumatic ordeal along the lines that the hon. Lady has outlined.

**Emma Reynolds:** From all the cases that I have heard about, those experiences are traumatic and have a lasting effect on the people involved. In many cases, they are not necessarily the debtor—they are not the person who owes the money—but they are still treated in an appalling manner. That is not to say that the debtor should be treated appallingly either, but bailiffs do not seem to have regard to the rules, which is that they can seize possessions that belong only to the debtor.

That brings me to another example—a person from the constituency of the hon. Member for Harborough (Neil O'Brien), whose son was in debt and who bravely spoke out on the radio today about his experience. He said:

“We invited these men into our home so that we could understand what was going on and in the belief that we could then work with them to resolve the problem. All they did once inside our home was to threaten us with public humiliation. At no time did they advise us of any of our rights. We were told that although we were in our own home that the only way we could prevent them seizing our property”,

including this gentleman's car,

“was if we could produce receipts.”

I do not know about other Members, but I would not have a receipt for my car at hand if someone were to knock on my door. I know that the hon. Member for Harborough will speak in more detail about his constituent, whom I thank for coming forward.

In another case, a woman told me:

“I went to close the door and the bailiff put his foot in to my hall to prevent me from shutting the door. I got through to the police, explained the situation, was told he had no right to demand to come into my house. The bailiff had gone by then and did not return but I felt very intimidated and for a while found myself checking through the window before opening the front door.”

How awful that a person should not feel safe in their own home.

**Dr Matthew Offord** (Hendon) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this debate. I wanted to raise the case of a constituent of mine, in which a bailiff put his foot in the door because he wished to enter the property, but the property he wished to enter did not belong to my constituent—the bailiff wanted to see a tenant of my constituent. Even so, not only did that cause a lot of problems when the police were eventually called, but of course the body camera worn by the bailiff was not working at the time, so no one corroborated whether my constituent was indeed assaulted.



**Emma Reynolds:** How very convenient for the bailiff involved! We had a similar case in my constituency. At one point, we were told that there was a body cam, but when we pressed to see the footage, we were then told that there was not a body cam. The hon. Gentleman raised that in the form of a written question to the Minister and we should consider it. It will not solve all of our problems, but it would go some way towards helping to look at these disputes.

One man told me that, although he had moved out of his mother's house and the debt was his and not hers, the bailiffs told her that if she did not pay, her son would go to prison. They marched her to the post office, where she was pressed to withdraw £550 to cover the debt. His mum was 73 at the time. There are countless examples of bad practice from all over the country.

**Rachel Reeves** (Leeds West) (Lab): Like other Members, I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. Is she aware that there is a private bailiff trade body called the Civil Enforcement Association? Its code of conduct says that its members should be "professional, ethical...polite, honest and non-threatening", yet all the examples that my hon. Friend has given are of behaviours that are the exact opposite. In 2016, the Civil Enforcement Association received 255 complaints about its members yet expelled none of them. Is that not a perfect example of why we need better enforcement and regulation of the bailiff industry?

**Emma Reynolds:** I could not agree more. I have had contact with that trade association. It is simply not realistic to expect a trade association, which is there to represent its members, to take action against those members. In fact, the lead of that organisation was on "World at One" on Radio 4 today claiming that there was a robust complaints procedure. I beg to differ and will address that point towards the end of my speech.

The worst case of this kind that I have heard—I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon Central (Sarah Jones) has raised it with the Minister and will speak about it today—is the devastating case of Jerome Rogers, who took his own life. He had offered to pay back the debt in stages, but the bailiffs refused. I pay tribute to the brave campaigning of his family, who are here today. We owe it to them to do all we can to change the culture of the bailiff industry so that they are there to help, not penalise people. There is a positive example from Hammersmith and Fulham Council in London, which has stopped using bailiffs to enforce the collection of council tax arrears because it thinks it is better to try to work with the people involved and help them pay back that debt rather than forcing them into a spiral of ever more debt.

**Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for mentioning Hammersmith and Fulham Council, which as she correctly said stopped using bailiffs to enforce council tax debts from April last year. Collection rates have not gone down since. One council cabinet member said:

"We have done this by intervening early with residents who may have trouble paying council tax, speaking to them in a respectful and supportive way to develop a sustainable repayment plan that both protects the council's income while avoiding forcing people into making bad financial decisions to avoid bailiffs, such as resorting to payday lenders or missing rent payments." Should not all local authorities and anyone trying to enforce debts adopt that as their philosophy?

**Emma Reynolds:** I could not agree more and would love to see other councils around the country follow that example, for which I thank my hon. Friend, who I am sure played a part in bringing that about. When we hear these cases, it is incumbent on all Members of Parliament to bring them to the Government. It is incumbent on all councils and any other public authorities that are owed money to seek a constructive way to get that money and to help people pay that debt back rather than threatening them with bailiffs.

**Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. Five or six years ago, I had a Bill that would have established an independent body to regulate bailiffs. I had some very nasty cases in my constituency at the time, which prompted me. Unfortunately, the Bill did not go through because the Government stopped it. I hope my hon. Friend's Bill gets through, because it is important that we regulate bailiffs properly and give them proper training.

**Emma Reynolds:** An independent regulator, training for bailiffs and standards that are enforced are essential—I will come to that towards the end of my speech. I put on record my thanks to my hon. Friend for trying to push the issue a few years back. I hope I can follow in his footsteps. I have applied for a ten-minute rule Bill, and I hope I can get something on the statute book, although I also hope the Government will beat me to it.

The examples I quoted remind us that anybody could end up in this situation, although in many cases, the people involved are vulnerable. Often it starts with a small fine or debt that escalates, and it can spiral out of control. Citizens Advice recently found that such experiences have a very negative impact on people's mental health and financial position. Some of those who are likely to fall into debt already have a mental health problem.

**Ellie Reeves** (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab): Bailiffs are supposed to have training to identify vulnerable people and to behave appropriately, but the reality is that it is not always obvious that someone has a disability or is suffering from mental ill health. Much more robust legislation needs to be put in place to protect those people.

**Emma Reynolds:** We need more robust rules and we need more robust enforcement. My constituent is disabled and was facing a fine because her disability badge was out of date. That was because she was moving from disability living allowance to the personal independence payment—that is another story. She was told by the bailiff that she did not look disabled. Her vulnerability has been questioned at every turn when I have raised her case. I thought it was obvious, because she is disabled, that she is vulnerable, but it is not always that obvious, as my hon. Friend says. We need much better procedures in place so that bailiffs recognise that.

Of those who had a negative experience with a bailiff, Citizens Advice found that seven in 10 reported increased stress and anxiety. I am sure that that very much chimes with the experience of the constituents that Members are here to represent. It certainly chimes with the experience of mine. Eight in 10 felt that the experience had a lasting effect and one in two saw their finances deteriorate further.

**Bambos Charalambous** (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): Is the practice by bailiffs of not accepting affordable repayments a cause for people getting further into debt, thus exacerbating the problem and leading to unfortunate experiences for those people?

**Emma Reynolds:** Indeed it is. It seems to me that it is not in the interests of the local authority. For instance, Hammersmith recognised that if people are forced into more debt, they are unlikely to be able to pay it off. As I understand it, there is no compulsory obligation on bailiffs to accept a repayment plan, which the Government should consider carefully. In fact, all the incentives seem to be stacked against the bailiff being cautious or sympathetic to the debtor. All the incentives seem to be for the bailiff to collect as much money or as many possessions as possible on that visit.

Bailiffs have extraordinary rights to seize possessions and the police are the only other profession that I can think of that is permitted by law to enter someone's property. The police can do so only if someone is suspected of serious criminality and they have to secure a search warrant and read someone their rights. Those with a complaint can report the police to the Independent Office for Police Conduct. Bailiffs too need a court order, but there seems to be no requirement for bailiffs to tell someone their rights. Indeed, evidence suggests that bailiffs often misrepresent people's rights to gain entry to their home and seize possessions.

**John Howell** (Henley) (Con): The hon. Lady is moving on to the area of complaints, which is close to my heart. Does she agree that there needs to be a simple system that people can use that includes something like mediation—alternative dispute resolution—that is quick to implement but very friendly and not as intimidating as going to court?

**Emma Reynolds:** The hon. Gentleman pre-empts the next section of my speech, which is all about that. Short of taking a bailiff to court, there is no meaningful way of seeking redress, because there is no simple or clear complaints procedure. Arguably there is no meaningful complaints procedure, although I will come to that.

In the case of my constituent, I complained to the local council, which was enforcing a parking fine. The council and I complained to the bailiffs company, but it disputed my constituent's version of events. I complained to the bailiffs trade association, which we have discussed. I got a letter back saying that it was the word of my constituent against the word of the bailiffs. I raised the case in Parliament and we are having a debate today, but even as an MP, I felt powerless to take the case any further, which was deeply frustrating. Can it be right that, short of taking the case to the courts, our constituents have no other means of redress? It cannot, and the bailiffs know it—they know that most people in debt will not have the money to take them to court. There have been only 56 complaints in the courts since the 2014 reforms despite reported widespread bad practice.

One couple explained to me that their attempts to take a complaint forward had been blocked at every opportunity, including by claims from the bailiffs company that letters had been lost in the post—that old chestnut—and had taken nearly a year and cost thousands of

pounds. Bailiffs are largely unaccountable, which is why I am calling on the Government to bring forward urgent reform.

Specifically, I call on the Minister to take forward the proposal of a cross-party group of MPs led by my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves). In a letter sent to the Minister today, they ask the Government to set up an independent regulator to enforce the rules. The regulator, which could be an existing body or a new body, should have a range of powers and responsibilities to set and enforce rules, and standards for bailiffs, and to take both a reactive and proactive approach, investigating firms and individuals where there are complaints but also proactively monitoring standards. Crucially, a regulator must ensure access to redress. Alongside that—this speaks to the point of the hon. Member for Henley (John Howell)—we need a fair, free, simple and transparent complaints procedure.

Crucially—I very much speak on behalf of my disabled constituent on this point—bailiffs must be required to identify vulnerable households. To end the targeting of vulnerable people, there have to be clear procedures for referring debts back to creditors when enforcement is not appropriate.

The impact of those reforms must be to change the culture of the industry. There are not enough sanctions on bailiffs, and all the incentives drive bailiffs in the wrong direction—to penalise people rather than help them. The debt advice charities are highly regulated. The debt collectors are also regulated. The bailiff industry is an anomaly. I ask the Minister to take urgent action. They are not difficult reforms and, crucially, implementing such changes would mean that bailiffs played by the rules and treated people with the respect that they deserve.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Nigel Evans (in the Chair):** Order. As Members can see, there is a lot of interest in taking part in the debate. I intend to call the Front Benchers just before 3.40 pm. I plead for self-discipline and restraint regarding time when Members make their contributions. I call John Howell.

2.50 pm

**John Howell** (Henley) (Con): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Evans, and to follow the hon. Member for Wolverhampton North East (Emma Reynolds), who introduced this important debate.

The debate is timely. The subject is very much on the lips of the Minister and of members of the Justice Committee, as both the Minister and the Committee are undertaking inquiries at the moment. The Ministry of Justice inquiry, which has called for evidence, will look at the effect of the 2014 legislation, which although it has brought some benefits, clearly did not go far enough and has created new problems, as the Lady told us. Those problems are due to the behaviour of many bailiffs—the way they go about their job is a real problem for us. I believe the Ministry of Justice has promised that any proposed changes will be put out to consultation, so we will all have the opportunity to engage with them.

The Justice Committee also decided to conduct an inquiry on the subject, and we discussed yesterday how it would feed into the Ministry of Justice inquiry and

[John Howell]

how we could submit it as evidence. The Committee's inquiry will look at the 2014 legislation and the way in which complaints are handled and dealt with throughout the process. Two issues emerge above all: the extent of regulation and the complaints system. The two are of course associated, but they need also to be looked at separately.

As the hon. Member for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves) mentioned, the Civil Enforcement Association exists, but it is not independent. The system of regulation is effectively one of self-regulation or, in this case, pretty much no regulation. I listened to all the points made by the hon. Member for Wolverhampton North East about why the system of regulation is not very effective. One point that came in, but was not actually mentioned, is that no sanctions can be levelled against a firm of bailiffs conducting its business in such a way.

**Rachel Reeves:** The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. The Civil Enforcement Association is just a trade body. People have to pay a fee to be a member, but a bailiff does not have to be a member. The answer is to have an independent bailiff regulator capable of banning and prosecuting bailiffs who break the law. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that that is in the interests of bailiffs who respect the law and their customers, particularly vulnerable ones?

**John Howell:** I very much agree with the hon. Lady's description of how the regulatory system should work, but I do not think we should concentrate solely on the regulatory system. I completely take on board everything she said about what the regulatory system needs to include, but we need also to examine how complaints are dealt with if we want to have an effect on bailiffs who are not doing their job properly or are abusing their position.

The current complaints system has seen an enormous increase in people trying to make complaints, but fewer people have been able to do so legitimately. I propose to the Minister that, before she proceeds with the results of the call for evidence, she and I have a conversation. I chair the all-party parliamentary group on alternative dispute resolution, and I think we have the solution to the problem. The solution, which the rail system is using to try to deal with complaints, is to have in place a system of alternative dispute resolution, including such things as mediation, that can deliver quick advice.

One great thing about alternative dispute resolution is that it is much cheaper than going to the courts. That is what we need. If the Minister would like to have a conversation with me, I will propose a system to do that. From the experience that we have of how ADR has been used elsewhere, I think it will satisfy all the requirements that the hon. Member for Wolverhampton North East set out.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

**Mr Nigel Evans (in the Chair):** Order. We are looking for contributions of around four minutes if everybody is to get in. I call Sarah Jones.

2.56 pm

**Sarah Jones (Croydon Central) (Lab):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Evans. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton North East (Emma Reynolds) for introducing the debate so eloquently that it is almost impossible to imagine the Government not wanting to act. I think there is cross-party agreement that action needs to be taken, which has to be incredibly powerful. I know that the Minister is listening, as she has listened to me previously, and that she will have listened to everything that my hon. Friend said.

As we know, bailiffs are the only part of the financial sector that is not regulated with an independent regulator. A powerful case has been made already in the debate, and by Citizens Advice and many other voluntary organisations, that the problem is worsening, that it is not being fixed by the changes made in 2014, and that something should be done. My involvement arose from a meeting with a constituent, the mother of Jerome Rogers from New Addington, who in 2016 ended his life at the age of just 20. Jerome had two £85 traffic fines from Camden Council that he had received in the course of doing his job as a motorbike courier. Due to the escalation of that fine and enforcement by Newlyn plc, the fines spiralled to more than £1,000. The Minister is aware of the case and last year she very kindly met with Jerome's family and with me.

Jerome's case is particularly tragic, but we must not think that it was a one-off. The coroner found that the bailiffs involved with Jerome had complied with the industry's guidelines—guidelines that are self-written and self-enforced, as we have discussed. That is not something to be proud of; it simply highlights how flawed the guidelines are and how flawed the system of self-regulation is across the whole bailiff industry—especially in view of what Jerome was subjected to in the months leading up to his death. Each of these things underlines a systemic problem rather than a problem specific to Jerome.

Jerome was refused an affordable repayment plan. He called the bailiff after being told that he would be receiving a visit to his home and was told that he needed to call Newlyn. Newlyn then told him that he must pay the debt in full. After the bailiff visited his home, adding more money to his debt in the process, he was finally offered a repayment plan, but at £128 per week it was clearly not affordable. His average earnings were about £97 a week, and less than £20 after his work expenses. If Camden Council had offered him a repayment plan of £10 per week there and then, he could have paid off both £65 fines in three months.

Secondly, Jerome's motorbike—his only means of earning money—was clamped. There was dispute over the valuation of the bike and whether it was even legal to clamp it, but looking beyond the valuation, it is surely wrong that a person's sole means of income can be taken away by bailiffs. Thirdly, the enforcement fees were duplicated because the two cases were treated as separate, which is in the interests of no one but the bailiffs, who can charge £75 per case for simply writing a letter. It makes no sense that £150 can be added to a debt for a few pieces of A4 paper, or that two cases cannot be dealt with in the same letter. Bailiffs charge hundreds of pounds per case for every visit to a property, which might explain why they refused a repayment plan



before the bailiff made his visit. The coroner viewed the bailiff's behaviour as intimidating and raised the possibility that his actions could have been viewed as a form of harassment. They involved sitting outside the house for a prolonged period without telling Jerome why he was outside.

The fourth issue is one that has already been spoken about: the bailiff was paid by results. He had the potential to earn more if he seized assets, but if the debt was not cleared he would not get paid. Debt collection agencies are prohibited by their regulator, the Financial Conduct Authority, from paying enforcement agents through such commission models. Those models are common in the bailiff industry, but we cannot stop them leading to bad practice when bailiffs have the power to seize assets and enter homes. It is systemic.

**Andy Slaughter:** There is FCA regulation in the private sector to some extent, but not in the public sector, as in my hon. Friend's example. Extraordinarily, the National Audit Office's recent report found that in many cases Government bodies are worse at fulfilling their duties. Does she agree that the Minister should look particularly at what local authorities and central Government Departments are doing in the area?

**Sarah Jones:** My hon. Friend makes a good point. We must tackle all the aspects; we cannot just say that it is a problem for local authorities without also looking at independent regulation.

I realise that I have already spoken for longer than I should have, Mr Evans. I wanted to give other examples of cases and stories that people have written to me about, but I will write to the Minister about them instead.

The trade body is not fit for purpose as a regulator. Indeed, it has written to me, as have other bailiffs, threatening legal action:

"Please desist from using this tragedy to lobby for changes that are unrelated to the actions of the enforcement agents."

The chief executive officer of the trade body called our work on behalf of Jerome's family

"a means to attract publicity for a populist campaign on behalf of the debt advice sector."

For shame! That is not what we are doing; we are trying to honour the memory of Jerome and fix a system that is clearly broken. I really hope that the Minister will listen. I will work with her, as we all will, to make sure that we bring in the right kind of regulation.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Nigel Evans (in the Chair):** Order. If I let hon. Members know that their speeches are timed on the monitors, it may assist them to keep to the four-minute mark.

3.3 pm

**Neil O'Brien (Harborough) (Con):** I congratulate the hon. Member for Wolverhampton North East (Emma Reynolds) on securing this important debate; she spoke incredibly well. She referred to the treatment that my constituents received at the hands of bailiffs. Let me add a little about their experience by quoting from a letter they wrote:

"My wife & I (both retired) were woken up by loud banging on our front door at 7.22am. When I answered the door I was confronted by two men who announced that they were bailiffs... The first we knew of the matter was when they...turned up at our door... We were...in shock...at the threat of a tow truck arriving at our door to remove our car and that we were to be humiliated by our possessions being publicly removed from our house... Later that day my wife and I sought advice from our local Citizens' Advice Bureau... The CAB advisor informed us that we could have refused the officers entry...and that we could have signed a Statutory Declaration of ownership covering goods not belonging to our son which should have prevented our property being taken in lieu for my son's debt. At no time did the officers inform us about this... My wife and I have never broken the law. Both my wife and I used to work for the prison service. We have both since we retired, been active as local volunteers... I...find it reprehensible that two pensioners should be coerced, albeit politely, into having to hand over their pension savings for something that they are not in any way culpable for. Nor can we believe that British law supports the kind of action we have experienced."

They are absolutely right. It is clear that the law needs to change and that we need to go beyond the 2014 reforms, and I am glad that the Government have announced the call for evidence. I praise the campaigning work of Citizens Advice and the debt charity StepChange. I think six main things need to change.

First, we need an independent regulator, and I welcome that being raised explicitly in the current review. When I took up my constituents' case, I was astonished to find that there was no independent regulator, given that there are industries such as the parking industry in which far less serious things happen but in which there is a clear independent regulator. Debt collectors who are not bailiffs and do not have bailiffs' powers have a regulator, so this is a historical anomaly that needs to be fixed.

Secondly, once the regulator is set up, it needs to improve the process. Part of that is about communication—if my constituents had been informed about the debts at an earlier stage, they could have nipped the whole problem in the bud—but part of it should also be about the offer of an affordable payment plan, as several hon. Members have said. Affordable payment plans have become the norm in most types of debt collection and for most utilities, because we know that vulnerable people are much more likely to pay if they are offered a structured plan rather than getting a big demand all at once. As it happens, my constituents are bright, articulate, hard-working people, but even they felt totally humiliated by the process. Imagine how those who are more vulnerable feel.

**Mr Jayawardena:** Does my hon. Friend agree that it is only right that homeowners should be notified of the fact that a bailiff is about to attend? Of course, we should recognise data protection concerns as well.

**Neil O'Brien:** Absolutely. That point brings me on to the third thing that needs to change: people need to be told what their rights are. My constituents never were. If someone is arrested, they are told their rights; the same thing should happen if a bailiff visits.

Fourthly, there must be a clear and simple complaints procedure through the new independent regulator, backed up with swift fines for bailiffs who break the rules. Fifthly, there must be controls on fees. My constituents' son's original debt was increased by half again, and we have heard about the tragic case of Jerome Rogers,

[Neil O'Brien]

which is incredibly moving. I was shocked that a publicly funded institution had initiated the debt collection against my constituents. As hon. Members have said, the incentives in the industry are to seize as much as possible in order to do as much business as possible, and there is no link between fees and ability to pay. Finally, the new regulator should improve training standards for bailiffs, as some have only a few hours of training. That is truly shocking.

A great injustice was done to my constituents, who are hard-working, law-abiding, public-spirited people. We are lucky to have a very able Minister guiding the Government's response to the call for evidence. Every single day in this country, vulnerable people are being maltreated purely as a result of a historical anomaly. I know that she will want to put that right as soon as possible.

3.7 pm

**Ian Paisley** (North Antrim) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Member for Wolverhampton North East (Emma Reynolds) on getting today's debate on the agenda. I agree wholeheartedly that we should be helping people, not penalising them, and that there is certainly a need for regulatory change on the British mainland.

May I cite the example of Northern Ireland? Bailiffs do not operate in Northern Ireland; we have a very different system, which I recommend that the Minister should examine when she considers how to take action on the points raised today. Indeed, the attitude of, "If you have it and you haven't paid, we will seize it", I see on popular television programmes, which is alien to many people in Northern Ireland who face debt issues.

Enforcement officers in Northern Ireland can go out only if they have a court order and are accompanied by a police officer. Enforcement is strictly and specifically done via court order, and the individual in question knows that it is happening and, ultimately, when it will happen. This is therefore not a common practice, as it is on the British mainland. Even in the Republic of Ireland, where bailiffs do operate, the court order has to contain the name of the bailiff who will go to the person's home. It is an open and transparent system, which can be challenged.

Why is that the case? Northern Ireland's troubled past is very clear. Having gangs or groups of people who are allowed to "enforce" in Northern Ireland without police supervision could be very dangerous, given our paramilitary past and the issues that pertain there. Indeed, there are some very detailed cases that show why that should be avoided. Most recently, for example, in Roscommon in the Republic of Ireland, a Northern Ireland enforcement team was employed by a bank to seize a property that a mortgage had not been paid on for 16 years. The enforcement order in the Republic of Ireland contained the name of the bailiffs who would attend the property and remove the people who had not paid for it. Unfortunately, it spiralled into a very serious crime situation.

The bailiffs, or the enforcement officers from Northern Ireland who were employed, many of them ex-soldiers and some of them ex-police officers, were charged upon by about 40 people in a gang. A chainsaw was taken to the door, the door was removed, and the bailiffs were dragged out of the property, tied up and beaten. One of

them received a fractured skull, another a broken arm. The dog that they had with them to do security work and to look after the property that evening was killed. One of the bailiffs was forced with a gun pointed to his head to eat the faeces that the dog had left. So we had a very serious situation.

Thankfully, the Guards in the Republic of Ireland have arrested four people and hopefully charges will pertain in that case. However, it shows the difficulties in a situation that has grown up with crime, and I see crime developing here on the British mainland in many of our cities, where there is anger and instant "law of the jungle" retribution. We saw that here in this city last night, with people stabbing a boy who had driven into their car. Allowing that sort of attitude to develop in a country will lead to a law of the jungle mentality. The culture change that the hon. Member for Wolverhampton North East argued for is therefore absolutely essential.

We do not need gangs of people to be asked to do this work; rather, we need a managed response to debt. Debt has to be addressed and ultimately, of course, paid, and the person has to take responsibility for paying off their debts. But when enforcement officers humiliate people, and when they feel vulnerable in their own properties and do not know their rights, as Members have described, that needs to be addressed through proper regulation. I therefore support the motion moved by the hon. Lady and hope that the Government will look at the example of Northern Ireland and ask, "How have they been able to get away from creating a situation that would have deteriorated into a downward spiral of the law of the jungle?"

3.11 pm

**Rachel Maclean** (Redditch) (Con): Thank you for calling me, Mr Evans. It is a great pleasure to speak in this debate and to follow the other interesting and vital contributions. I want to present a slightly different perspective. I have a debt collection agency in my constituency that has been very concerned and wanted me to speak in this debate, because it felt it was important to put on the record the practices of the good debt collection agencies. The hon. Member for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves) said it was not fair on those who play by the rules, although there are clearly many examples of highly concerning practice, which Members from all parts of the House have highlighted, and I certainly do not take away from those for one second.

The point behind my contribution is to highlight for the Minister how the good debt collection agencies operate. Bristow and Sutor employs 156 people in my Redditch constituency and is already proactively improving the way that it operates, because it recognises many of the concerns that have been raised. Indeed, collecting debt in a fair and compassionate way results in more debt being collected, which is what we all want. We need to see that debt collected because it makes a vital contribution to our public services.

Importantly, Bristow and Sutor's agents are all directly employed by the company. They are not on zero-hours contracts and are monitored and trained by the company directly. They have body-worn cameras when they go out and visit clients. The company has named people who deal with a particular client when they are visited and its agents are trained to deal with all the situations that they might come across.

**Alex Chalk** (Cheltenham) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that reputable firms should be the loudest advocates for a system of regulation, so that they can mark themselves out from the rogue agents that behave unconscionably and make innocent people's lives a misery?

**Rachel Maclean:** Yes. I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention; I completely agree. I was going to say that this particular firm is not against further regulation at all. It merely makes the point that it needs to be done in consultation with the debt enforcement agencies, looking at the best practice of some of the good agents, who carry out vital work that needs to be done to recover funds that will go into our local government coffers. When I visited that firm in my constituency, it made the point that its recovery rate is much more effective than those of some of its competitors. It is the second largest enforcement agency in the country and covers 16% of all local authorities' collections. It is not the one that the hon. Member for Wolverhampton North East (Emma Reynolds) referred to, and it does have a good reputation locally. I wanted merely to place that on the record, and I agree with my hon. Friend that we need to totally overhaul the system.

**Emma Reynolds:** I am interested in what the hon. Lady is saying. She has made an important point about that company employing its agents directly. Does she feel that that has made a difference in its behaviour and practices?

**Rachel Maclean:** Absolutely. I have visited the company, which is a long-standing employer in the constituency. People have worked there for many years, starting their careers in that business. The company takes that very seriously, otherwise it would not have loyal employees for such a long period who care about doing their jobs properly and respectfully and about treating their clients with dignity in extremely difficult situations. That gives further assurance that there is proper oversight.

**Ruth George** (High Peak) (Lab): Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Rachel Maclean:** I am sorry, but I need to conclude. I know that people want to speak. I very much support the calls for an independent regulator.

3.15 pm

**Justin Madders** (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Evans. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton North East (Emma Reynolds) on securing this important debate and on the way in which she introduced the subject. As we have heard, we have all had many constituents contact us when they have received a bailiff's letter or had a bailiff turn up at the door. Although we would want our constituents to contact us as soon as possible, when things might be a little easier to resolve, we have to remember that quite often a Member of Parliament is not the first port of call for someone facing a debt situation.

There is the question of household debt, the availability of easy credit and, as we have heard, the way in which a seemingly small debt can spiral out of control once an enforcement process begins, so we need to think about

what more we can do to stop debt becoming the debilitating and all-consuming terror that it often is. To paraphrase a former Prime Minister, we should be not just tough on bailiffs, but tough on the causes of bailiffs, but that is perhaps a wider debate for another time.

I appreciate that there are important distinctions between the powers of a bailiff appointed by the court and a debt collector, but are those differences apparent to the public, particularly when someone knocks on the door unexpectedly demanding money? We know bailiffs must provide evidence upon request by the debtors, as well as sight of a warrant providing them with authority to enter, but how many people in such a pressurised situation will have the presence of mind to ask for those things?

We know that, as part of national standards, bailiffs are expected to treat the debtor fairly at all times. However, one recent example that I came across concerned a constituent who was unable to keep up with the payment plan they had previously agreed because they were in poor health and had been unable to work. The bailiff's demand in those circumstances was to actually request that the monthly repayment be doubled. How is that a reasonable request? How is that treating the debtor fairly at all times? The national standards are not legally binding, which is presumably why we see such outrageous behaviour.

**Ruth George:** Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Justin Madders:** I am sorry; other people want to speak, so we have to move on.

An even worse example was when a constituent had agreed a payment plan with bailiffs, which she was paying on time and in full. She then received a letter from the bailiffs requesting that the repayment increase by £30 a week. There never was and has not been any justification given for that proposal. Following that request, and despite the constituent asking for an income and expenditure form to demonstrate that she could not afford the increase, she then received a letter asking that the full debt be repaid within 24 hours or goods would be removed. There then followed the threatening phone calls and visits to the property that we have often heard about. Such despicable behaviour cannot be justified, but in this instance, as in many, the original creditor had washed their hands of the whole business. They do not seem to care how unreasonable, threatening or intimidating the bailiffs get. They just want their money back. Even if they are outsourcing responsibility to recover the debt, they should not outsource their responsibility to ensure that the debt is recovered in a responsible manner.

Demands for unaffordable payment plans are probably the most commonly occurring issue that we get. We often find that bailiffs are unwilling to negotiate and then ask for the full amount owed. They even suggest that debtors should borrow more money to repay the debt. As we have heard, the situation is exacerbated by adding hundreds of pounds to the debt once a visit has been made by a bailiff, which can lead to punitive increases that are often totally disproportionate to the original sum being recovered. I appreciate that those wishing to recover the debts need to recover their own costs as well, but the fees, which are then treated as part of the debt, cannot make it any easier for the individual to repay the debt.



[Justin Madders]

In conclusion, I support Citizens Advice's call for the Government to report annually on the debt to Government and essential service providers, and for the introduction of an independent regulator for the bailiff industry. It is time we gave people confidence that the difficult issue of debt enforcement will be given the same checks and balances that we rightly expect in many other areas of our lives.

**Mr Nigel Evans (in the Chair):** If hon. Members aim for the three-minute mark, perhaps we will be able to get in everyone who wants to speak.

3.19 pm

**Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con):** I congratulate the hon. Member for Wolverhampton North East (Emma Reynolds) on obtaining this important debate, and my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Neil O'Brien) on persuading me to sign the letter of the hon. Member for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves) about trying to get change through a meeting with the Justice Secretary.

I am making my speech partly in my role as chair of the all-party parliamentary group on poverty. Clearly, poverty and debt are inextricably linked. I totally agree that there is a problem with bailiffs and support the call for an independent regulator. There are also problems with debt. Collecting debt must be a commercial matter. It can be very effective. I have to tell the House that in my business life we have a number of offices and, in 2008 when things were pretty tough in the economy, we were visited by the bailiffs and paid our debt very quickly on the back of that. We did not realise how quickly bailiffs could enter premises on a commercial lease without any notice, but we soon found out, so they can be very effective. However, there are other and better ways to collect debts in many instances.

Debt is a commercial matter and those to whom people are not paying their debts have a perfect right to try to collect them, but several hon. Members have spoken today about local authorities, over which we should have some influence. The local authorities in question should learn from and develop best practice on debt collection. I had a meeting with StepChange, the debt advice charity. Thirty per cent. of the people coming to the charity are behind with their council tax. That is by far the No. 1 area for debt that it works with. There has been a huge increase over the past seven years. Seven years ago, 21% of total debt was owed to utilities and local government. Today 26% of debt is with utilities, but 40% of total debt is with local authorities. Local authorities have been criticised by the Treasury Committee for being overzealous in their recourse to bailiffs and could make a significant difference to people's lives if they adopted debt collection best practice. The Justice Committee will also consider that. Interesting research from Citizens Advice said that one in four people had made their bailiff an affordable payment offer that was rejected. Clearly there is a better way to deal with the matter.

What is best practice? The Money Advice Service has developed what it calls a supportive council tax recovery toolkit for local authorities to adopt, which talks about best practice and how to liaise with debt advice agencies,

taking specific approaches to specific cohorts, particularly vulnerable people. On utilities, I have had dialogue with Yorkshire Water about how it deals with vulnerable households and how it makes sure it identifies those people. According to the Money and Mental Health Policy Institute, 50% of people who are in debt have mental health problems, so it is a case of identifying them and taking a different approach. In my constituency, as in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch (Rachel Maclean), an excellent debt collection agency works with the utilities. I have visited it and it takes a supportive and collaborative approach to debt collection. The collection rates are at least as good as those obtained by traditional routes.

I absolutely support the calls for an independent regulator, but I also suggest developing best practice and perhaps creating a requirement for local authorities to follow it in the first instance. That would make a huge difference to people who are in debt and to people in poverty.

3.24 pm

**Yvonne Fovargue (Makerfield) (Lab):** I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton North East (Emma Reynolds) on securing the debate. I have long been interested in bailiff practice both as chair of the all-party group on debt and personal finance, and from my long association with Citizens Advice as manager of the local bureau. I had hoped that the 2014 regulations would stop the bad practice I saw when I was doing that work. I saw bailiffs who threatened to take children into care. On one occasion I heard them trying to seize a family pet in front of the children. Perversely, the regulations have created consolidation into bigger firms, and it is easier for the people at the top of those firms to blame individual bailiffs as rogues, and to say that it is nothing to do with them, their training or their practices. I have sympathy for individual bailiffs. As we have heard, there are some very bad employment practices such as working on commission and payment by results. We must stop the cycle of desperate people chasing desperate people.

Bailiffs are still breaching the new regulations. According to StepChange, a third of the 2.2 million people contacted by bailiffs in the past two years experienced them flouting the law. Bailiffs forced entry and took goods needed for work. Half the StepChange clients surveyed in 2016 said that affordable repayment plans had been refused. I have certainly never known a bailiff to accept the single financial statement that most other creditors accept. Complaints are too difficult. Only 28% of people complain and, as we have heard, there have been 56 complaints to the court since 2014. Does that mean that we have had only 56 problems with bailiffs? The charities would certainly dispute that.

To me, the question is not why we should regulate bailiffs but why we should not. Everyone else is regulated. Debt collectors and debt charities are regulated, but bailiffs are free from oversight by an independent regulator despite dealing with people in probably the most vulnerable circumstances who should have the most protection. Their only protection at the moment is guidance. As others have asked, what are the sanctions if that is ignored? Many hon. Members have put forward the same solution: independent regulation twinned with a simplified single free and independent complaints procedure similar to the system used for debt collectors. It is not

only the frontline charities who call for that—some bailiffs firms would like it because they want to get some of the rogues out of the business. Self-regulation has not worked. There is enough evidence to prove that there is a systemic problem and not just a few bad apples. Everyone who deals with people in very vulnerable circumstances is regulated, so I ask the Minister why bailiffs should be the exception. I ask her to act quickly to prevent anyone else paying the highest price, as Jerome Rogers did.

3.27 pm

**Dr Matthew Offord** (Hendon) (Con): I shall not delay the House much. I want to focus on just one area. Many hon. Members have focused on financial recovery, which is entirely appropriate. To assist constituents and improve the perception of the bailiff industry, I want to talk about repossessions.

A landlord can, for any reason, apply to a county court to seek a possession order. That usually happens when a tenant has broken the terms of the lease. Subject to the decision of the court, the tenant will be given 14 or 28 days to vacate the property or, in exceptional hardship, the judge can allow them 42 days to leave. Such an order is presented and communicated to the tenant so that they are aware of it. Many people then decide to see the council, but local authorities tell people to remain in the property until they are physically kicked out.

On occasion, landlords can apply to the High Court to seek an immediate possession order and enforcement by a High Court enforcement officer. That requires no notice. An officer will turn up at someone's house and tell them to pack the possessions that they need for the next few days. They will give them an hour to leave, and they can collect their property at an arranged date later. Imagine the hardship and distress that it causes someone when they are told they must leave the house immediately and that they can then take the paperwork to the council, which will rehouse them.

Will the Minister consider speaking to her colleagues in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government about the rehousing of people who have received possession notices, so that they do not have to go through that traumatic experience—particularly if they are elderly or vulnerable, or have children?

3.29 pm

**Rachel Reeves** (Leeds West) (Lab): It is a pleasure to speak under your chairmanship, Mr Evans, and I wish to make a few brief points in this important debate—there have already been many valuable contributions from across the House.

The debate should be seen in the wider context of growing household debt. The rise of rogue bailiffs speaks to a wider malaise in our economy. People face a range of challenges, including insecure work and zero-hours contracts, stagnant wages, benefit cuts and access to affordable credit, which all put pressure on household finances. It is no surprise that the No. 1 money concern for people seeking help from Citizens Advice is household debt. UK households owe an average of just over £15,000 in unsecured lending from credit card firms, banks and other household debt, and unsecured debt is now the highest it has ever been—indeed, it is higher than before the financial crisis.

It is not a sound basis on which to build our future economic prosperity if more of our wages go towards servicing debt than spending on our basic needs. It is therefore not surprising in such an environment that more people are racking up debt and struggling to pay household bills, council tax and some of the other debts we are discussing. It is also not surprising that into such an environment step those rogue bailiffs who exploit people who are already struggling with debt, and who are vulnerable or in precarious circumstances.

Like the hon. Member for Redditch (Rachel Maclean), I am not arguing—I do not think any Member of the House would argue this—that creditors are not entitled to pursue their debtors. It would be unfair on those who do pay their debts if others were not encouraged and made to do so. The issue, however, is about obeying the law and exploiting people, especially if they already face financial hardship and are vulnerable. In truth, ballooning household debt means that bailiffs now have more scope to exploit some of the most vulnerable people in our society by refusing to accept affordable payment offers, and by misrepresenting their rights of entry or acting aggressively or unsympathetically on the doorstep. That is the issue we need to focus on, and where we need Government action.

Members have already mentioned the letter sent today to the Justice Secretary to ensure that the Government take seriously calls from across the House for an independent regulator. As my hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Yvonne Fovargue) said, the 2014 reforms have not worked and it is now time for such a regulator. I hope the Government seize this opportunity and take heed of the concerns raised and the examples that Members have given, put in place that independent regulator, and ensure that those struggling with financial difficulties are not exploited in the ways we have heard about.

3.32 pm

**Ms Marie Rimmer** (St Helens South and Whiston) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Evans, and to follow speeches on the important matters raised. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton North East (Emma Reynolds) for securing the debate. As we have heard, rogue bailiffs are a blight on the lives of some of the most vulnerable people in our society, and the issue affects those with debt from household bills rather than from consumer credit. People who are struggling to pay their council tax or energy bills—the essentials in life—are having increasing problems with bailiffs.

There are serious, structural problems with how some bailiffs operate, and are allowed to operate, and 850,000 people contacted by bailiffs in the past two years have experienced law breaking. As my hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Yvonne Fovargue) said, just 56 complaints have been launched with Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunal Service. The complaints system is not fit for purpose and lacks teeth. When someone complains directly to a firm, there are no statutory guidelines about how complaints should be reviewed, or about the sanctions or compensation that should result. The process is long-winded, confusing and inaccessible, and rarely leads to any real consequences for the bailiff involved. However, rule breaking by bailiffs has consequences for those they contact. Refusal to accept

[*Ms Marie Rimmer*]

affordable payment offers is a huge problem—almost one in four people contacted by bailiffs in the past two years had an affordable payment offer rejected.

My constituency suffers from income poverty and has one of the highest levels of suicide. There are also high levels of prescriptions for anti-depressants. One of my constituents, a 65-year-old woman, has already had her personal independence payment stopped and is subject to the bedroom tax. Her gas supply has been capped and she has rent arrears, and has received an offer from the housing association. She now has to pay back a council tax debt at an amount that is simply unaffordable to her. After bailiffs knocked at her door, she was frightened and agreed on the spot to pay the amount suggested. This woman sleeps on a couch—she does not own a bed. As a direct result of bailiff action, my constituent's mental and physical health has deteriorated.

Almost two in five of those contacted by bailiffs in the last two years experienced some sort of intimidation. I call on the Minister to act as quickly as possible and to take steps to alleviate the problems faced by my constituents and those who are suffering across the country.

3.35 pm

**Melanie Onn** (Great Grimsby) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Evans. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton North East (Emma Reynolds) on securing this important debate. I wish to raise a few cases that my constituents have brought to my attention, and I will focus on vulnerability, which has already been mentioned by some of my colleagues.

Constituents have contacted me in a state of real despair and great distress. One constituent has multiple health conditions, all of which qualify her to be considered vulnerable under the bailiff's own policies and guidelines, but despite her advising the bailiff of that, her vulnerability was entirely ignored and the debt agency would not take it into consideration until my office intervened. At one stage of the interaction between my constituent and the bailiffs, rather than trying to assist or advise her constructively, she was advised that prison might be an option.

Another constituent has two young children and was pregnant with her third. She too would be considered vulnerable under the bailiff's own policies. She regularly received threatening letters about the removal of her property and her possessions. She had so few possessions that she was regularly on the phone to my office, in tears, fearing that her children's toys would be removed to settle some of those debts. The fact that the bailiff would not take into consideration any of the vulnerabilities detailed in its own policies until my office stepped in tells me that the current systems are not working. The extra stress placed on my constituent during her pregnancy made it even worse, and every letter sent and visit made accrued extra financial burden and added more to a debt that she already had no idea how to pay.

Another constituent was harassed by threats of the removal of belongings, and there were many visits and additional letters, ramping up those artificial charges. My office intervened and managed to put in place a reviewed payment plan, but unfortunately the bailiff

entirely ignored that agreement, and the following day they turned up at my constituent's home demanding payment. After an attempt to intimidate my constituent, we had to step in again, but when her health condition meant that she ended up in hospital and unfortunately missed a £10 payment, the bailiff was back at the door as soon as she was out of hospital, demanding payments at a much higher, unaffordable level, and saying that the debt had increased. That was not the case at all, and was completely false advice about the current situation. Fortunately, we were able to resolve the problem again, but this shows that the bailiffs' code is falling short and self-policing is not working. Today, a clear case has been made for far better enforcement, although if that adds to the burdens of local authorities, the Government should not seek to take action without ensuring that additional resources are in place.

3.39 pm

**Gloria De Piero** (Ashfield) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Evans. This has been a fantastic debate from which I have learned a great deal.

I am pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton North East (Emma Reynolds) secured the debate to shine a light on the case of her disabled constituent, who thought she was being burgled when debt collectors forced their way into her home without showing ID, and stole cash from her purse. As we know, that was not an isolated incident. The hon. Member for Harborough (Neil O'Brien) described a case where constituents of his suffered total humiliation. My hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) talked about threatening and intimidating behaviour, and my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn) spoke of vulnerable constituents receiving threatening letters and living in fear and anxiety.

My hon. Friend the Member for Croydon Central (Sarah Jones) spoke about the tragic death of Jerome Rogers. That should concentrate all our minds on the importance of this debate. Jerome was a young man with plenty to live for when he took his own life, but it seems he felt that he just could not go on in the face of the stress and despair he felt after months of interaction with bailiffs. Looking at his story, it is striking how unfair and pointless his treatment was. He was struggling with debt and trying to get out of it, but the odds were stacked against him.

Two unpaid £65 traffic fines spiralled to debts of more than £1,000 in a matter of months. Sky-high bailiff fees meant that there was virtually no cap on what they could take from Jerome. Knowing he could not cope with the debt and the eye-watering fees, he contacted the bailiff company and the individual bailiff dealing with his case, asking to set up an affordable repayment plan. He was met with a flat refusal and little to no human compassion. At least he could earn some money using his motorbike to deliver blood supplies to London's hospitals—but no. It seems that the bailiffs were systematically cutting off every escape route he could think of. They clamped Jerome's motorbike, despite the fact that its value fell far below the £1,350 threshold for seizing or taking control of goods. Not only did Jerome have no money and no agency to solve his problems, but he had the added pressure of the intimidating presence of a bailiff outside his home. The stress was unimaginable, and ultimately Jerome just could not take it anymore.



As many people have said, we are not talking about a one-off case, or a few rogue bailiffs and their firms. Recent research from Citizens Advice shows that one person in three has experienced bailiffs breaking the rules, and half of StepChange Debt Charity's clients said their bailiff refused to accept an affordable repayment offer. This is a systemic failure in our society that must be dealt with.

The legislation covering bailiffs is complex and fragmented. It has failed to protect vulnerable people going through hard times from aggressive and intimidating behaviour. There were some positive measures in the 2014 reforms to taking control of goods, but they just have not worked. It seems that bailiffs are ignoring many of the provisions, as they did when seizing Jerome's motorbike, refusing affordable payment plans or engaging in threatening behaviour. We cannot allow the bailiff industry to continue marking its own homework.

**Ruth George:** I have had similar problems in my constituency with the bailiffs hired by my local council. Bristow and Sutor—a company that the hon. Member for Redditch (Rachel Maclean) mentioned—uses cameras to take photos of people's possessions and threatens them with those possessions being sold off if they cannot pay a full demand up front, immediately. It also refuses payment plans. My constituents say its bailiffs have even visited elderly relatives, refused to leave their properties and made them feel intimidated. I am sorry to say that even where we have better practice, with directly employed agents, very serious complaints are still being made.

**Gloria De Piero:** I thank my hon. Friend for that contribution. Story after story shows why reform is necessary. Unlike similar industries dealing with vulnerable people, such as debt collectors, the bailiff industry is not overseen by an independent regulator. As Labour recognised with our successful payday loan campaign, self-regulation is just not suitable for industries with intrusive powers over vulnerable people's lives, homes and finances. It is just too easy for unscrupulous companies to be greedy or to mistreat people when they are at their lowest. None of the main trade bodies for bailiff companies seems interested in enforcing the law or holding the industry to account, and even if they were, they do not have the teeth to do so, just as we saw with payday lenders.

There is also no simple, accessible complaints system for people to report the horror stories or infringements of the bailiffs they are dealing with. The only thing that will do, as so many colleagues have said, is to replace the broken system of self-regulation and piecemeal reform with independent bodies that will hold the industry to account and allow people's complaints to be heard and dealt with. We need either a new regulator or to bring bailiffs within the remit of the Financial Conduct Authority—that went a long way towards reining in payday lenders. It does not matter what body we choose as long as it is fully independent and has the teeth and the will to put a stop to unscrupulous behaviour.

We also need a simplified, free, independent complaints procedure, adjudicated by an independent body. We need to listen to the myriad voices calling for change—organisations that in many cases are working on the frontline of the effects of the broken bailiff system.

They include AdviceUK, the Children's Society, Christians Against Poverty, Citizens Advice, Community Money Advice, the Institute of Money Advisers, the Money and Mental Health Policy Institute, the Money Advice Trust and StepChange Debt Charity.

Many colleagues said that the current system is not fit for purpose. The hon. Member for Henley (John Howell) talked about the current system of regulation not working because there are no sanctions, as did the hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake), who also brought a mental health angle to the discussions and suggested some practical solutions. My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves) talked knowledgeably about how the law needs to change, and made a wider point about use of bailiffs being a symptom of increasing household debt. The hon. Member for North Antrim (Ian Paisley) brought a Northern Ireland perspective to the debate and talked about how enforcement orders are used. My hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston made a wider, and important, point about the need to be tough on bailiffs and tough on the causes of bailiffs. My hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Yvonne Fovargue) talked of desperate people chasing desperate people and brought her long-standing expertise to the debate. My hon. Friend the Member for St Helens South and Whiston (Ms Rimmer) talked about how the complaints system is not working and is not fit for purpose, and the wider issue of poverty.

There really is no excuse for the Minister not to act. As the hon. Member for Redditch (Rachel Maclean) explained, some of the bailiff companies are themselves calling for independent regulation. I have a fundamental request. Will the Minister agree to enact a properly independent regulator, and will she set a timetable today to do so? Will she also urge other local councils to follow the example of Hammersmith and Fulham and not use bailiffs? Will she heed the call from the hon. Member for Hendon (Dr Offord) for councils to look at how they deal with repossession and rehousing? Every day that we wait is another day of stress and despair for too many people struggling with bailiffs.

**Mr Nigel Evans (in the Chair):** I remind the Minister that it is customary to leave a minute or so for the proposer of the motion to wind up.

3.47 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Lucy Frazer):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Evans. I congratulate the hon. Member for Wolverhampton North East (Emma Reynolds) on securing the debate on a matter that I know has affected her constituents greatly, as she spoke to me about it a few weeks ago.

I pay tribute to all hon. Members for the quality and passion of the contributions today. As my hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell) said, this is a timely debate because on 25 November the Government launched a call for evidence to inform their second review of the 2014 reforms that regulate enforcement agents, in order to ensure that that important area operates well. We have framed that call for evidence against the points that have been raised with us about how the system is not operating as it should. We have heard much today that will help us reflect on that call for evidence.

[*Lucy Frazer*]

It is interesting that three colleagues—my hon. Friends the Members for North East Hampshire (Mr Jayawardena), for Harborough (Neil O'Brien) and for Hendon (Dr Offord)—all raised examples of bailiffs taking action against people who were not even the debtors.

**Mr Jayawardena:** I welcome the fact that the Government have agreed to review the matter. Does the Minister agree that it is important to stop innocent homeowners being caught up in the collection of debts that they have nothing to do with, including where those debts have been incurred through fraudulent credit card applications, as in the case of my constituent?

**Lucy Frazer:** That is a very interesting point, which I just highlighted—three of my hon. Friends raised the issue of whom the action is taken against. I know my hon. Friend feels strongly about this, and it is something he has talked to me about before.

Before I turn to the review in more detail, I want to set out a bit more about the subject of debt enforcement more broadly. Enforcement agent action has been, and is likely to remain, a highly divisive subject. People who experience debt problems represent a broad spectrum of society, including some who are extremely vulnerable and others who deliberately refuse to pay for products and services.

It is important to note the two points that were made in this debate by a number of Members. The hon. Member for North Antrim (Ian Paisley) and my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) highlighted the need for people who owe money to pay their debts, because the recovery of debts is important to the economy and the justice system. My hon. Friend the Member for Redditch (Rachel Maclean) highlighted the good practice of a company in her constituency. The Government are committed to ensuring that all enforcement agents treat debtors fairly and operate responsibly and proportionately. Our role as a Government is to strike the right balance between ensuring that debts can be collected effectively while protecting debtors from enforcement agents' aggressive behaviour.

With those principles in mind, and after an extensive period of research and engagement, the Government imposed significant extra regulation on the enforcement process and the behaviour of enforcement agents in April 2014. I am pleased that the hon. Member for Wolverhampton North East welcomes those reforms, which included a comprehensive code governing when and how enforcement agents can enter somebody's premises; the safeguards to prevent the use of force against debtors; which goods agents can and cannot seize and, if necessary, sell; and what fees they can charge.

The reforms stopped enforcement agents entering homes when only children are present and introduced important safeguards for vulnerable debtors. They aimed to make all parties more aware of their rights and responsibilities and introduced a new certification process for enforcement agents to ensure that they are the right people for the job. They introduced mandatory training to ensure that enforcement agents have the skills required to perform the role. The Government undertook to review the implementation of the reforms after one, three and, if necessary, five years in order to check that

they are working as intended. The review, which was published in 2018, found that the reforms had many positive benefits, such as better awareness of debtors' rights and how to complain, as well as more clarity for debtors about the fees that can be charged, the processes that should be followed and where to go for advice. However, it also reported that debt advisers and debtors still perceive some enforcement agents to be acting aggressively and, in some cases, not acting within the regulations.

The Government take those concerns very seriously. While many enforcement agents work within the law, we will not tolerate any who pursue aggressive tactics and bad practice, who make people's lives a misery and ruin the industry's reputation. For that reason, we launched the call for evidence to shine a spotlight on the behaviour of enforcement agents. Many of the points that have been raised today are the subject of that call for evidence. The hon. Members for St Helens South and Whiston (Ms Rimmer) and for Wolverhampton North East highlighted the problem of threatening behaviour, which is part of the call for evidence. My hon. Friend the Member for Henley and the hon. Member for Wolverhampton North East raised the issue of complaints, which is also a subject for the call for evidence. The hon. Member for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham) and my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough raised issues about training—again, that is a matter for the call for evidence.

The independent regulator, which is part of our consultation, was raised by my hon. Friends the Members for Henley and for Harborough, and by the hon. Members for Coventry South, for Wolverhampton North East, for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves), for Croydon Central (Sarah Jones), for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) and for Makerfield (Yvonne Fovargue). The treatment of vulnerable people was raised by the hon. Member for Lewisham West and Penge (Ellie Reeves), and that is also covered in the call for evidence, which is running for 12 weeks until 17 February 2019. As part of that, we are meeting representatives from the advice sector to get a better understanding of the research they have conducted and their concerns, and we will also be talking to enforcement agents and creditors. However, the call for evidence is not just about collecting data; we are very keen to hear from people about their individual experiences. A number of hon. Members have shared the experiences of their constituents, whom I encourage to respond to our call for evidence.

I was very pleased to have had the opportunity to meet the hon. Member for Croydon Central and her constituents the Rogers family, who sadly lost Jerome following visits to their home by enforcement agents. Like others, I am pleased to see them here today. I thank them for their contribution to this important issue and for their continuing efforts to highlight this matter.

A number of hon. Members have suggested that the Government's reforms should go further by introducing an independent regulator, and that there should be a simpler, free and independent complaints procedure. As set out in the call for evidence, we are considering these suggestions. The call for evidence asks whether independent regulation is needed and, if so, what form that should take and how it should be funded. We would welcome any input on all those questions. It also asks about the complaints procedure, as I have said.

In addition to reviewing the behaviour of enforcement agents, the Government are working more widely to help people who fall into problem debt by providing them with protection and ensuring that creditors are acting responsibly. For example, the Government are increasing funding for free debt advice via the Money Advice Service, which will spend £56 million this year to help more than half a million people. After consultation, and via regulations to be laid this year, the Government will implement their 2017 manifesto commitment to introduce a breathing space in order to give people in serious debt the right to legal protections from their creditors for up to six weeks. We will also introduce a statutory debt repayment plan to enable those with unmanageable debts to enter into an agreement to pay their debts in a realistic timeframe. The Ministry of Justice is a member of the Government's Fairness Group, which works with the advice sector to look at the issue of fairness in Government debt management and in enforcement practices.

I would like to end by commenting on the cross-party support to address this important issue. It has been invaluable to me, and I am sure to others, to hear not only people's tragic personal stories, but articulate and thoughtful arguments about the principle behind these issues.

**Dr Offord:** Will the Minister meet her colleagues in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to discuss possession orders and assist local authorities in rehousing people before such a possession order is escalated to the High Court? That would ensure that they were removed from a property immediately, preventing the hardship and stress that many people experience.

**Lucy Frazer:** I note that my hon. Friend made a very eloquent speech on that subject, which we can of course look into.

Enforcement agents play an important role in recovering money. It is a matter of regret that some are not behaving as they should, and that many members of the public do not hold them in high regard. It is vital that the public have confidence in them.

I thank the hon. Member for Wolverhampton North East for the opportunity to respond to this debate, and I look forward to the finalisation and conclusion of the call for evidence on how we can take this matter forward.

3.57 pm

**Emma Reynolds:** I thank Members from across the House, including our Front-Bench spokesperson and the Minister, for contributing to this debate. They have given such powerful examples of bailiffs' poor, aggressive and intimidating behaviour. What has been striking about this debate—it is not always the case in this place—is the cross-party consensus that the current system of self-regulation is not working. There is a need for an independent regulator, a clear and simple complaints procedure, the training of bailiffs and better protection for vulnerable people.

I welcome the Government's call for evidence and the Justice Committee's inquiry, which has just started. We must see this issue in the wider context of rising household debt, as mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves). The need for change is urgent. We have to do more to root out aggressive and intimidating behaviour. We have to address the anomaly that somehow bailiffs are not properly regulated but debt advice charities and debt collection agencies are. Above all we must ensure that, in a civilised society, everybody is treated with respect. The focus should be on helping people who get into debt to get out of debt, not forcing them into a spiral of despair, which in some cases has led to the most tragic events, as we have heard, with Jerome Rogers taking his own life.

I know that the Minister is listening to Members of different parties, and I thank her for doing that. I hope that after the call for evidence, the Government can quickly put in place these reforms, for which there is cross-party support. I hope that we can work together to ensure that this aggressive behaviour is rooted out.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered bailiff regulatory reform.



## Social Mobility: North-west

[MR ADRIAN BAILEY *in the Chair*]

4 pm

**Jo Platt** (Leigh) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move,

That this House has considered social mobility in the North West.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bailey. Social mobility is a term that we frequently use, but what do we really mean by it? At its core, we are discussing the life chances of every person in our constituencies, but what impact does the place we live, the family we were born to, our age, our career, our earnings or our parents' background have on our educational and career opportunities and our life experiences?

Perfect social mobility would mean that, wherever we came from and whatever our background and our parents' experiences, we would have a fair shot at success. Sadly, many of the constituencies represented by hon. Members in this debate are all too familiar with what poor social mobility looks like. It means that in areas such as Leigh, the place in which a person happens to live or have grown up in too often dictates their opportunities in life and blocks their shot at success.

**Justin Madders** (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): I am doubly delighted, as the chair of the all-party parliamentary group on social mobility and as a north-west Member, to be present in this debate. Does my hon. Friend agree that this is not just a regional issue, but is much more nuanced? It varies between individual towns, and there are rural issues too. Social mobility is a much more finessed geographical issue than is sometimes imagined.

**Jo Platt:** I completely agree with my hon. Friend, and I thank him for all the work he does on the APPG on social mobility. I think he is referring to the 2017 "State of the nation" report, which stated that it is no longer inner cities, but remote rural and coastal areas and former industrial areas where social mobility is a huge problem. He will agree that that goes against everything we should stand for as MPs. It cements inequality into our society. It excludes and isolates whole areas of the country from our joint prosperity. It demotivates and demoralises, and can even lead to the breakdown of our social fabric.

Unfortunately, in the north-west we know exactly how that can feel. The region has some of the highest poverty rates and some of the lowest attainment rates in the UK. Fewer than half of children from low-income families—48%—are school-ready. Just 3.9% of children eligible for free school meals gained five A grades at GCSE, and nearly three quarters of local authorities in the north-west have more than one in four workers earning below the living wage. As the Social Mobility Commission said in its annual report, and as I just mentioned,

"old industrial towns and coal mining areas that have struggled as England has moved from a manufacturing to a services-based economy now dominate the areas identified as social mobility coldspots."

As the Member of Parliament for Leigh and, most importantly, having lived in and represented our post-industrial towns, I know exactly what poor social mobility can lead to. I grew up in neighbouring Salford, and I did not have the best start. Back in the 1980s—I am probably giving my age away now—I did not have the best education. I left school without qualifications, and so did many of my peers and friends. I was lucky because I got supported, but that was not the case for many of my friends.

**Chris Green** (Bolton West) (Con): There are many drivers of social mobility. What more does the hon. Lady think can be done to keep people who have achieved social mobility and become successful in the communities they came from, rather than moving away and taking their success with them? What more can local communities and perhaps local authorities do to help people to remain in place?

**Jo Platt:** I thank my constituency neighbour for that contribution. He is absolutely right. Particularly in places such as Leigh, we see that if people become qualified, get a good education and go on to university, they do not bring their skills back.

**Justin Madders:** I am conscious that we do not have much time, so I will be brief. On that point, we found in evidence to the APPG that it is important that people who have moved on go back and give youngsters something to aim for aspirations, ideas and a belief that they can get on and do different things in life.

**Jo Platt:** Absolutely. I thank my hon. Friend for that contribution and, again, for all the work he is doing in the APPG.

It pained me to read in a recent House of Commons Library analysis that the constituency of Leigh is ranked 501 out of 533 on the social mobility league table, but we must be up front and honest about why we are there. As a post-industrial town, which was once at the heart of the first industrial revolution, we knew what success and prosperity looked like. As the mines closed and the Beeching cuts took away our railway stations, we were left without the infrastructure to prosper and the investment to succeed.

**Conor McGinn** (St Helens North) (Lab): My hon. Friend is being very generous in giving way. I congratulate her on securing this debate and thank her for being such a fantastic neighbouring MP. We represent towns and villages across St Helens and Leigh that are intimately linked because they were, and still consider themselves to be, coalfield communities. Does she agree that the Government should continue to support those proud, resilient communities through organisations such as the Coalfields Regeneration Trust and the Industrial Communities Alliance, which are implementing programmes that create employment opportunities, increase social mobility and give ambition to our young people in those communities?

**Jo Platt:** I thank my hon. Friend for making that really important point. He is absolutely right about the support that is out there for communities such as ours. Later, I will talk about what we can do to come together to make this issue work for places such as Leigh and St Helens North.

We have been left isolated from our booming cities, without the tools to remedy our situation. There is no doubt that the talent and aspiration are there. I am often struck by the energy and determination of our young people, who are desperate to get on in life and succeed, and by the passion of our incredible community leaders such as Peter Rowlinson and Elizabeth Costello in the Leigh Film Society, who work relentlessly to put Leigh on the map. Without outside help and meaningful plans for inclusive growth, towns like Leigh are left feeling helpless.

**Bambos Charalambous** (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): I am very lucky to live in a constituency that has very good transport links into London. I was in Manchester at the weekend and had the pleasure of travelling on the trams there. Does my hon. Friend think that greater investment in the transport system would benefit Leigh and overcome the social mobility issues?

**Jo Platt:** I thank my hon. Friend for making that really important point. Again, that is something that I will talk about later in my speech. This is not just about education, but about a whole-system approach, which includes transport. We need to bring it all together.

Let me talk about the pathway of a young person growing up in Leigh and share that experience. The statistics and Ofsted reports show that our school provision is good. We are not letting young people down between five and 16, as they progress through education, but when a young person reaches the stage of deciding their career path, they hit a brick wall. There is no obvious industry to enter as there used to be. We are desperately short of inward business investment, which often comes with the offer of apprenticeships and training. With only one sixth-form college in the constituency, achieving A-levels is difficult. Our young people have to travel out of the constituency to gain decent A-levels. A higher education is even more difficult with no providers at all. Where other constituencies might rely on transport connectivity to access those opportunities, the young people of Leigh cannot. They are brought up in the fifth largest town without a railway station in the country. Those young people are left with the looming question at the end of their mandatory education: "Then what?"

Quite simply, our failure to provide adequate options in answer to that question, which should be at the top of our list of priorities, is an enormous failure of us all as a society. Although I am enormously optimistic that this week's draft spatial framework in Greater Manchester will explore the options for a railway station in the constituency—I will be working closely with Transport for Greater Manchester on that—we must look at the Government's broader responsibility to promote and ensure inclusive prosperity. When I look at their response however, I am left asking, "Where is the pathway for local areas to propose local plans? Where are the resources to tackle"—in the words of the Prime Minister—"those 'burning injustices'? And where is the joined-up strategy across Government needed to tackle such an enormous problem?"

As delighted as I am that the Under-Secretary of State for Education, the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi) will respond for the Government, why has it fallen to the Minister of State for Children and Families to respond to an issue in desperate need of a cross-governmental approach? Social mobility needs

a whole-Government approach that opens the machinery of government up to local areas. This is not only a children's or educational issue, as it feeds into our infrastructure needs and our transport connectivity, and it crosses into the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, the Department of Health and Social Care, the Ministry of Justice and the Treasury. This truly is a cross-Whitehall task that needs the resources of a cross-Whitehall response.

Too often, token vanity projects from the Government are hailed as the golden bullet for social and economic progress. They include, for example, the creation of the Social Mobility Commission—it went nearly a year without commissioners after they all resigned—the northern powerhouse and HS2. HS2, a prime example, was meant to connect northern communities with London and the south-east—the famous trickle-down model of economic inclusivity. HS2 will cut through the middle of my constituency, however, and offers no connectivity whatsoever. The nearest station to access HS2 will be an hour away for some residents. How does that help our northern communities, which are feeling isolated and held back?

We must also recognise that the Government's response cannot be blanket across the country, but needs to complement and respond to plans drawn up locally with the input of the community, and in Leigh we took the first step last year. I recognised that our towns face unique challenges, so I organised the first Leigh social mobility roundtable, where the local council, schools, businesses, community organisations and stakeholders were all invited to discuss our situation, what can be done and what needs to be changed to help everyone in Leigh to succeed.

As I am sure the shadow Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown)—to whom I am grateful for attending our roundtable—would agree, what quickly became apparent is that without Government support for local plans or the devolution of investment and infrastructure decisions, towns such as Leigh will never be connected to the educational and employment opportunities in nearby cities or their thriving economies. Put simply, without a railway line and with such poor road infrastructure, which already struggles to cope with our daily pressures, how will constituents access educational and retraining opportunities outside the town, and why would businesses decide to invest in our towns? The people of Leigh have been left in this never-ending cycle of limited employment, low pay and restricted opportunities to upskill or retrain.

To us, Leigh is a beautiful place to live and bring up a family; a place with rich culture and heritage, near to both Manchester and Liverpool. But we have seen our town transformed from the thriving powerhouse of the industrial revolution to a place left feeling isolated and held back; a place that no longer offers the opportunities that it once did. For the first time, the next generation may not see fulfilled the promise of a better life than the generation before them. That sad reality underlines the importance and urgency of taking action to leave our community on a better footing than when we found it.

I therefore urge the Minister to review the approach that the Government take, recognise the importance of locally produced models and commit to empowering and entrusting our communities with the investment decisions that have such a heavy impact on their lives.

4.15 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Nadhim Zahawi):** It is a privilege to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bailey. I thank the hon. Member for Leigh (Jo Platt) for securing this vital debate, and I welcome the opportunity to respond on behalf of the Government. She spoke powerfully of her experience growing up and the experience through the eyes of a young person growing up in Leigh.

At this point, it would be remiss of me not to mention my Parliamentary Private Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (David Morris), who was born and bred in Leigh. He grew up and left school with only five O-levels and no A-levels, went to hairdressing college and opened a salon, which became the biggest hair salon and chain in the Leigh area, before he became the MP for Morecambe and Lunesdale. His son is a lawyer from Leigh. That is a true example of social mobility in Leigh. I also thank the hon. Members who have so far contributed to this important debate: my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton West (Chris Green), and the hon. Members for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders), for Enfield, Southgate (Bambos Charalambous) and for St Helens North (Conor McGinn).

We welcome the debate secured by the hon. Member for Leigh—it is important that we take a close look at social mobility. Rightly, social mobility is a critical priority for the Government and, as she argues, it is a challenge that requires action across the whole of Government in order to make progress. Our social housing Green Paper, for example, makes social mobility a key priority, and we are the Government who introduced the national living wage and increased it at the last Budget. She is also right to single out the importance of good transport connections for regional prosperity. That is why £48 billion will be invested in modernising our rail network over the next five years.

To ensure that our efforts are joined up across Government, the industrial strategy provides a comprehensive plan to ensure that no place is left behind when it comes to boosting opportunity and growth. That strategy sets out the steps that we are taking to spur productivity and to create more high-skilled and high-paying jobs. We are delivering that agenda not only across Whitehall, but through our local industrial strategies, local enterprise partnerships and with mayoral combined authorities.

As a Minister in the Department for Education, however, I hope that the hon. Lady will understand if I focus the majority of my remarks on that subject, although not just because of my day job. As someone who came to this country unable to speak English, I know at first hand how education can change lives and open the doors of opportunity. We still live in a country where someone's start in life far too often determines their future success. Education can and should break this link by helping everyone to fulfil their potential. I am pleased to say that the Government have made significant progress in closing the opportunity gap when it comes to education. The difference in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and their peers has been reduced across all stages of education, and through our opportunity areas programme, we are targeting extra support at some of the most disadvantaged areas of the country.

Yet there can be no room for complacency. It is both an economic and a moral imperative that we ensure the schools system works for all and that it does so up and down the country.

**Chris Green:** Does my hon. Friend welcome the fact that, on youth social mobility, my constituency comes 73rd out of 553 constituencies from around England and Wales? I also want to support the idea of a huge sense of responsibility—a duty—not only for local entrepreneurs to invest in the local communities but for local councils to support local business, provide opportunities and enable those businesses to invest. It is so much more inspirational when someone comes from our own community.

**Nadhim Zahawi:** My hon. Friend makes the point about engagement by local councils eloquently. He pursues such engagement passionately, locally and nationally.

We take action in every region and at every stage of a young person's life to close the opportunity gap. I will now take each of the stages of education in turn, reflecting in particular on the progress that we have made in the north-west of England.

Good early years education is the cornerstone of social mobility and we are making record investment in that area. Too many children, however, still fall behind early, and later in life it is hard to close the gap that emerges. Today, 28% of children finish their reception year without the early communication and reading skills that they need to thrive. The Secretary of State has set out his ambition to halve that figure by 2028. We have announced a range of initiatives to deliver it, including a local authority peer review programme, which we piloted in Wigan, and a professional development fund for early years practitioners in 54 local authorities.

The Government are committed to help parents to access affordable childcare, which is why we will spend about £6 billion on childcare support in 2019-20, a record amount. That will include funding for our free early education entitlements, on which we plan to spend £3.5 billion this year alone. I am pleased to say that, in Wigan, take-up of all the Government childcare entitlements is high: 93% of eligible children there took up care that we made available for two-year-olds, which figure is substantially higher than the national average of 72%; equally, 95% of three and four-year-olds took up an entitlement place, which is also higher than the national average. During the first year of delivery, more than 2,700 children in Wigan benefited from the places that we made available under our policy offering of 30 hours of free childcare.

On school education, we target extra support at the poorest areas of the country to raise standards and to attract great teachers to our primary and secondary schools. I know that schools have faced cost pressures in recent years, but I am happy to report that schools in the north-west will attract an average of 2.8% more funding per pupil by 2019-20 compared with 2017-18.

**Conor McGinn:** Will the Minister give way?

**Nadhim Zahawi:** I am trying to make headway, but if I have time, I will come back to the hon. Gentleman towards the end.



This year, the north-west received more than £369 million in additional funding through the pupil premium, giving more than 300,000 disadvantaged young people extra support for their education.

On post-16 education, our efforts do not stop when school comes to an end. Social mobility means that everyone must have the right level of ongoing support to help them on to a path to a skilled job. That could be via university, but it could also be a more practical, technical path. I am sure that the hon. Member for Leigh and I agree that getting that right is critical to boost regional growth and to expand access to opportunity for all. In the current academic year, we invested more than £750 million in the education of 16 to 19-year-olds in the north-west, with £80 million of that funding allocated specifically to support disadvantaged students in reaching their potential, whether that is for employment or ongoing education.

For those who want to take the academic route, we will ensure its availability as well. We therefore welcome the fact that more disadvantaged pupils than ever before go on to university. In 2010, more than a quarter—27.6%, in fact—of 18-year-olds from the north-west entered university; by 2018, that figure had risen to one in three, or 33.1%, so the north-west outperformed all English regions outside London and the south-east. Data released by the Department for Education in November of last year showed that 23% of students eligible for free school meals from the north-west had entered higher education by age 19 in 2016-17. That compares with 26% for England, with only London and the west midlands having a higher rate.

In the north-west, the Office for Students has invested more than £15 million through its national collaborative outreach programme, with key programmes in Cumbria, Lancashire, Greater Manchester and Merseyside. The Government have also embarked on a long-overdue overhaul of technical education, which is why we are acting to expand high-quality apprenticeships. In the 2017-18 academic year, the 58,120 apprenticeship starts in the north-west were 15.5% of all such starts in England.

Skills challenges and priorities differ not only across the country, but within regions such as the north-west. We heard that from the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate. We must therefore collaborate with local partners in order to ensure our reforms make sense on

the ground, which was very much his point. That means working with employers and providers, and supporting individuals who want to succeed in life and work. We have also introduced skills advisory panels, which will bring together local employers and skills providers to pool knowledge on skills and labour market needs in the regions. That will help to address local skills gaps more effectively.

We are to introduce a national retraining scheme, an ambitious and far-reaching programme to drive adult learning and retraining. It will be in place by the end of this Parliament. The Chancellor recently announced £100 million to roll out initial elements of the scheme across the country. That accompanies funding announced in the previous budget for the Greater Manchester combined authority to test different approaches to encourage and support adults to undertake training.

I am happy to take an intervention if the hon. Member for St Helens North still wishes to make one.

**Conor McGinn:** The Minister is so generous to take one intervention from the Opposition in the 10 minutes for which he has spoken. None the less, I appreciate it.

When I visit schools in my constituency, teachers and headteachers tell me that they have less money, fewer resources and larger class sizes. Does that have an impact on social mobility?

**Nadhim Zahawi:** We have protected the schools budget. I hope that I made that clear earlier in my remarks, when I also recognised that there are financial pressures on schools.

Progress on social mobility is critical to our shared prosperity. No progress is possible without action in every part of a young person's education and in every part of our country. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Leigh for beginning the year with a debate on a subject that is fundamental to our future success as a country. Again, I thank my colleagues for their contributions—my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton West and the hon. Members for Ellesmere Port and Neston, for Enfield, Southgate and for St Helens North—and congratulate my brilliant PPS, my hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale, on his ability not only to build a great business but to be a very successful musician. He has delivered real social mobility in Leigh.

*Question put and agreed to.*

## Journalists: International Protection

4.29 pm

**Mr John Whittingdale** (Maldon) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered international protection of journalists.

I am very grateful to have the opportunity to debate the very important issue of the international protection of journalists. I am also delighted to see so many colleagues present. We have only an hour so I will endeavour to keep my remarks brief. I thank all those who have helped me with the preparation for the debate and for the more general work they do in this field, particularly Reporters Sans Frontières, Index on Censorship, the National Union of Journalists and the International Federation of Journalists, the Committee to Protect Journalists and the BBC World Service.

Journalists play a vital role in a free society. Their role in exposing corruption, highlighting injustice and holding Governments to account helps to make a democracy function, but it does not always make them popular. Sadly, in authoritarian regimes, that often leads to imprisonment, being taken hostage, intimidation and sometimes even death.

There are varying figures for the past year, but all agree that 2018 was one of the worst years on record for journalists being killed, imprisoned or held hostage. According to Reporters Sans Frontières, 80 journalists were killed in 2018 during the course of their duties; 348 are being held in prison and 60 held hostage. The countries with the worst records are perhaps predictable: in terms of deaths, they are Afghanistan, Syria, Mexico, Yemen and India.

Perhaps the most high profile death was that of Jamal Khashoggi, who died in October in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul. It is reported that 11 people are on trial for that in Saudi Arabia, but we have little knowledge of the evidence to suggest that they ultimately bear responsibility. That death was condemned by Turkey—the country in which it took place—but Turkey's record inspires little confidence. Turkey has 33 journalists imprisoned. One journalist, Pelin Ünker, was sentenced only in the last few days to a year's imprisonment for her work in investigating the Paradise papers. It is for that reason that international bodies have called for an international, independent investigation into what happened to Jamal Khashoggi. The worst countries for imprisonment of journalists are China, Egypt, Turkey, Iran and Saudi Arabia.

I want to mention in particular the work of the BBC World Service, which I have a particular regard for, and the Persian service of the BBC. Its journalists have suffered a relentless campaign against not just them but their families that are still in Iran. BBC World Service journalists in Russia have also found that their data has been published online with an encouragement to hound them. The BBC has made protests against that.

**Huw Merriman** (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on securing this debate. I chair the all-party parliamentary BBC group, as he will know from his previous role. It is the case that 152 named individuals, many of whom are based here in London, working for BBC Persia have been prevented from

buying or selling property, and their families have been accused of the most hideous things, which is impacting their relatives in Iran. Will he join me in calling for the Minister to do everything he can to protect those individuals?

**Mr Whittingdale:** I absolutely join my hon. Friend. I will call upon the Minister to make it a routine matter to raise concerns about the safety of journalists whenever we have contact with countries where, sadly, imprisonments or deaths have taken place.

**Liz Saville Roberts** (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): I rise as the chair of the cross-party group of the National Union of Journalists. I am very interested in the figures the right hon. Gentleman has presented. According to the International Federation of Journalists, 94 journalists and media staff were killed in work-related incidents last year. In the light of that, does he agree that the UK Government might be called on to do everything possible to support the call for a new United Nations convention on the protection of journalists and media workers?

**Mr Whittingdale:** It is correct that there is a small difference in the figures from RSF and the International Federation. What we all agree is that the figures are extremely worrying and have been going up. That is the reason for the debate. I absolutely join the hon. Lady in calling on the Government to do more. I know the Minister will want to set that out in due course.

**Hannah Bardell** (Livingston) (SNP): The right hon. Gentleman is being generous with his time. I welcome this debate. Does he agree in the same vein that the Foreign Office has a very serious and important role in the protection of journalists, and that it must do all it can to protect journalists and our citizens wherever they are?

**Mr Whittingdale:** I agree. I was going to say and probably will say again that I absolutely welcome the Foreign Secretary's commitment to prioritise this issue and for the UK to take a lead internationally in pressing for more to be done. The hon. Lady's calls have been heard in the Foreign Office and I hope this will prove an opportunity for the Minister to tell us a little about what is intended.

**Jo Stevens** (Cardiff Central) (Lab): The right hon. Gentleman mentioned the IFJ. Will he join me in paying tribute to the work of the IFJ and the NUJ? Does he agree that strong trade unions are a force for good in protecting democracy and freedom of expression?

**Mr Whittingdale:** I do not always leap to say that trade unions are a force for good, but in this instance I absolutely agree with the hon. Lady. The International Federation of Journalists does great work alongside the other organisations that I mentioned. This is a priority area for non-governmental organisations and a lot of work is being done, but, unfortunately, one reason for that is that the record is so poor at present.

I talked about countries that perhaps will not have come as a great surprise—places such as China, which has the worst record for imprisonment, and Afghanistan and Syria. Sadly, this is also happening in Europe. I want particularly to mention the murder of Daphne

Caruana Galizia in Malta at the end of October 2017, and the death of Jan Kuciak in Slovakia and Victoria Marinova in Bulgaria. The climate that provokes hostility towards journalism is, to some extent, encouraged by intemperate remarks from people who really should know better. I do not want to single out President Trump, but I think his attacks on journalism generally have not helped in this regard. When someone such as the President of Czech Republic holds up a mock assault rifle labelled “for journalists”, that clearly will lead to a climate in which journalists have reason to fear.

**Christine Jardine** (Edinburgh West) (LD): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that even in this country we have to be very careful what we say about our attitudes to journalists, as to politicians and everyone else? As a former journalist, I am well aware that one of the prerequisites for the job is the willingness to put yourself at risk to uncover public injustice in this country and abroad. Perhaps we need to be very wary in this country, as elsewhere in Europe, about the intemperate language we use.

**Mr Whittingdale:** I agree with the hon. Lady. Like almost everyone in this House I suspect, I have had occasion to be deeply unhappy about some of the things that journalists have done, but I recognise that freedom of the press is a vital component of a free society. Therefore, to some extent we have to take the reports that we do not like alongside those that we do.

**John Howell** (Henley) (Con): Since we are talking about Europe, does my right hon. Friend welcome and support the work of the Council of Europe to protect journalists, and the new platform it has set up that makes it very public which journalists have been attacked and imprisoned unjustly?

**Mr Whittingdale:** I very much support the work of the Council of Europe. I am a member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, which also highlights journalistic abuses, but, unfortunately, as I just said, Europe does not have a spotless record. Indeed, the new country holding the presidency of European Union, Romania, has a poor record on intimidation of journalists.

**Joanna Cherry** (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): The right hon. Gentleman is being very generous with interventions. He will be aware that the Council of Europe has taken up the case of Mehman Huseynov, an Azerbaijani journalist and human rights activist who has been in prison for nearly two years for the so-called crime of slander. He has been on hunger strike for two weeks. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the British Government should also take up Mr Huseynov's case and make representations to the Azerbaijani authorities?

**Mr Whittingdale:** I agree entirely with the hon. and learned Lady. I have my own criticisms of Azerbaijan and regard it as a badge of honour that I am blacklisted from visiting. That is a particularly bad case and Mr Huseynov should be added to the list of those whose cases we are pursuing internationally at every opportunity.

I want to allow as many people as possible to speak, so I will make just two points to finish. First, as I indicated, I am encouraged by the Foreign Secretary's statements that he wants to prioritise this. I understand

that the British Government intend to organise an international conference on the subject of the protection of journalists later this year, which is a very welcome initiative. As the newly elected chair of the British group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, I intend to organise a parallel conference alongside the Foreign and Commonwealth Office one. While the FCO can try and reach agreement among Governments that more needs to be done on as wide a basis as possible, we can try to mobilise parliamentarians from different countries to give this priority. I look forward to working with the Minister in due course.

Secondly, there have been calls for a UN special representative for the safety of journalists. That would demonstrate the importance with which the issue is held by the UN. At present, it comes within a broader remit, but the specific appointment of somebody to highlight the safety of journalists would help. I understand that about 30 countries have signed up to that proposition, so I hope the Government will consider adding our support in due course.

Sadly, there are a lot of cases and I could spend a great deal of time talking about them. Hon. Members have taken the opportunity to raise some. I am encouraged that so many Members have come to the debate, so I will deliberately keep what I say short so that as many as possible have the opportunity to contribute.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Adrian Bailey (in the Chair):** Order. I have seven speakers listed and intend to call the Front-Bench spokespeople by 5.14 pm. If Members who I call can confine their remarks to four minutes each, we will get everybody in.

4.42 pm

**Ann Clwyd** (Cynon Valley) (Lab): Thank you for your guidance, Mr Bailey. I congratulate the right hon. Member for Maldon (Mr Whittingdale), who is the new chairman of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, of which I am a vice-chairman. The IPU does very good work on the human rights of Members of Parliament all over the world, and that includes many journalists who are in trouble.

The debate is particularly timely, in the light of the brutal murder of the *Washington Post* columnist and Saudi national, Jamal Khashoggi, in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul in October, and the very real dangers faced by journalists around the world in carrying out their work. I note that *TIME* magazine collectively named Jamal Khashoggi and other journalists who had been killed or imprisoned as its person of the year for 2018. Its editor-in-chief, Edward Felsenthal, explained that “influence—the measure...for nine decades...of *TIME*'s Person of the Year—derives from courage,”

and that the named journalists and one news organisation being recognised

“have paid a terrible price”

to receive that accolade.

Journalists and the media are important civil society actors and fundamental to ensuring that information is collected, disseminated, exchanged and evaluated to illuminate the dark corners where suffering, discrimination and injustice prevail, and to hold those in power to



[Ann Chwyd]

account to prevent tyranny and corruption. It is not surprising that those with something to hide, or who are motivated by power, greed or hatred, are often particularly keen to undermine, stigmatise and silence those endeavouring to bring their actions and abuses to light, by enforcing censorship, the creation of a climate necessitating self-censorship, intimidation, persecution, unwarranted criminal or civil prosecution, imprisonment, or even disappearance and murder.

The International Federation of Journalists, which is a global group, notes that 84 journalists, cameramen, fixers and technicians died last year in targeted killings, bomb attacks and cross-fire incidents. It highlights an ongoing safety crisis in journalism, which was dramatically illustrated by the cruel murder of Jamal Khashoggi. Interestingly—and worryingly—IFJ figures reveal that more journalists were killed last year for trying to cover stories in their communities, cities and countries than for reporting in armed conflict areas. Increasing dangers are posed to journalists by a growing intolerance of independent reporting, by populism, by rampant corruption, by organised crime and by the breakdown of law and order in countries such as Mexico, India, Pakistan, the US, the Philippines and Guatemala.

The Committee to Protect Journalists recently published a report on the number of journalists imprisoned by Governments. At least 251 journalists were jailed in 2018, underlining authoritarian Governments' ongoing attempts to close down critical reporting. According to the CPJ, Turkey, China, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Eritrea are imprisoning the highest number of journalists, as the right hon. Member for Maldon mentioned. For the third year in a row, Turkey, China and Egypt are responsible for more than half of those jailed around the world. Turkey again has the dubious distinction of taking the No. 1 spot, further to President Erdoğan's attempt to stifle all peaceful debate, criticism and potential challenge to his rule. That includes a number of people I met when I took an IPU delegation to Turkey, where we met journalists who were in fear of being imprisoned and subsequently have been arrested and imprisoned. People feel that fear daily: they do not know when a knock at the door will come.

For the third consecutive year, every one of the 68 journalists behind bars in Turkey was facing anti-state charges, including alleged membership of a terrorist organisation, such as the Kurdistan Workers' Party or the Fethullah Terrorist Organisation, spreading propaganda or engagement in terrorist propaganda. Although Erdoğan began the crackdown against his opponents before the 2016 failed coup, repression has undoubtedly intensified since then, with the closure of more than 100 news outlets by decree and thousands of journalists losing their jobs as a result. As mentioned last week, a Turkish journalist and member of the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists was sentenced to more than a year in jail for her work on the Paradise papers, simply because those papers and that investigation revealed details of the business activities of the country's former Prime Minister, who is now speaker of the Turkish Parliament, Binali Yıldırım, and his sons, despite the Yıldırım family admitting that the articles about their Maltese businesses were accurate.

Sadly, I appear to have run out of time already, but I want to say that I went to Iraq after the invasion—or the liberation—and met journalists who had to write their copy at that time according to press releases given to them by the Iraqi Government. Of course, they were what Saddam Hussein wanted them to say, rather than their own observations.

I pay tribute to the Institute for War & Peace Reporting, based in Islington, which trains journalists and was then in the process of retraining journalists in Iraq. I went along to one of those meetings and asked whether they had any questions for me. One of them put his hand up and said, "Why did it take you so long to get here?" They now felt that they were free, which they had not been before, to observe what was going on in their country and give accurate reports on the excesses of the Saddam Hussein regime. As an ex-journalist myself, I value the freedom that journalists have and take all over the world, and the bravery they show when they are likely to get into trouble in the countries in which they are reporting.

**Mr Adrian Bailey (in the Chair):** I am going to call John Howell now. I am imposing a four-minute time limit on your speech, Mr Howell, consistent with my previous guidance. I indicate to other speakers that after that, there will be a three-minute guideline.

4.50 pm

**John Howell (Henley) (Con):** I will try to keep it as short as possible, Mr Bailey. I start by re-emphasising the point I made in the intervention; I know that I am a bit of a Council of Europe buff, but I make no apology for saying it here. The issue is of great importance to the Council of Europe, both keeping journalists up to the mark and ensuring they do not exploit people, and ensuring that they are safe and that there is suitable protection for them.

The reason we are concerned about this in the Council of Europe is one of self-preservation. So many journalists from around Europe are there that there is a great need to ensure that their interests are kept up to the mark. For example, the head of the Ukrainian delegation is himself a journalist, and he and I have a lot of discussions about journalism in Ukraine. In addition to Azerbaijan and the problems we have with Russia at the moment, Ukraine is also a place that needs to look after its journalists in a big way where they are under threat from the Russian invasion.

Of course, the Council of Europe relies on the European convention on human rights, and article 10 is the appropriate bit. While I hope it is not necessary all the time to come back to the courts in order to ensure the protection of journalists, I am pleased to see that the European Court of Human Rights has produced a number of judgments that thoroughly protect the rights of journalists.

The other thing that the Council has done, which I will just mention, is to introduce a platform for the protection of journalism and safety of journalists. The platform is a public space to facilitate the compilation, processing and dissemination of information on serious concerns about media freedom and the safety of journalists in Council of Europe member states—it obviously cannot go outside those member states, but it does those things

within member states. The two things required for that are, first, to ensure that we are all alerted on time when journalists' safety is threatened, which it does by putting their pictures up on a public database and, secondly, to take a systematic approach, ensuring that every journalist who is threatened is there, which I think it does.

The platform has a number of things that people need to comply with: there must be a serious concern about media freedom, there must take place in a Council of Europe member state, the information must be reliable and based on fact, and the information must also be in the public domain, which I think is a sensible requirement so that we do not have things that are half-hidden. With all that, I am encouraged that this mechanism is in place to enable the safety of journalism and journalists to be protected.

4.54 pm

**John Grogan** (Keighley) (Lab): George Orwell said:

"Freedom of the press, if it means anything at all, means the freedom to criticise and oppose."

I will offer three reflections on that statement in three minutes, but before I do so, I congratulate the right hon. Member for Maldon (Mr Whittingdale) on his exposition, which demonstrated his typical clarity and brevity. Whatever our political differences, he and I have always shared an enthusiasm—a love, even—for freedom of the press.

That is my first point: the decisions we make in this House matter. In our nation we are lucky to live among only 13% of humanity who enjoy freedom of the press. The vast bulk of the world does not. When we make decisions, as we did last year about whether there should be punitive damages on news organisations that did not sign up to a state-approved regulator, those decisions matter, because dictators around the world look at what we are doing. I am proud that our party changed its policy and our deputy leader said that never again would we advocate that. When did "mainstream media" become a term of abuse? When did "balanced news" become a term of abuse? That has entered our politics as well, and what we do here is important for what happens in the rest of the world.

Secondly, the BBC has been mentioned. I was up early on Sunday morning and heard a religious and ethical programme on Radio 4 called "Sunday" on which Lyse Doucet, the BBC's chief international correspondent, spoke about this very issue. She said that it is the worst time ever in the world to be a journalist, and explained that statement in a couple of ways. She said that the respect that journalists reporting internationally around the world enjoyed when she was young is less apparent now. She said that that was partly because in the past, even the most hard-nosed terrorist organisations needed journalists to get their message out. Now they do not need them so much, and there are more kidnappings. She also pointed out that 98% of journalists who are imprisoned are local journalists, not renowned international journalists from the BBC or CNN. That is because, in the past 20 years, such journalists have had more outlets through social media and so on, but they are also very exposed to oppressive regimes around the world. We must admire and honour them.

My final point relates to another thing that the right hon. Gentleman and I share: a love of Ukraine, which has already been mentioned in this debate. In November

or December last year, I went to a commemoration of 85 years since the holodomor—Stalin's man-made famine in Ukraine. It was British journalists, Gareth Jones and Malcolm Muggeridge, who helped to expose it, all those years ago. Gareth Jones' reporting was printed in *The Guardian*, which was doing good work then, as it is now. That fearless journalism is needed in Ukraine now, particularly in Donbass, to give truthful accounts of what is happening and what Putin's regime is up to in that part of the world. Never has freedom of the press been more needed in Ukraine and, indeed, throughout the world.

4.57 pm

**Fiona Bruce** (Congleton) (Con): I will speak specifically and in a little more detail on behalf of the BBC Persian journalists and their families who have been targeted for harassment by the Iranian authorities, as mentioned by my right hon. Friend the Member for Maldon (Mr Whittingdale), whom I congratulate on introducing this debate.

The BBC World Service states that the Iranian authorities have systematically targeted BBC Persian journalists who are mainly based in London and their families in Iran since the service launched satellite television in 2009. However, recent measures have escalated that persecution and the World Service has serious concerns for the safety and wellbeing of the journalists and their families. I commend the bravery of those journalists and of their families who support them.

In 2017, the Iranian authorities commenced a criminal investigation into journalists working for the service in London, alleging that their work was a crime against Iran's national security. That was accompanied by an asset-freezing injunction preventing 152 named individuals, comprising mainly current and former BBC Persian staff, from buying or selling property inside Iran, as we have heard.

Other measures against the journalists and their families have included arbitrary arrests, interrogation and detention of family members in Iran, confiscation of passports and travel bans on family members leaving Iran to prevent them from seeing their relatives who work for the BBC Persian service, ongoing surveillance and harassment, and the spread of fake and defamatory news stories designed to undermine the reputation of those staff and their families, for example by accusing them of prostitution or infidelity, much of which is targeted at the female journalists.

Since August 2018 there have been targeted attacks on several journalists in Iran's state press, using inflammatory language and providing names and photographs of the journalists. Before I give an example, I ask the Minister if he will once again raise these concerns with the Iranian authorities. Time precludes me from going into the full details, which have come to me this week directly from the World Service, but if I may I will provide the full text to the Minister.

To give a recent example, in August 2018, on Iran's national day for journalists, comments were made about BBC Persian through the Mizan news agency, which is affiliated to the Iranian judiciary, describing BBC Persian staff as a "mafia gang" who "must be held answerable for their actions against the Iranian people",

[*Fiona Bruce*]

and who

“will surely be exposed one day before the Iranian nation, and God’s hand of justice will manifest itself through the arms of the Iranian people, and they will be punished for their actions.”

Those who follow Iranian politics will know that language is ominous—it has been used in the past with regard to extrajudicial killings. BBC World Service staff are extremely concerned that the statements represent a significant recent escalation of the threats made against named BBC Persian colleagues.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Adrian Bailey (in the Chair):** Order. I have just realised that my arithmetic was slightly out and that I will have to call the Front-Bench spokespeople at 5.9 pm, so there is a now a two-minute time limit.

5.1 pm

**Joanna Cherry** (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): I will keep my comments short. I only want to raise with the Minister the case of Mehman Huseynov, who, as I said earlier, is an Azerbaijani journalist, human rights activist and blogger who has been in prison for the so-called crime of slander since March 2017. As has been said, independent human rights organisations view Azerbaijan as one of the world’s most repressive countries, and its judicial system is not seen as independent of its powerful Executive. Azerbaijan is a part of Europe, and is not very far from here.

Further charges were levelled against Mr Huseynov in December and he is now on hunger strike in protest against them. The charges against him have been dubbed “bogus” by the *Washington Post*, and his case has also attracted support from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Human Rights Watch and US Senator Marco Rubio.

Because of Mr Huseynov’s hunger strike, his health is deteriorating. The Council of Europe’s Commissioner for Human Rights saw fit to make an intervention earlier this week, calling the Azerbaijani deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs to raise Mr Huseynov’s case. She told the deputy Minister that the charges against Mr Huseynov should be dropped because they lack credibility and underscored that the authorities are under an obligation to afford the necessary medical care to Mr Huseynov, whose condition is extremely worrying. She particularly asked the officials to transfer Mr Huseynov to a civilian hospital for medical care.

Mr Huseynov is a very young man. He was born in November 1992. His plight is particularly shocking when one thinks that he is basically in prison for simply exercising what we in this country would take as natural—the right of free speech.

5.3 pm

**Bob Stewart** (Beckenham) (Con): I am sorry that I was a bit late coming into the debate, although I was actually on time—we started early. I have two minutes, so I had better get on with it.

I will talk about the protection of journalists in conflict. Some 26 years ago, as the UN commander, I was sent to Bosnia by the British Government with the

explicit instruction that I was not to protect journalists. I was not to look after them, I was not to sustain them, I was not to give them food and I was not to give them fuel. They were not my responsibility and I was to leave them alone.

The Ministry of Defence then accredited 102 journalists to my battalion. I thought that something was weird. Then, on 20 October 1992, I recovered the body of a BBC journalist who had been cut in half by an armour-piercing round. He was a dreadful mess. He was dead, of course, which I was very upset by. His name was Tihomir Tunuković. I brought him back and thought something was wrong. On 1 November, three more journalists were in my hospital. I thought, “This is actually wrong. I have been given rotten instructions here.” They were British journalists but, British or not, any journalist required my protection, so I changed the instructions.

I note that I have 33 seconds left, so I will say only one thing. The Geneva convention should have a new protocol—perhaps the Foreign Office could start that process—to protect journalists, because the Geneva conventions are actually the laws of war and conflict. Thank you, Mr Bailey. I am sorry that I screwed up my speech.

5.5 pm

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): The hon. Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) never screws up his speech. He spoke exceptionally well.

I thank the right hon. Member for Maldon (Mr Whittingdale) for introducing the debate. I was shocked to read some of the stats that have been read out already. The Reporters Sans Frontières worldwide round-up of journalists killed, detained, held hostage or missing in 2018 is sad reading, with 80 journalists killed, 348 in prison and 60 held hostage. I represent Strangford in Northern Ireland. Right hon. and hon. Members will know that there was a campaign of murder and attacks on journalists during that terrorist campaign in Northern Ireland, with newspaper offices and delivery vans burned and offices blown up. That was all part of that 30-year conflict of terrorism and malicious murder.

These people are simply doing their job and reporting the news. While I have sometimes had difficulties with how some news is reported and sometimes struggle with what could be deemed as biased reporting, there is no doubt in my mind of the right of the reporter to present factual information. An impartial reporting mechanism, and not simply a propaganda machine, goes hand in hand with democracy.

The figures for journalists murdered across the world include 15 in Afghanistan, 11 in Syria, nine in Mexico, eight in Yemen, six in the United States and six in India. Some 31% were killed on the job, while 48 were premeditated murders. Many of those figures worry us greatly. Over the past 10 years, 702 professional journalists alone have been killed around the world. That trend is increasing even in Europe, the region that respects press freedom the most but that has experienced the sharpest decline in the Reporters Without Borders 2018 World Press Freedom Index.

It is clear that freedom in any nation should include freedom of the press. That freedom must be protected, and protection is an active thing. It is not tutting when



something goes wrong, but actively declaring, and using diplomatic pressure to assert, that freedom of the press is essential. That is something that I and the House believe in. Hopefully this debate will make things better for journalists across the world.

5.7 pm

**Priti Patel** (Witham) (Con): I will make just one additional point. I too have seen at first hand that many people go overseas to report in areas of conflict, in places as far away as Syria and Yemen, but also in conflict zones where the British Government are doing great work on humanitarian support and conflict resolution.

As the Government take forth their strategy and policy this year, I urge the Minister to use our bilateral footprint across the world much more emphatically and robustly at a Government-to-Government level, while at the same time integrating our approach. We spend a great deal of UK taxpayer resource not only on humanitarian issues but on capacity building—supporting institutions, strengthening governance, working with NGOs and civil society organisations. We can support journalists, free speech and freedom of the press.

As we approach World Press Freedom Day in May this year, there is a fantastic opportunity, notwithstanding UN conventions and Geneva protocols, for the United Kingdom to lead the world—as we already do when it comes to aid, foreign policy and our humanitarian approach—to strengthen our profile internationally and to give voice to those who need support to safeguard international freedoms, as well as political and press freedoms. The UK Government could do that quite robustly.

5.8 pm

**Hannah Bardell** (Livingston) (SNP): The number of Members here despite the magnitude of events in the main Chamber just goes to show the high regard in which we hold international journalists. I do not have time to go through everybody's contributions, but I congratulate the right hon. Member for Maldon (Mr Whittingdale) on bringing the debate to the House and particularly on his proposals for a UN special representative on the safety of journalists. I think that proposal will garner cross-party support, and I will absolutely add my name to it. I studied media and journalism, and when I was at university I wanted to be a war correspondent—I held the likes of Kate Adie up as absolute stars. I did not realise that dream, but I did end up in another reasonably good job.

Over the holidays, I read Lindsey Hilsum's book "In Extremis: The Life of War Correspondent Marie Colvin". Her incredible life is depicted in a film that is about to come out, "A Private War". The places that Marie reported on included Chechnya, Iraq, Israel and Palestine, Sri Lanka—where she was injured and lost an eye—Syria and Africa. She was, we believe, assassinated in Syria in 2012. She held Martha Gellhorn, who reported the rise of fascism in the 1930s, in high regard; Gellhorn was one of her heroes. The plight of female journalists is a particular issue. As we have seen in recent years, all international journalists are under threat and it is an increasingly dangerous time, but female journalists in particular have had terrible experiences.

In an address that Marie Colvin gave at St Bride's church on Fleet Street when she returned from Afghanistan, she reflected on the injury suffered by a colleague who stepped on a landmine and had to have both legs amputated. She said:

"The expectation of that blast is the stuff of nightmares."

I want to share with the House something else that she said:

"We always have to ask ourselves whether the level of risk is worth the story. What is bravery, and what is bravado?"

Lindsey Hilsum wrote about Marie's determination to bear witness and its importance. She said that Marie was

"the champion of bearing witness so that even if no one stopped the wars, they could never say they had not known what was happening."

That goes to the heart of the issue. Marie's death, or assassination, in 2012 was a tragedy not only for her family and friends, but for journalism and the truth. Her ability to report and bear witness was vital.

Journalists are our eyes and ears on the international stage. They go where we cannot. They see what we cannot see. They hear what we cannot hear. That is particularly important for politicians. There is often a relationship of conflict between journalists and politicians, but we must hold them in the highest regard—indeed, cherish them—because their accounts help to direct our decisions about aid and about troops and intervention. Without them, we are blind to the great atrocities that, as we have heard, many Governments and regimes are visiting upon their own people and other nations.

If we do not protect international journalists, if we do not protect their integrity and their safety, we risk becoming detached and distanced. I want and hope to hear from the Minister what more we can do, particularly from a Foreign Office perspective, because as chair of the all-party parliamentary group on deaths abroad and consular services and assistance, I have interviewed a number of partners of those who have been incarcerated, including Richard Ratcliffe, the husband of Nazanin Zaghari, and Daniela, the wife of Matthew Hedges, who was studying in the United Arab Emirates. Their experiences are unbelievable. We must remember that academics and researchers are just as important as journalists. We must be able to protect them, and we must not fall foul of the trade relationships that we may have with countries coming above the diplomatic relationships that we have, in protecting journalists and others who in order to tell stories travel to places where we cannot go.

**Bob Stewart:** On a point of order, Mr Bailey. I am so sorry, but I was flustered when I spoke and I want to correct the record. Tihomir Tunuković, whose body I picked up, was killed on Sunday 1 November, not on 20 October. I hope that the record can be amended accordingly.

**Mr Adrian Bailey (in the Chair):** I am sure that it can be, Mr Stewart. Thank you for that correction and, indeed, for the very interesting tale that you were able to tell us today.

5.13 pm

**Fabian Hamilton** (Leeds North East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bailey. I congratulate my right hon. Friend, if I may call him

[*Fabian Hamilton*]

that, the Member for Maldon (Mr Whittingdale) on securing and introducing this debate. This is a timely moment to have such a debate, and in many ways it is a shame that it could not be for three hours, not the one hour. I congratulate all hon. Members who have taken part on their excellent contributions. They were brief contributions, but powerful none the less.

I think that Labour Members strongly agree with the proposal made by the right hon. Gentleman that there should be a new UN convention on the protection of journalists. We also heard contributions from my right hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd), the hon. Member for Henley (John Howell), my colleague and hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (John Grogan), who in the past was, I believe, chair of the all-party parliamentary BBC group, my colleague and friend the hon. Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce), the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry), the hon. Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart), who always tells excellent and very relevant stories from his own experience, the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and the right hon. Member for Witham (Priti Patel). I thank them all for their extremely good contributions.

The brutal murder of Jamal Khashoggi last year was a frighteningly vivid reminder of the serious threats that journalists face globally today. It is the most dangerous time to be a journalist globally in more than a decade. As has been said this afternoon, the freedom of the press is one of the most powerful platforms for freedom of expression. It is a means of informing, of scrutinising and of disseminating information and is a fundamental pillar of democracy. Article 19 of the UN universal declaration of human rights states:

“Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”

The protection of journalists and their sources is one of the basic conditions for press freedom, but in the last two years alone journalists have been murdered in Europe—in Bulgaria, Slovakia and Malta. Organisations such as Reporters Without Borders have called on Governments, including the British Government, to create a special rapporteur with the responsibility to protect journalists and press freedom. I look forward to hearing from the Minister about that in a few minutes.

I shall give some statistics to remind hon. Members here this afternoon. In 2018, 94 journalists were killed, an increase from 82 in the previous year—far too many. Afghanistan was the most dangerous country in which to be a journalist, with 16 journalists and reporters murdered. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, at least 251 journalists were jailed for their work in 2018. There are currently 126 journalists detained across member states of the Council of Europe, and almost 70 of those are in Turkey, as we heard. It is the case that 98% of jailed journalists are local people imprisoned by their own Governments, that 62% of journalists killed covered politics and political activity, and that 70% of jailed journalists imprisoned globally were arrested on anti-state charges, including terrorism.

Fewer than 10% of the killings of journalists end up with a prosecution. The impunity definitely exacerbates the cycle of violence against journalists. As we have

heard, three countries—Turkey, China and Egypt—were responsible for more than half the journalists jailed globally. There has been an increase in politicians and other individuals labelling journalists as “enemies” and making false and damaging claims about the media.

Examples include Donald Trump—he has already been mentioned today—labelling media outlets such as the *Washington Post* and CNN as enemies of the people; media outlets run by close associates of Viktor Orbán in Hungary listing journalists and academics as “mercenaries” for George Soros; in Turkey, President Erdoğan forcing the closure of media outlets over allegedly “terrorist propaganda” and supporting the 2016 coup attempt; and BBC Persian staff in Iran, as we have heard, having their assets frozen. I am very grateful to Julia Harris from the BBC World Service for the information that she provided to me and all of us this afternoon. She does an excellent job for the World Service. Other examples are media outlets in Venezuela—this has not been mentioned—being forced to shut down by authorities alleging irregularities in their licences and, as we have heard today, authorities in Azerbaijan targeting the last independent news agency in the country, Turan, with claims of “financial irregularities”.

The results are that many media outlets are shut down and quite often the licences and assets of those organisations are given to close supporters of the Government or regime in those countries. Of course, that means reduced media pluralism and the creation of pliant media that will toe the Government line. We all stand against that, and we all need to do more to oppose it and to ensure that journalists have the freedom that keeps our society free and fair.

5.19 pm

**The Minister for Asia and the Pacific (Mark Field):** I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for Maldon (Mr Whittingdale) for securing parliamentary time to debate this very important issue. His passionate commitment to the strategic issues around global media is of long standing. Let me take this opportunity to personally pay tribute to his previous outstanding work in this important and increasingly high-profile field, both as Secretary of State and as a two-term Chair of the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport.

We were also delighted to hear contributions and interventions from a range of other hon. Members, and I will try to respond to the points that were raised, but first, I will share some of what the UK Government are already doing to try to improve the climate for media freedom and our plans to do more over the coming year.

There can be no doubt that media freedom is under increasing attack across the world. The figures speak for themselves: 80 journalists were killed in 2018, 348 are languishing in prison and 60 are being held hostage. It is appalling that these numbers represent a steady increase on those of previous years. Countries are increasingly using restrictive laws to stifle freedom of expression and to prevent the functioning of an independent media. The climate is worsening fast.

Naturally, for many people—even those in public life—it is uncomfortable to find oneself in the glare of the media spotlight, but I hope that all of us, as publicly elected representatives, believe and appreciate that such

scrutiny is an essential part of a vibrant and healthy democracy, and that it is of huge benefit to society as a whole. It is no coincidence that countries with the freest media are also generally the most transparent and the least corrupt. Needless to say, the same applies in reverse. Powerful people may think twice about abusing their position if there is a good chance that their behaviour will be exposed in the media; conversely, an absence of scrutiny can lead to the very worst abuses of power and corruption.

Here in the UK, we have long had a culture of supporting freedom of expression. We are rightly proud of our tradition of an independent media, which underpins the fundamental values of our democracy. As a consequence, we collectively tolerate the excesses and, at times, the low journalistic standards of our tabloid press. That is a price we have to pay. However, in recent days in the vicinity of the House, the Sky News journalist Kay Burley and my right hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry) were subjected to unacceptable levels of harassment.

The wealth of media expertise and innovation in this country not only strengthens our own media sector, but supports the development of a strong and independent media in many countries overseas.

Regarding UK action, I was very taken by the comments made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Witham (Priti Patel). Let me reassure her that posts overseas routinely lobby Governments, often on a bilateral basis, wherever and whenever serious violations occur. My fellow Foreign Office Ministers and I also raise these issues routinely with our counterparts, and we will continue to do so, while also taking up individual cases personally—a point mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman), as well.

We promote freedom of expression and media freedom all over the world, and we routinely raise concerns about serious violations with foreign Governments. One such case was highlighted during my trip last week to Vietnam, where I raised with ministerial counterparts concerns about the plan for a new cyber-security law in that country. I know that such discussions go on in visits that Ministers undertake across the globe. We also support media freedom through our Magna Carta Fund in some of the countries where human rights and democracy are most at threat.

In the multilateral sphere, we will continue to use our influence to support media freedom, the safety of journalists and freedom of expression at the United Nations Human Rights Council. A current example of this is seen in Mexico—a country that has been named by Reporters Without Borders as among the world's five most deadly countries not at war. In November, we raised concerns about limitations to freedom of expression and violence against journalists and human rights defenders during the United Nations' universal periodic review of Mexico. We raise these issues as important international principles in their own right, but in the past 12 months we have also raised concerns in all the specific countries mentioned in the debate.

We shall also utilise our active and ongoing membership of the Council of Europe and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe. We will continue to use those important vehicles to highlight our concerns,

galvanise consensus and effect change, and we are looking actively for ways to use them to greater and more meaningful effect.

**Martin Whitfield** (East Lothian) (Lab): Tribute should be paid to our own Baron Foulkes of Cumnock, who is the general rapporteur in the Council of Europe for media freedom and the protection of journalists.

**Mark Field:** That tribute has indeed been paid. I also take on board the proposal that we support a UN representative or convention on the protection of journalists. I know that is something that is actively being pursued.

In the coming year and beyond, we will strengthen our efforts yet further. My right hon. Friend the Member for Maldon referred to the work being done by the new Foreign Secretary, who is very focused on this issue. We shall continue to work through those important multilateral bodies to galvanise consensus and effect change, and we are looking actively for ways of building on their work. We will also use our membership of like-minded groupings, such as the Freedom Online Coalition and the Community of Democracies, to step up our efforts specifically to promote media freedom and the safety of journalists. We shall continue to work closely with civil society and media organisations to ensure that we use the influencing power of Government to good effect, to complement and build on their own efforts. However, it is also important that we ramp up the bilateral response with countries with which we have strong connections, whether through the Department for International Development or in a range of other areas. We will continue to work together in that regard.

We must also recognise that we cannot do all this work alone. That is why, later this year, we will host in London an international conference on media freedom. Our aim is to bring the issue to global attention, promote the value and benefits of a free media—indeed, a free internet—to a wider audience, and mobilise an international consensus behind the protection of journalists, as the obvious guardians of those freedoms.

A robust, free, vibrant and varied media landscape is also one of the best antidotes to hostile state disinformation. Like restrictions on the media, disinformation also requires a concerted response. Here, too, we feel that the UK is at the forefront of a growing international consensus on the need for action. At home, we are drawing, among other things, on the experience of our Nordic and Baltic partners, which means taking a whole-of-society approach to this matter. That involves working towards three key objectives in relation to disinformation: first, deterring the use of disinformation by exposing and disrupting the perpetrators; secondly, increasing transparency and accountability online to make it more difficult and less rewarding to spread disinformation; and thirdly, making people more resilient through education and empowerment. We are investing £100 million in that effort around the world, which includes, at the moment, £8.5 million in eastern Europe and central Asia alone.

To respond to some specific points raised by Members, my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) and the right hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) talked about Iran. The reports of BBC staff in Iran being harassed and subjected to asset freezes and similar forms of mistreatment are deeply worrying. The Foreign Secretary specifically raised our



[*Mark Field*]

concerns about the harassment of BBC Persia staff and their families in Iran when he was there during his visit on 9 and 10 December. Officials at the British embassy in Tehran have also twice raised concerns with leading figures in the Iranian Government. Members should be made aware that in December 2018, we once again co-sponsored the UN General Assembly's resolution on the human rights situation in Iran, specifically highlighting the poor record on freedom of expression.

The hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) asked about the case of Mr Huseynov in Azerbaijan. We regularly express our concerns about the rights of political prisoners with the Azeri authorities. Over the past two years, we have attended a number of Mr Huseynov's court hearings, and we met with his lawyer most recently on 3 January this year. The UK will continue to follow the case closely and is considering next steps with our international partners.

I will conclude with this thought. A free press is the lifeblood of a healthy democracy, because it holds the powerful to account, helps to expose corruption and lack of integrity, and is one of the best antidotes to disinformation. That is why we must take action to stop the intimidation, harassment and persecution of journalists across the world, and why this year we will place as many resources as we can from the Foreign and

Commonwealth Office—not only financial, but time—behind a campaign to reverse the worrying trends outlined in this debate.

5.29 pm

**Mr Whittingdale:** I thank all my colleagues who have come this afternoon. My only regret is that we have had only one hour in which to hold this debate, but the fact that so many have spoken, representing five parties from across the House, is an indication of how important the issue is seen in all quarters of Parliament. I was therefore particularly pleased to hear confirmation from the Minister that it will be one of the priorities of the Foreign Office in the coming year, when we will be holding the conference. I hope that this debate will act almost as a curtain raiser, and that we can return to the issue in due course as that conference approaches and thereafter. As I said earlier, I hope to organise a parliamentary conference in parallel to the Foreign Office one, so that parliamentarians from across the world can come together to talk about the issue too. I thank everyone who has come along and contributed this afternoon.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered international protection of journalists.

5.30 pm

*Sitting adjourned.*

# Westminster Hall

Thursday 10 January 2019

[MR NIGEL EVANS *in the Chair*]

## Crown Post Offices: Franchising

1.30 pm

**Lisa Nandy** (Wigan) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered franchising of Crown Post Offices and the effect on high streets and local communities.

I refer Members to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. Just before Christmas, we learned that 74 Crown post offices faced closure or franchising to a retail branch, including my local one in Wigan. Taken alongside the 150 that have already been closed or franchised, that represents a staggering loss of 60% of the network in only five years. Crown post offices might be a small part of the overall network, but they are significant, historically accounting for between 10% and 20% of overall profits.

Many of us in the Chamber remember the anger when post offices were closed under the previous Labour Government. We should have learned then that the Post Office is important to the people of this country: it is our asset, we own it and we are proud of it. When the coalition sold off Royal Mail, two thirds of the public were strongly opposed. But here we are, and once again we have been cut out of the consultation.

The Post Office says that it has been consulting, but there is every reason to believe that those consultations are nothing more than a sham. The 2017 wave of closures was announced before Ministers had even bothered to respond to their own consultation, in which 75,000 people had urged them to think again. When the Aberdeen office was franchised, WHSmith advertised for new counter staff—at what was described as the “fantastic” level of the minimum wage—while the consultation was still going on and before any consultation with trade union representatives about terms and conditions.

**James Frith** (Bury North) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making a powerful argument. Does she agree that, as with our argument for postal workers, we demand better working conditions, pay and prospects in public assets that perform well? Does she agree that modern post offices can give more service to the public, but that that must not mean less for the workers in them?

**Lisa Nandy**: I could not agree more, and I know that my hon. Friend is a tremendous champion of that workforce in his Bury constituency. That point goes to the heart of how a publicly owned service should set the standard for how we treat our workers and our customers. I absolutely agree with him.

**Albert Owen** (Ynys Môn) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate, and I wish her, the Chair and all Members a happy new year. She made the important point about ownership of the Crown network. We are the owners but, in addition, the Government are the sole shareholder, so by proxy the Government are

closing down our public services. We need the opportunity to have not just a debate, but the information before anything happens.

**Lisa Nandy**: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. On that basis, I was quite horrified at what happened last month when I went to my Crown post office to talk to the staff. I went with a representative of the Communication Workers Union, who had notified management in advance, but an area manager was then sent all the way to Wigan to block me at the door. We were chucked out of the building, but for some time I stood outside in the street in the freezing cold to talk to staff about their concerns and fears. A number of counter staff who had initially been keen to talk emailed me later to explain that they had been put under significant pressure not to come outside.

Why is a publicly owned business trying to intimidate and silence its own staff? It was particularly telling that the area manager said that she had been sent by the press office. This is an organisation apparently more concerned about appearances than about the rights of its own workforce.

**Dr David Drew** (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend is making an excellent case. One of the most disillusioning things for staff is that this business hawks itself around to every and any shop that might try to fit a Crown post office into it, on the basis that that is better than a properly run, properly financed Crown post office. Does she agree that that can do nothing but disillusion staff?

**Lisa Nandy**: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and that is the view expressed very strongly by my constituents in Wigan. Over in Oldham, Members have had a significant response to a public petition that they set up for precisely that reason.

A Citizens Advice report showed that in those post offices that have been franchised, the result is longer queues, reduced counters and a significant loss of experienced staff. No wonder disability groups and pensioners groups have been critical of such plans.

**Gordon Marsden** (Blackpool South) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making a powerful case. I wish her campaign in Wigan every success, as I do the campaigns of my hon. Friends the Members for Oldham West and Royton (Jim McMahon) and for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner) in their constituencies.

For us in Blackpool, sadly, the boat has already sailed. Our Crown post office, which was a grade II listed building, now lies empty, while my constituents have to go down stairs, which is not easily accessible to people with disabilities, to an unprepossessing place in the middle of the shopping centre. Does my hon. Friend agree that, besides the intimidation she described, the Post Office is on a hiding to nothing purely in commercial terms if it continues to outsource branches in that manner to WHSmith, which is widely regarded as one of the worst retailers on the planet?

**Lisa Nandy**: I agree, and I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Reading East (Matt Rodda) might have an issue from his constituency that is relevant to that point.

**Matt Rodda** (Reading East) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way, and I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool South (Gordon Marsden). In Reading, we have serious accessibility issues. The existing Crown post office is to be shut. It has been there for some time, is busy and has ground floor access, which is welcome for many local disabled people. Unfortunately, the post office is now to be moved into the upstairs of the very busy WHSmith branch on Broad Street in Reading. The lift access is only by a relatively small lift to the first-floor premises to be used.

My constituents are concerned about that, and about the additional problem of the sub-post office in the village of Caversham, which has been closed due to other, unrelated matters. Local businesses rely on that local post office, as do many elderly and disabled people. I agree with both my hon. Friends about accessibility, which is paramount for disabled people, elderly people and small businesses. I urge my hon. Friend to continue her campaign and the Minister to look into the matter.

**Lisa Nandy**: Many Members have similar anecdotes from their constituencies—I can see that the Minister is listening, and I am grateful to her for doing so. I have learned that access to post office counters in WHSmith is a huge issue for those with mobility impairments. Some, such as the one that my hon. Friend has just mentioned, have been located on the first floor in premises that do not have an adequate-sized lift. Yet over 1 million people have their social security paid into a post office card account.

The Minister is supposed to represent the interests of the public in discussions with Post Office Ltd and UK Government Investments. Will she tell us whether she has asked colleagues in the Department for Work and Pensions to carry out an equality impact assessment of the consequences of franchising on disabled claimants? I have seen no evidence of such discussions or of an equality impact assessment by the DWP. What discussions has she had with her DWP colleagues, and will an equality impact assessment be placed in the House of Commons Library as a matter of urgency, and certainly before any further action is taken?

Last year, as my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool South (Gordon Marsden) alluded to, WHSmith was voted the “worst retailer” on the high street by *Which?* readers, and it has been in the bottom two for eight consecutive years—it turns out that there is a lot of competition for worst retailer on the high street, so that takes some doing. Why, therefore, are the Government handing our valued public service to the worst retailer on the high street?

Significant sums of our money are being spent on, in effect, privatising the Post Office, using the worst business model available, yet apparently we do not get a say. At a recent meeting of the all-party parliamentary group on post offices, which is chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough (Gill Furniss), the network and sales director told MPs that “this is a commercial decision for us alone”.

Yesterday, I received formal notification of the consultation on the Crown post office in Wigan. The document that I was sent said:

“the change of management of the branch to one that is operated by a retail partner rather than by us directly is a commercial decision for Post Office Ltd and therefore we are not seeking feedback on this aspect of the change.”

That shows complete contempt for the public who own this service.

**Jamie Stone** (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this incredibly important debate. The Minister know about this, but in my hometown of Tain in the highlands, our post office has been moved into a wee narrow newsagent where there is no room to swing a cat. That means that when a pensioner wants to talk about his or her pension or any other aspect of PO services, there is no confidentiality whatever. On 22 March, that newsagent will shut. We do not know where the new post office will be. There is a feeling of helplessness among my constituents. People in my home town want to know what will happen. I take on board the hon. Lady’s point that we, the people, do not feel we are in control.

**Lisa Nandy**: The hon. Gentleman’s constituents clearly have a very strong voice here.

**Marion Fellows** (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this important debate. The Crown post office in Motherwell was closed down and there was a consultation. As we all know, the consultation consists of simply saying, “Can we have your opinion on the new place we have decided to put the post office?”, but then totally ignoring that opinion. Does the hon. Lady agree that this is yet another example of Tory privatisation of public services by default?

**Lisa Nandy**: I absolutely agree that that is happening, and the public can see it is happening, which accounts for the anger and the public response, particularly from older people, who the Conservative party has traditionally been very concerned to attract. It would be worth reflecting on the fact that the National Pensioners Convention has come out very strongly against the latest wave of Crown post office closures, because it can see where it is going, and it will not be in the interests of its members.

It concerned me when it became apparent at the all-party parliamentary group meeting that, should WHSmith fail, there is no plan B at all. There have been widespread media reports that WHSmith is in trouble. In fact, we have been here before. When the bizarre decision was taken some years ago to move branches of the Post Office into, of all places, Bargain Booze, which then folded, we were left in crisis. It seems there is no learning happening. Unless the Minister tells me otherwise, the Post Office has no plan B for what will happen in the event of WHSmith’s collapse.

**Matt Rodda**: Will my hon. Friend give way briefly?

**Jo Stevens** (Cardiff Central) (Lab) *rose*—

**Lisa Nandy**: I give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff Central (Jo Stevens), as she has not yet spoken.

**Jo Stevens**: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I am losing my post office in the centre of Cardiff, the capital city of Wales. It is our last post office in the city centre. Does she agree that the *Financial Times* got it absolutely right when it said:

“Once a high street without a WH Smith seemed unimaginable. Now it seems almost inevitable?”



**Lisa Nandy:** I absolutely agree. I give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Reading East, as he said he would be brief.

**Matt Rodda:** I thank my hon. Friend for indulging me. I want to raise the mismanagement and the way in which the Post Office does not seem to engage with local retailers or look for suitable retail outlets to place sub-post offices. The problem we had in Caversham, not in Reading town centre, is just that. A local pharmacy shut and the post office then shut. It has taken months for Post Office officials to find new premises. Elderly and vulnerable people do not know where the post office will reopen and are very concerned. I would welcome the Minister meeting with residents to discuss this matter.

**Lisa Nandy:** My hon. Friend highlights a key issue that simply has not been heard, understood or addressed by the Post Office. These postal services matter not just to customers and staff but to our towns. In recent years, many towns across the country have been hollowed out. Bank branches have closed, and as the Centre For Towns has showed, bank closures have hit towns harder than cities or rural areas. Many of the banks that have closed branches in the centre of Wigan over the last few years were at pains to tell me that the service would not be lost because customers could use the post office, but now we find that the post office is closing.

**Janet Daby** (Lewisham East) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for securing this important debate. Does she agree that WHSmith having been voted the worst retailer should ring alarm bells for the Government, and that the plan should be suspended on that basis?

**Lisa Nandy:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The Minister will hear “suspended”, “halted”, “paused” and “moratorium” over and over during this debate. It is not just about bank closures, the threat to the post office and the fact that WHSmith is in trouble. Many towns that face the loss of their Crown post office have had closures of major department stores such as Marks & Spencer, House of Fraser and Debenhams. Like the Crown post office, those are destination stores—they attract people into our town centres who then stay and shop elsewhere. There is a very real prospect that our town centres will begin to fall like dominoes. A perfect storm is hitting our high streets.

My Crown post office in Wigan has stood on its site in the centre of our town for 134 years. It has weathered a global financial crash and two world wars, yet apparently it cannot survive three years of Tory Government. One of our major concerns is about the lack of proposals for the building, which is owned by the Post Office. It is a striking building right in the centre of town. Will the Minister tell us what is envisaged for those buildings? Will we see derelict and abandoned buildings blighting our already struggling high streets?

**Albert Owen:** My hon. Friend makes an important point. The Government are trying to regenerate town centres, yet they are closing down buildings. In a town in my constituency, the building has been empty for some years and is a blight on the landscape.

**Lisa Nandy:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right; that is a story I hear over and over from colleagues around the country. Behind those losses is a loss of spending power in our towns. Over several decades, good jobs

have been lost and replaced by minimum-wage, insecure work. Young people have left and there has been a significant loss in the working-age population. The jobs that remain do not pay enough to sustain our local services. We have felt the anger from those areas in recent years, so why do the Government allow this process to continue?

WHSmith employs its staff on part-time contracts at the minimum wage, whereas post office counter staff typically earn £21,000 a year. It matters for the viability of our town centres that people are paid properly, and for the health of our nation that people are treated properly. In my view, this failed economic model was one of the direct causes of the heavy leave vote in constituencies such as mine. It has caused justifiable anger in our towns, so why is that failed economic model being employed?

Surely, if Government mean what they say about listening to those who have been left behind and about trying to reinvigorate our high streets, they must abandon this plan right now and seek an alternative. All the plan means, as the Communication Workers Union puts it, is that post offices are on “a path of managed decline”.

For the 800 or so staff facing transfer or redundancy, I suspect that this will be the final straw. The vast majority of staff who faced franchising were not subject to the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006 in either of the last two rounds of transfer. Workers in Wigan tell me that it has been a tragedy to watch services run down over several years. Some of them have worked for the Post Office for decades, but this is the final straw.

The Post Office faces pressure from the loss of traditional services such as letters and from falling Government revenue, but it is by no means without assets. Last year it announced profits of £35 million. That should have been the catalyst to retain experienced and well-paid staff and expand into new areas—in France, La Banque Postale, established a decade ago, made a profit of €1 billion in 2016—but instead, it has cut staff and branches and awarded the chief executive a 7% pay rise. Behind the latest wave of closures is a story of greed, exploitation and carelessness with the social fabric and economic heart of our communities.

**Lilian Greenwood** (Nottingham South) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an incredibly powerful speech. Nottingham city centre post office is incredibly well used and very busy. When that transfers to WHSmith—the Post Office is not interested in what local people have to say about that—a lot of the staff will not transfer but will choose to leave. The post office will lose some of those experienced staff, who probably have a very good relationship with existing customers. On behalf of all of us who face a post office closure in our towns and cities, does she share my concern that that is a huge problem and a dereliction of the service we have come to expect?

**Lisa Nandy:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right, but it does something else: it prevents the Post Office from being able to adapt, change and build new strategies for survival in the future. A lot of the staff standing on the cold street outside the Crown post office before Christmas told me that in recent years they had come to believe that what was happening was a deliberate strategy to run down our postal services, to the point that they are

[*Lisa Nandy*]

no longer viable or sustainable. That would be a shameful thing for the Government to preside over, without acting. Those staff, our towns and our communities deserve so much better than that. I ask the Minister today to place a moratorium on the franchising programme and to bring together stakeholders for a conversation about how to grow the business and make the Post Office fit for future challenges, rather than selling off one of our most valued public services to a failing retailer.

The Minister has consistently told us that it is not the place of Ministers to intervene, but perhaps she will take a leaf out of the book of her colleague who presented a petition to the Commons urging the then Business Secretary to instruct the Post Office to halt post office closures and listen to the people. That was back in 2008, and the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) was absolutely right. If the Prime Minister recognises the role of Government in protecting this publicly owned national asset, then surely so must the Minister.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Nigel Evans (in the Chair):** Order. I can see that there are a lot of people who want to speak. I do not intend to put a time limit on speeches, but I want everyone to speak who wants to, so please show some time restraint.

1.51 pm

**Liz McInnes** (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Evans. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy) for her thorough and eloquent opening speech, which set out very clearly why this is such an important subject. It means a lot to my constituents, particularly in the Middleton area, where in October last year we learned of the plan to move our busy town centre Crown post office into a branch of WHSmith. My constituents are extremely concerned about the potential loss of their post office from its current site and its proposed move into a struggling retail outlet in the town. If I was told that the branch of WHSmith was moving into Middleton post office, to increase its footfall, that would have made a lot more sense. I might have supported the move as mutually beneficial, but to do it the other way round is simply farcical.

WHSmith faces an uncertain future. Last year it announced the closure of six of its high street stores, plus the planned closure of 24 of its budget Cardmarket outlets, over the next three years. It is well known that WHSmith's high street stores have struggled and that they are shored up by overpriced airport, railway station, motorway service and hospital outlets.

**Gordon Marsden:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is not the time of year to promote chocolate or other consumables, but would she agree that some of the prices that WHSmith charges at the outlets in railway stations and other places are scandalous in terms of the mark-ups?

**Liz McInnes:** My hon. Friend is right. There was a scandal last year about a particular hospital outlet that was charging eight times the high street price for toiletries, and getting away with it because it had a captive audience. Last year, a 7% rise in trading profits at WHSmith's

hospital and travel stores helped to offset a 3% fall in sales and profits at its high street stores, so we clearly have a business that is struggling. It is a huge risk to relocate vital post office services into a business that is closing stores and might lose more.

Over the past five years, the Post Office, which is entirely owned by the Government, has announced the closure of 150 flagship Crown post offices. The announcement that a further 74 Crown post offices are to be closed and franchised, including the one in my constituency, means that the Crown network will have been cut by 60% since 2013. Closing flagship branches, getting rid of experienced staff and putting counters in the back of a WHSmith is not the plan for growth or innovation that the post office network so desperately needs, and does not offer the level of service that the public should expect. At best, the relentless closures point to a lack of vision; at worst, they suggest the managed decline of a public asset.

My constituents have shared their concerns with me about the potential closure of our post office, and a local petition to save Middleton post office has so far attracted nearly 1,000 signatures. Our high streets are already struggling, and the loss of our flagship post office will be a major blow to Middleton town centre. Many constituents have made the point that it makes no sense to move the post office counter service to WHSmith 500 metres away, disconnecting the counter service from the sorting office, which will remain where it is. We are assured that public consultation on the future of Middleton post office will be happening at some point but my constituents are quite rightly concerned that this is already a done deal and that their responses will be ignored. I would like reassurance from the Minister, which I can pass on to my constituents, that she will ensure that any public consultation is meaningful and that the concerns of the general public will genuinely inform and shape any final decisions.

The chief executive of WHSmith, Stephen Clarke, has said that the franchising of post offices into his stores is attractive to the Post Office because his stores cost less to rent and run. It is wholly unacceptable that this is used as justification for backdoor privatisation of our Government-owned post offices. In the absence of a business plan for the Post Office, it would seem that saving money is the only motivation for the move. It seems odd that a party that claims to be the party of business has no clear plan for improving the performance of the post offices it runs. It is also highly significant that the so-called party of business cannot turn out a single Back Bencher for this important event.

I end by asking the Minister to put a stop to the process of privatisation by the back door and to begin a review of how the Post Office can grow its business through new products and innovation. We expect nothing less from the self-styled party of business.

1.57 pm

**Carolyn Harris** (Swansea East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Evans.

The post office has historically been a focal point of any community. Until recently, in my own community—in my constituency—there were five post offices within walking distance. Now there is one, which is inside a general store. We still have a few post offices in Swansea, but most of them are franchised, including the Crown post office in Morriston.

Crown post offices offer a crucial service to the local community and their potential loss will always be a great concern to that community. Citizens Advice tells us that over half the population consider a local post office to be one of the most important services in the local community. Moving Crown post offices into private hands is a worrying trend; most importantly, we do not want it to lead to the number of post offices on our high streets declining further, and we certainly do not want any more job losses than have already occurred. It is becoming a real problem in Wales, where we have seen the greatest percentage drop in the number of post offices, with 25 closing between 2017 and 2018.

Current employees of the Crown post office must have their employment protected. That issue is being championed by the Communication Workers Union with its Save Our Post Office campaign. The CWU rightly makes the argument that the decision to franchise Crown post offices to WHSmith will hugely affect those who are currently employed by Crown post offices, moving them into lower quality jobs with WHSmith, with inferior wages and hours.

**Jo Stevens:** I declare my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. Does my hon. Friend agree that, although staff moving from the post office to WHSmith, for example, will have their terms and conditions protected under TUPE, their pensions will not be protected, and so they stand to lose a significant amount from the transfer between one employment and another?

**Carolyn Harris:** That is of great concern to staff members I have spoken to. WHSmith, as we have heard, was recently voted the UK's worst high street shop. Why are we transferring a cherished brand, the Post Office, into the hands of a negatively viewed private retailer? Since 2012, 484 post offices around Wales have been modernised or moved into premises such as convenience stores, newsagents and pharmacies. Citizens Advice carried out mystery shopping in 122 of those post offices across Wales and found accessibility concerns about one in five of them.

We cannot let the transformation of post offices across the UK alter the service that they offer to our communities and particularly to vulnerable consumers. Crown post offices are integral community hubs, offering valuable services to our high streets, and the decision to franchise a further 74 is a grave mistake. It is putting jobs at risk, putting services at risk, and potentially eroding the good will and spirit in our communities.

2.1 pm

**Mr Steve Reed** (Croydon North) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Evans. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy) on securing this important debate.

Crown post offices, like the postal service itself, are at the heart of our communities. Up and down the country, post offices are hubs for local people and their neighbourhoods. They bring people together, they connect people, and at a time when community institutions, from pubs to community centres to libraries, are closing at record rates, we need our post offices as never before.

I pay particular tribute to the post office staff serving my constituents in Croydon North. I had the opportunity of visiting the Post Office depot in Factory Lane just

before Christmas; I repeat here, on the record, the thanks I offered the staff there for the fantastic job they do for the rest of us all year round, not only in the very busy Christmas period. It is sad in the extreme that, instead of protecting these vital and publicly owned assets, the Government are complicit in what my hon. Friend calls their managed decline. It is particularly galling for the public that they are paying more while getting less. The costs of getting rid of staff and refurbishing the franchisee's stores are met by the public, but they all lead to a reduced service.

It is a tragedy to see our postal services being run down in this way. Fewer counter positions means more time spent queuing, especially at busy times of the year such as Christmas. The loss of post offices presents particular difficulty for older and disabled people who are less able to get around—particularly, as we heard earlier, if new facilities are situated above ground floor level—and overworked staff have less time available to offer help and advice to customers who may need it.

**Lilian Greenwood:** My hon. Friend makes an important point about people with mobility difficulties. One of the issues that has been raised with me is that of people who have other conditions, perhaps neurodiverse conditions, who find the overload of being in a busy shopping centre particularly difficult. Does he think that has been properly recognised in the proposals to franchise into shopping centres?

**Mr Reed:** My hon. Friend makes an important point; clearly that has not been taken into account at all. My hon. Friend the Member for Wigan referred to an attempt to site a post office in a retail outlet called Bargain Booze. How inappropriate is that for many people—children, for instance, who might be going to a post office to use its services, but are walking through aisles of cheap, low-quality alcohol? That is entirely unacceptable.

**Gordon Marsden:** I endorse what my hon. Friend has just said. We had exactly the same situation in Blackpool, where a very well used sub-post office was transferred into that position. We managed to get some amelioration of the presentation of the booze, if I can put it that way, but it is not a welcoming environment for people to go into late at night to get the services of a post office branch.

**Mr Reed:** I agree completely with my hon. Friend's important point.

Of course, it is not just customers who are suffering from the current franchising model. Many staff lose their jobs, only to be replaced in due time by lower paid staff. That, fundamentally, is how franchise partners deliver a service more cheaply. They cut staff numbers, they cut staff pay and they cut staff terms and conditions. In all seriousness, we are not going to protect our high streets or tackle growing levels of in-work poverty through a race to the bottom.

My final point is about the lack of a real forward vision for our post offices. Of course services have to change as society changes, but change does not only mean closure. The CWU has called for the Government and Post Office Ltd to set up a "post bank", which my hon. Friend the Member for Wigan referred to earlier, along the lines of those seen working effectively in other European countries. Thornton Heath is an important district centre in my London constituency. Like many



[Mr Reed]

towns outside our cities, it no longer has a bank at all since Barclays closed its branch last year. Many small businesses in such areas trade in cash, and they need a bank in the locality—in the neighbourhood—to deposit the day's takings. Not all businesses are digital and not all businesses are online. We are driving small businesses into ruin by allowing basic facilities like banking to be withdrawn. What a fantastic opportunity a post bank would be to revitalise our Post Office and our hard-pressed high streets at the same time—and what a crying shame that we lack a Government with either the ambition or the vision to seize it.

2.6 pm

**Ian Murray** (Edinburgh South) (Lab): I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy) for securing this debate. I will be brief because she has said everything that all of us in the Chamber would echo about the problems we have with this proposal.

I draw hon. Members' attention to the Conservative manifesto back in 2010, which said that it would make the post office the front office of Government services. How hollow has that manifesto promise proved? In fact, we could be here all day picking holes in what the Conservative manifesto promised and what the Government have since delivered. To put that into context, we consistently have debates in this Chamber about the dilution of our post office services locally, whether Crown post offices, franchises or the postmasters and postmistresses who run our post offices, because it is not the front office of Government at all.

In 2011, £172 million of Government services went through our post offices. That fell to £168 million in 2012 and was down to £141 million by 2015. In 2017 it was down to £114 million and it dipped below the £100 million mark in the Post Office annual accounts in 2018, at £99 million. That is not the front office of Government; it is the Government withdrawing services from the very thing they are supposed to be protecting on behalf of our constituents.

We can add to that the history of the project. The Royal Mail and post offices were split off under the Postal Services Act 2011. The Royal Mail was subsequently privatised. The Government said they would look after the post office network, but we have seen that post office network withering on the vine since the Royal Mail and post offices were split up under that piece of legislation. Indeed, if we look at the share price of Royal Mail today—it is just over £2.50—we see that the Royal Mail may be in a bit of financial trouble. It is hardly a success for the taxpayers of this country or for the Royal Mail.

Franchising is difficult not just because successful franchising operations end up in WHSmith. We have heard of the problems with that. I draw hon. Members' attention to the Consumer Futures report done in 2012, away back at the start of this process, which said how disastrous franchising into retailers such as WHSmith would be. That has proved to be correct. The Government at that time, when I was the shadow postal services Minister, said that the Consumer Futures report was built on incorrect data, but it has since proved to be absolutely correct when we look at the practice of franchising Royal Mail services.

The Morningside Crown post office in my constituency was a profitable branch at the top of Morningside Road. I can tell hon. Members how popular it was in terms of footfall, because that is where we do our street stalls in south Edinburgh. On a Saturday morning, there is no better place to be than outside the post office, with a stream of people going in and out, looking to engage with their Member of Parliament on various issues. That Crown post office came up for franchising, and the interesting thing about its franchise potential was that no other shop in the local area wished to take the franchised post office. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wigan mentioned, when asked about its plan B if a franchisee does not come forward or if no franchisees satisfy the criteria for running a Crown post office, the Post Office does not have one; it has no idea.

I remember when we had a public meeting in Alloa with Gordon Banks, the former MP for Ochil and South Perthshire, when Crown post offices there were threatened with closure. Someone from the audience asked Post Office Ltd what would happen when either the franchisee failed or if no franchisee came forward, and the answer was that the Post Office itself would have to invest in the Crown post office. Perhaps we should invest in post offices before they are up for closure or franchising.

I have to pay tribute to Ibrahim Joulak, the sub-postmaster who runs the Bruntsfield post office in my constituency. He will take on the Crown post office by merging his small sub-postmaster's post office and the Crown post office. However, franchised Crown post offices do not have all the services that we expect from the major Crown post offices, further diminishing our constituents' use of the post office, which is a vicious circle for post offices that want to be self-sustaining.

Footfall is key if we want to revive our high streets. The best thing to drive footfall is services that people wish to use, and my constituency postbag certainly shows me that people wish to use local post offices. That drives the local café and the local newsagent, and people moving around our local communities drives the viability of public transport services. We need these linchpins in our local communities.

The most interesting and ironic thing I have seen on the franchising arrangements in my area is that four major high street banks have also closed their branches, and the letter they send to account holders says, "Don't worry, you can use your local post office." Well, they can do so only if their local post office exists. It is the very same problem with the free bus pass in many parts of Scotland. Of course pensioners can travel anywhere they like in Scotland with a concessionary travelcard, but they have to be able to get on a bus.

**Jamie Stone:** I acknowledge the hon. Gentleman's commitment. As high street banks continue to close branches, could we not turn the whole argument on its head, keep Crown post offices open and offer the banks a one-stop shop in these wonderful old premises that have been there for hundreds of years, thereby giving an additional service to post office customers?

**Ian Murray:** That is a great intervention. I keep asking the chief executives of the Royal Bank of Scotland and other high street banks why they do not co-host with post offices, bringing together two business models

that are struggling because of the way that we use modern communications and modern banking. The technology must be available. If I can do all my banking on my smartphone, surely the high street banks are able to co-locate with post offices and provide that for our constituents.

Finally, the reason why staff tend not to be TUPE-ed across when there is a franchisee partner is that franchisee partners simply do not want them because they do not want the cost. The reason they do not want the cost is that they want fewer staff. The reason they want fewer staff is that they think the service cannot possibly be efficient and effective unless there are fewer experienced staff, so staff tend to take the quite generous redundancy packages from the Post Office. That experience is then lost and there is a brain drain from the service, and again there is a vicious circle of the service becoming less efficient and less able to meet the needs of the local communities.

It is right for the Minister to come here again. I hope we are not having this same debate about franchising and the closure of post offices again next year and the year after and the year after that. The Minister is new in her role, but I hope she eventually grabs the nettle of the post office network, pauses the franchising process, looks at what the Post Office can do on its profitability and then invests those profits back into the current network, so that we can all have post offices in our communities that are sustainable for the future.

2.13 pm

**Mrs Sharon Hodgson** (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Evans. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy) on securing this debate—we can tell from the quantity and quality of the Members attending how important it is. She gave an excellent speech, as others have said, and set out the case so well. I will probably repeat some of what she said, but because it is so important I think it is well worth saying twice, or even three or four times. Maybe then we will get the message across to the Minister, who I am sure will be in no doubt about how strongly we all feel about this.

Over the last five years, 150 Crown post offices have closed, with the closure or franchising of a further 74 Crown post offices announced in October last year. Unlike many of my colleagues, I am fortunate that no Crown post offices in my constituency are scheduled to be closed or franchised under those plans. However, the Crown post office in Sunderland is one of the busiest in the country. I can only imagine the impact on the local community if it were to be closed in the next phase of franchising. I thought I had better get in there now and stake the claim for that one to be taken off any future list.

Post offices are at the heart of local communities and are more than just somewhere for people to buy stamps or post letters. They provide vital services for many across the country, and it is therefore right and perhaps obvious that proposed closures are taking place in the face of significant local and national opposition. That is why we are all here today.

The continued privatisation and closure of Crown post offices risks leaving vulnerable customers and rural communities without access to banking and postal services.

In addition, a 2016 report from Citizens Advice concluded that franchising to retailers in the past has led to inferior services and poor disabled access, which is concerning given the number of disabled welfare claimants and pensioners who access payments via Post Office card accounts. Will the Minister please tell the House whether the Government plan to carry out equality impact assessments to ensure that any post offices that are franchised are accessible to all?

Franchising is often accompanied by substandard service, as we have heard. A constituent of mine who is a former Crown post office employee wrote to me recently to voice his concerns about the impact of franchising on the employment of trained, experienced staff. In fact, Citizens Advice reported that franchising leads to a deterioration in service and fewer staff with less experience. It seems that the economics of the franchise model are based on cutting staff numbers and reducing service provision. Franchise plans put in place by the Post Office in 2014 could work only if 50% of existing Crown post office staff left the service. This expulsion of experienced, knowledgeable staff is all done at a massive cost to the taxpayer, with £13 million paid in compensation agreements to redundant postal staff between 2014 and 2015. Then, after all these experienced staff are let go, their jobs are replaced with low-paid, temporary employment.

Recently announced plans show that many Crown post offices will be franchised to WHSmith, as my hon. Friends have said. Unions have raised concerns about the retailer's employment practices, given that its business model is based on low-wage, part-time jobs paying little above the minimum wage, whereas the usual pay for a counter position at a Crown post office is way above that. How can the Minister justify the replacement of well-paid, quality jobs with low-paid temporary positions? It is exploitative of staff and residents in areas where Crown post offices will be franchised.

I wrote to the Minister recently to voice my concerns and those of my constituents, and I thank her for her quick response. She said in reply that franchising is not a process of privatisation or closure. However, when considering the staff cuts, substandard service provision and poor profits that the postal service has faced in recent years, it appears that this publicly funded service is going through a period of managed decline.

The Minister also told me that franchising was about reducing costs for taxpayers. However, the process of franchising is paid for by public money. Millions have already been spent on compensation agreements with Crown post office staff and on installing and furnishing new, franchised branches. The Post Office will not even disclose the magnitude of some of these costs and has refused to carry out a public consultation on franchising.

Does the Minister agree that the public should at least be consulted before they are billed for substandard service and the loss of publicly owned assets? There has been a serious lack of transparency throughout the process and it is wrong that significant sums of public money are being used to finance the privatisation of the post office network. Franchising leads to poor service, poor accessibility and job cuts. The Government must justify their use of franchising and acknowledge the effect on service provision in all our local communities across the country.

2.20 pm

**Mr Paul Sweeney** (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Evans. I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy) for initiating this debate and speaking so powerfully in introducing it. As many hon. Members have said, she laid out comprehensively the matters that we have concerns about.

I recently met a number of postmasters in my constituency to discuss their concerns, so the issue is not just the collapse of the Crown office network—the 60% decline that we have seen in that network. Last year saw the sale of the Dennistoun Crown office in my constituency; it was franchised off. I remember going along to the consultation that the new franchisee was holding, and he seemed upbeat about the opportunity that he had to make a difference. I was looking at the plans that he had. On the face of it, it was all quite impressive—the layouts and accessibility and the opportunity.

Obviously, at that time I expressed the concerns about TUPE-ing. We have seen that the general trend is that the majority of Crown office staff will leave. As my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray) said, staff will have a very generous settlement scheme, but that is because the business model of the franchising is set up so that it is sustainable only if those people take the settlements. TUPE-ing people across on the same terms and conditions is not a sustainable business model for the franchise. It is almost rigged, in a way, to create that perverse incentive to leave. There is a draining out of skills and knowledge and a diluting of employment protections and the standards of employment that people would generally have working in this sector.

The postmasters came to see me because they were concerned. The same guy I was talking about came six months later, and his mood could not have been more depressed. It was just awful to see the change from his initial upbeat enthusiasm. That small business owner had been looking to make an entrepreneurial fist of it, but he felt that he had been conned in the way he had signed up to the deal.

The main concern of the postmasters was the viability of the operations because of the reduction in funding and resource. For example, postmasters now have to rent ATMs at a cost of £8,500 per annum, but they get an income of only £7,500 per annum from those machines, so that is a net loss of £1,000 to the franchisee, just from the obligation to have an ATM on-site. There are associated business rates as well.

The Government have invested £1.3 billion in the post office network. However, that money does not appear to filter down to the franchisees. Banking contracts with new franchisees have changed. Postmasters used to receive 70p per £100 for providing banking services; they now receive only 31p per £100. That creates another problematic and precarious situation for many franchise owners.

As hon. Members have said, there has been a widespread programme of commercial bank branch closures, which has hit my constituency. Near the Dennistoun Crown post office, we have seen the closure of the Royal Bank of Scotland branch in Dennistoun in the last 18 months or so. Before that we saw the closure of RBS in Possilpark. My constituency has increasingly become a banking

desert. It increasingly relies on post office services, which in turn are becoming increasingly precarious because all the Crown offices are being franchised. One has already been franchised, and indeed one franchise cannot be shifted because it is so unattractive to any prospective franchisee.

The situation is not working at all and is not sustainable. Potential earnings have been eroded to the point at which people believe that cash starvation will lead to the closure of many post office outlets. The view is that post offices should go back to being run as they were. My fear is that offloading the Crown office network on to franchisees stores up a time bomb. There could be a wholesale collapse in the provision of postal services across the UK within the next five years because those people literally want to drop the keys and walk away because it is costing them money to run these businesses. It is a drain on their resources. Why on earth would they be paying money to run them? I fear that the Post Office is sort of saying, “Let’s offload this. We’ll create a superficial holding pattern for a couple of years and lock the people into these contracts,” and in two years’ time things are going to drop off a cliff and we are going to see a massive collapse in the overall post office footprint across the UK. That is my real concern.

I hope the Minister takes on board and addresses my points, and that she offers to meet postmasters who have those concerns. Postmasters in my constituency believe that their ability to provide a service, which they want to provide, and employment in the constituency is being severely eroded and that retail operations within the franchises are not sufficient to allow their survival. They believe that contracts should be renegotiated to allow both the service provision and the ability to earn a reasonable living. Of course, the Communication Workers Union actively opposes the franchising of the post office network for that very reason. Employees in those branches believe that they are 39% underpaid.

The model is totally unsustainable and risks further collapse in the post office network across the UK. I hope you will take on board the direct feedback from postmasters in my constituency. Sorry, I hope the Minister takes on board that feedback—perhaps you will as well, Mr Evans, and perhaps your constituents are also affected. I hope the Minister addresses those points with urgency because this is an urgent issue affecting postal services across the UK.

2.25 pm

**Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Evans. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy) for opening the debate so powerfully. I certainly echo many of the comments that she made. If the Prime Minister did not underestimate the power of Government to intervene, I see no reason why the Minister should not intervene on behalf of all our constituents to ensure that this franchising process is halted. It is absolutely clear that it is riddled with problems. I shall reflect on the situation in my constituency in York and some of the challenges that are being placed at the door of people there because of the decision to franchise the service.

The first issue is the consultation process taking place over the Christmas period—it closed on 28 December—the busiest and most stressful time for post office staff. I pay



tribute to them, but to have this situation hanging over their head over the Christmas period is nothing short of cruel. It also ignores the input that they would have wanted to have into the consultation. The issue is not just them and their jobs, but their customers, whom they care deeply about.

I want to highlight two particular issues: the impact on the local economy in York, and the location of and access to the post office. The post office has been at 22 Lendal since 1884. It has survived two world wars and still stands proud today. It is a busy and profitable Crown post office, which is a real advantage for our city centre which, like many high streets, is struggling. It is at the entrance to our city—a city that attracts 7 million people every year and a city that people will come into on a Saturday or during the week to use the facilities of the post office.

It is in a prime location for transport links, whether people are using the train or the bus to come into the city. Crucially, disabled people are able to pull up outside the post office to access the services, and for those who cycle, there is parking space for bikes outside. The post office is in the most profitable and accessible part of our city. It is boosted by having opposite to it Britain's best pie shop—Appleton's. People have a dual pact whereby they buy their pie and use the post office.

**Lisa Nandy:** As the Member of Parliament for Wigan, I am duty-bound to assure my hon. Friend that the best pies in the country are found in my constituency.

**Rachael Maskell:** My hon. Friend may say that, but by all judgment, Appleton's has won the prize for the best pie shop in the nation.

To get back to business, the reality is that York's post office is a profitable post office that works for my constituents. It is in the prime location. If the post office could choose its location, it would still be exactly where it is. However, the post office will be moving to WHSmith in Coney Street. That is not far, but the post office will be going into an area of the city that is struggling and where shops are shutting. The number of empty retail outlets that we see as we walk around is growing year on year and month on month, which is of great concern. People will not be able to pull up in their vehicle outside the post office because it is a pedestrianised area. That means that the post office will be inaccessible, particularly for disabled people but also for older residents.

The area will also have tighter controls in future. Mail vans will not be able to pop by because of the counter-terrorism measures that our city is taking—the Post Office was not even aware of that during the consultation process. If a van were to go there, it would have to be well out of hours because of the new counter-terrorism plan. It would have a very precarious route down a dark alley, which leads down towards the river and has been deemed unsafe under health and safety inspections, let alone if someone were to be in that alley with money—they just would not go there. It is deeply concerning for staff, who would have to use that as the only means of accessing the building other than going through the shop itself.

The post office will be located at the back of WHSmith. It will not be the first business to try to succeed there. Costa Coffee had a business at the back of WHSmith and it failed. In its current location, just down the road, Costa Coffee is thriving, but at the back of WHSmith it

did not work. This does not make sense for the future of the post office. Therefore, its current location is the right place for it.

**Jo Stevens:** I am glad that my hon. Friend has raised this situation where the post office is transferred and shoved right at the back of an existing WHSmith store, which is exactly what is proposed in Cardiff Central. We know that very few people are going into WHSmith because it is an ailing retailer. Walking right to the back of an ailing retail shop will not make it easy for people to access the postal services they need.

**Rachael Maskell:** My hon. Friend has made a powerful point. This has to make business sense and, where it does not, it should not proceed. I also highlight the fact that custom will be lost from retailers in the city who bank and place deposits within the post office. They do not feel safe having to walk through and then queue in a retail outlet. They have already said that they will be transferring their business away from the post office. That has to be taken on board. This does not make business sense or economic sense, nor does it make sense for our high streets or my city.

**Albert Owen:** As my hon. Friend knows, I know the branch she refers to very well from my student days and I use it at Christmas when I visit my daughter. It has excellent services, including an exchange bureau, which can compete with the best. Those kinds of services, which are working in purpose-built buildings, need to be maintained and enhanced. She is making an excellent case, but she makes it for the rest of the country, as well.

**Rachael Maskell:** It is so important that we do not sell off our family silver, which is exactly what this process will achieve, certainly with regard to my city.

Finally, I want to raise the issue of the war memorial placed in our post office, where 16 fallen men from the first world war and ten from the second world war are honoured. It is unknown today what will happen to that war memorial. I reflect on the words of Harold Wood, who today is 95. In 1942, he defended our city as part of the Home Guard. He said:

“The Luftwaffe couldn't destroy it. It would be sad to see the Post Office do it.”

Our post office survived two world wars, so it would be a shame to close the doors, thereby ensuring that its profitability, service and access will be lost to my constituents.

2.33 pm

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate. I congratulate the hon. Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy) on bringing this debate to the House. The fact that so many people are here indicates our interest in the subject and the importance of post offices to every constituency. I am pleased to bring—as I often do in Westminster Hall—a Northern Ireland perspective to this debate. I will speak about some of the success stories that we have had recently in post offices and their strategy. I am pleased to see the Minister in her place. She looks very lonesome in that top corner, but from my discussions with her, I understand that she is very much interested in the views we are putting forward. I know her response will be positive and I look forward to hearing it.

[*Jim Shannon*]

I will also make some comments about the high street, because it is important to have a high street. I was just talking to the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen), and I said to him that if a shop goes vacant and stays vacant for a while, it almost becomes infectious. It is important to ensure that somebody comes in quickly; otherwise, it will lead to the problems we are seeing across the UK mainland.

I hail from a rural area that has seen the closure of every rural bank in the last five years. The Scottish National party has highlighted the issue of rural banks closing, which is something I have seen in my constituency in the last five years. Any change or alteration of the post office greatly concerns me. We have no banks at all in the Ards peninsula, where I live. Almost every bank that has pulled out—except Ulster bank, which has created a mobile banking service and has a customer adviser in the area once a week—has pointed to the post office and urged people to make the most of the ability to lodge money and lift money through the post office. I have to say that that strategy has been successful in the Ards peninsula for a number of reasons. First, the post offices are there—I will explain how we have been able to keep them over the years—and secondly, two credit unions have opened in Portaferry and Kircubbin, which give some banking opportunities and supplement other facilities.

The figures in the background information may be a wee bit deceptive—I say that gently and with sincerity to those who did it. Some 111 Crown post offices have closed and 1,008 agency post offices have closed. Attempts have been made to build that up by using the outreach service, which can help a bit, but does not take away from the main issue. The role of a post office is not just to do monetary things. Other hon. Members have said that post offices should be doing more where they can, and that is one of the things that I want to look at. What can they offer? Can I do my driving licence there? Can I do my passport there? Can I pay some bills there? Can I do other things? That is what we need to do. I am not sure that the outreach service makes that happen. Therefore, I suggest very gently that the outreach alternative is not really where we are. A well-run network of rural post offices is needed.

I am very aware of any changes to the services offered and I am supportive of colleagues who are losing branches to what has been described to me as privatisation by stealth. That is why I support this debate. I am here to register my support for the post offices and to support those hon. Members who are probably having more difficulties in their constituency than I have in mine because of some of the success we have had.

The briefing from the Communication Workers Union, which I am sure we all received, is clear:

“The Post Office Ltd uses public money to finance the closure and franchising programme.

Everything from compromise agreements to get rid of existing staff (£13 million in 2014-15 alone), to refurbishments on stores it then franchises (£4.6 million was spent on 39 branches), and installing post office counters in franchisees’ premises (the post office refuses to disclose this expenditure), are met by the public. Yet, in return, the public receive a reduced service.”

That is the concern we all share, as hon. Members have said. It continues:

“While Crown offices represent a small share of the overall network, they have historically brought in between 10-20% of the Post Office’s overall revenue”—

a significant amount that cannot be ignored—

“and so any further closures could jeopardise the future of the network.

There is no evidence of respite from the slash and burn approach either, as the Post Office Ltd announced in July that they want to attract new applicants to set up ‘New Network Locations’ in 450 postcode areas throughout the UK.”

That perhaps unsettles the present franchise and network of post offices, as well.

“This initiative will have a substantial and far-reaching implication on the future of every flagship Crown office and Crown office job, as well as impact on Postmasters in sub Post Offices across the network many of whom are already reporting they are struggling financially.”

The two independent reports to which some hon. Members referred—one by Consumer Focus from 2012 and another by Citizens Advice from 2016—concluded that the previous franchising of Crown offices to WHSmith resulted in longer queuing and service times, inferior customer service and advice, poorer disabled access and a reduced number of counter positions. Those facts tell the story. If a service is going to be provided, it should be a good service. If the service is run down and secondary, by its very nature, that leads to the further reduction of the Post Office.

Alongside that, the closure and franchise programme results in the loss of experienced staff, as hon. Members have said. The sub-post office managers in the peninsula that I represent have historically been second to none and we have been truly blessed, but part of that is that they have invested in their businesses. It is not the big firms such as WHSmith that have been offered the franchises, but the smaller shop groups. That has enabled post offices to be retained, because there is an investment, but there also has to be a wage for the sub-postmasters or sub-postmistresses to be able to continue running them.

Having post offices in shops and garages across the peninsula is one way that we have made it work. Someone signing on to work for another company and not as a postmaster or postmistress may not affect quality of the service, but it means the loss of what people see as a community asset. I think all hon. Members have referred to and understood the importance of the community asset that we have.

I have lived on the Ards peninsula for all but four years of my life. It is a close community that has grown, with many people coming to live and retire there. Over the years, the post office has been the cog at its core—a central point for meeting friends. It is also a central point for saying, “You know something? Mrs Jones hasn’t come in this week to collect her money or make a transaction.” The people at the post office know that and then, as they often do, they will call out to see if she is okay. There is a critical community aspect to the post office that cannot be ignored, which is neighbour looking out for neighbour, as we do in this House as representatives.

**Albert Owen:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to talk about the social service as well as the postal service. There are also cash-handling services that post offices provide for small businesses. Wherever they transfer to, that service is not available.

**Jim Shannon:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely correct. Small businesses are another aspect that I want to mention. When the banks closed, they said, “You can do your business through the post office,” but people need to have that opportunity for lodging money and for getting cash out to pay staff wages. That is really important for small and medium-sized businesses, and that is why the intervention that the hon. Gentleman referred to is critical.

The closure and franchise programme means that the relationships that customers have with staff are lost, and it limits the Post Office’s ability to expand into the new services that customers want it to provide, which is another thing we need to make sure happens. Moving to a model with less space, fewer specialist staff and fewer experienced staff is not a model that customers want or that will bring future growth.

In the short time I have, I will set out how the post office counters have developed in conjunction with small and bigger shops. I will mention some of those places, because it is important for the evidential base—probably no one will know where they are, but hopefully the Minister will get to know them shortly, when she comes to visit my constituency sometime in April, after we get Brexit out of the way. They include Ballywalter, Ballyhalbert, Greyabbey and Kircubbin; Ards town, where Scrabo post office closed but was moved to the Ards shopping centre, which is only a couple of hundred yards away; Stratheden, where the post office was moved out to one of the larger shops; and West Winds, where the same was done. Those examples worked because the shops were big enough to absorb a post office and a counter, and to give a service, but the person who took it on had to have a wage that justified them looking after it, which is important as well.

The Minister knows the pressure on the high street well, as do all hon. Members present. The news stories in the media are always full of negativity—“This store has done well. That store hasn’t done well.” We want to make sure that post offices can play their role. The Crown post office in Newtownards in my constituency is critical to the future of the high street, and we are pleased to report that it has been retained.

Although I am thankful for businesses such as the Spar in Carrowdore, which has incorporated a post office in its shopping outlet that carries out all the post office functions, including foreign currency, and whose staff are certainly highly trained, that does not seem to be the case for all franchises on the mainland, as hon. Members have said. As an MP for a rural area, I give my wholehearted support to those wanting to preserve the skill and make-up of post offices in areas that rely on them as the only monetary exchange.

Earlier, someone said that privacy is sometimes needed for financial transactions. I want that to be recorded in *Hansard*. That is perhaps the one thing I would like to see more often in a post office. We live in an age where everyone overhears conversations about other people’s monetary transactions in the post office, but we do need privacy for some things.

The Post Office was not designated for privatisation and I sincerely oppose an attempt to privatise it by stealth—I put that on the record. The service it provides is truly a lifeline in rural communities and that service must be first class. For that reason, it must be retained.

I look forward to the Minister’s response. I know that in her response, we will hear some of the reassurance we need.

2.46 pm

**Peter Kyle** (Hove) (Lab): It is a privilege to speak under your chairmanship, Mr Evans. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy) for securing the debate and for introducing it so comprehensively. As she will see, I have been waiting for three years to say some of these things; this is a great opportunity.

My hon. Friend the Member for Croydon North (Mr Reed) started by talking about the impact and importance of post offices in our communities. Before coming here, I was a community worker and an academic studying community work. I can testify that having such institutions on our high street as part of our community is incredibly important. Some institutions, such as libraries and post offices, have been part of our communities for generations, and different generations use them to mingle and come together. They not only form a physical presence in our community, but bring different parts of our community, of different ages, ethnicities and backgrounds, together in the same place. They are uniquely and incredibly important to the cohesion of our communities.

Since 2000, I have lived in the Brunswick Town area of the Hove constituency that I represent. That town is characterised by having lots of the regency houses for which Hove is known. It also had a Crown post office that had been there for many generations. It was a well loved and heavily used post office. I was elected in 2015. Two months after being elected, I was contacted by the Post Office, which said that it was opening a consultation with the potential to close the branch. I immediately met Post Office representatives in my office in Parliament, because if the Post Office was going to have a consultation, I wanted to engage in it in an open-hearted, engaged and positive way. I wanted to make sure that it got all the information it needed to make a decision in the best interest of the community that I represent and that every single voice that needed to be heard would be heard.

When the Post Office’s representatives came to Parliament and sat with me, the first questions I asked were, “Is this a genuine consultation? Are you going to listen to the voices in our community? Are you going to look at and study the facts and base your decision on those facts, or is this a fait accompli? I need to know right now.” They both looked me in the eye and made me an absolute cast-iron categorical promise that it was a genuine consultation that would look at the facts and listen to the community, and that they would base their decision on what they saw and heard.

On the back of that, I engaged fully to try to deliver the voices and the information the Post Office’s representatives needed to hear. I made sure that there was a public meeting one evening, to which 200 local community residents turned up in an open-hearted way, so that they could sit with the representatives, feed in their insight and how they use the post office, and make sure that their needs were taken into consideration. That meeting was a difficult one, because people were really concerned, and I made sure that the people who had come from the Post Office were treated with respect, which sometimes meant challenging the people I represent and ensuring that they engaged in a positive way. In



[Peter Kyle]

other words, I used some of the political capital that they had given me in order, at times, to push back at them. That is a difficult thing to do at such meetings, but in the interests of getting the right outcome it was worth doing.

A petition was set up locally that received 5,400 signatures and there was another petition online that received an additional 2,000 signatures. The voice of the community was heard loud and clear.

The Post Office said of this post office—the Crown post office in Brunswick Town in Hove—that it had spoken to customers who were very willing to make the walk, for 1.1 miles uphill, to another post office, which was in a convenience store that had a counter. However, at the public meeting, not one person said that was the case. The Post Office could not provide me with the names of people who had said they were perfectly happy to make that journey. I went into the Brunswick Town post office several times to speak to customers and I could not find a single customer who said they would rather make that journey of 1.1 miles up a hill than use the post office that was already in their community and that had been there for generations.

So I went back to the Post Office with that information and the Post Office ignored it. I told the Post Office about people who could not make that walk of 1.1 miles, either because they were living with disabilities or living into old age; they simply could not make that journey. The Post Office heard their voices directly, because I made sure that it heard those voices directly.

Then I went in to the Brunswick Town post office, because the Post Office had said to me that in the previous year the footfall and the number of customers for it had fallen. The Post Office showed me statistics to back that up. So, as I say, I went into that post office and when I opened the door I saw something that I had seen very, very regularly—a queue, snaking through the building all the way to the door. Of the three counters, only one was open. In the 15 years that I had lived in that community, I had never seen a situation in which only one counter was open; it was always the case before that the post office had been a hub and all of its counters had been open.

So I spoke to some of the staff in the post office and it turned out that eight months earlier a diktat had come down from the Post Office to close two of the counters and not use them; only one of the counters was to be used. Why was that? I am absolutely convinced that the Post Office was running down that Crown post office, by allowing only one counter to be used and by only allowing the staff there—against their wishes—to use one counter.

It was very clear that the Post Office wanted to drive down the customer numbers, so I wrote to it and asked directly, “Have you asked the question and looked into whether the fall in footfall is due to fewer people wanting to use that branch, or is it because more people are finding it difficult to use that branch, or they just give up before they get to the counter in the first place?” The Post Office could not answer the question.

The process ended and the Post office announced in writing that it was going to close the Crown post office in Brunswick Town. There would be no further engagement and within weeks that post office had closed.

This sorry story ends a year later, when I walked down the street in Brunswick Town and discovered that the Post Office had opened a new branch inside a convenience store next door to the Crown post office that it had closed down, because it said there was no need for it. I repeat: next door. I have absolutely no doubt that I was misled, that the community I represent was misled and—worst of all—that the customers who used and depended on that post office were misled and the staff who had given a career and indeed a lifetime in work to that post office branch were misled. The post office staff’s jobs disappeared and the jobs that have been created in their place have no pension liability and no guarantee that they would have the standards that people who work long-term in the Post Office can expect. And those workers were no longer part of the Post Office family.

We have a Prime Minister who stood on the steps of Downing Street and said she was going to maintain those sorts of rights and tackle injustices. The Post Office is one of her companies; it is an organisation that she runs. However, she has allowed it to dwindle, to be stripped of assets and to be taken away from our high streets, and replaced with something that has less value, that makes less of a contribution to our communities, and that offers less stability and value in the workplace to the people who work for it.

I say to the Minister directly that I understand that she has said that it is not her job to meddle with the running of the Post Office. However, in times such as this, I and my community expect her to roll up her sleeves and get stuck in, because if branches are being taken from our high streets, and MPs and our communities are being misled, we are their elected officials, she is speaking on behalf of the Government and we expect her to act.

2.55 pm

**Daniel Zeichner** (Cambridge) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Evans, and a particular pleasure to follow a very powerful speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Peter Kyle). It was a salutary warning, and I suspect that some of my comments will echo the concerns of others about the so-called consultation process. I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy) on her powerful introduction. She speaks for all Labour Members on these important issues.

The announcement a few months ago that Cambridge was one of the post offices to be put through this process was met with incredulity in my city. People are absolutely furious. I will say a few things about our local circumstances, trying not to repeat some of the points that have been very well made already, and then make some general reflections.

The Crown post office in Cambridge has around 15 very experienced staff, who between them have 150 years of experience—experience that is likely to be lost if this process continues. The post office has already been moved across the street—that was not a popular decision eight years ago—from one of the many fine buildings in Cambridge, in order, we were told, to secure its long-term future. There are some interesting definitions of “long-termism” in the modern world. That post office is one of the most successful in the region and possibly, I am told by my colleagues in the Communication Workers

Union, in the country. It has been one of the top-selling post offices for travel currency, travel insurance, travel-related products and passport checking. It is one of the top-performing post offices in the area, so we might expect it to be celebrated as a success story.

That post office is also one of the few nationally to carry out biometric services and provide international driving permits, which is what I want to focus on. There has been a huge change in our country for those coming here to work or study, which most of us—who do not have to go through such processes—are probably only dimly aware of. Those people have to have biometric residence permits. If we are to have that system, we also need a system to allow them to register their biometric data, and in my area it is the Crown post office in Cambridge to which they are directed.

[MR GRAHAM BRADY *in the Chair*]

In conducting the research for this speech and talking to people locally about how the whole system works, I stumbled on what can perhaps only be described as a coincidence. In November, just after the announcement of the consultation, guess what quietly happened? That biometric information system has been very quietly transferred from the post office—although it still exists there at the current time—to the local library. However, it is hard to know how anyone would find that out, because if they go to the Home Office website or Post Office website, they will still be directed to the Cambridge Crown post office.

Let us, for the moment, continue to follow the public advice, because biometric residence permits are needed by all foreign nationals from outside the European Economic Area if they want to stay in the UK for longer than six months, extend their visa, or settle in the UK or have other interactions with the Home Office. In areas such as mine, which have huge numbers of people coming to study or work, and contribute to our local economy, this issue is enormously important. For instance, I am told that almost all the 2,000 non-EEA staff at the University of Cambridge will need to have used, or will need to use, those services, and if they cannot go to Cambridge, they will have to go to Huntingdon, Harlow or Romford, which requires hours and hours of travel on public transport.

**Jo Stevens:** I have a similar situation in Cardiff Central, where the biometric centre was in our post office, which is due to be put into WHSmith. I met with the post office to ask whether the biometric service would transfer to WHSmith, and guess what? It will not. Does my hon. Friend agree that that creates another barrier for people who are already in a vulnerable situation?

**Daniel Zeichner:** I totally agree, and that is an important point. Apparently, only 37 WHSmith stores across Britain have the wider access for wheelchair users, and if that is no longer available, people from my area would have to travel to Luton, Milton Keynes or London—a major diminution of service. It may be possible that those services can be provided elsewhere. Frankly, who knows? Maybe the Minister can enlighten us. Maybe she can tell us whether the timing of this transfer was random chance or coincidence. Maybe she can guarantee the future of our local library. I do not know, but my guess is that the Government have very little clue about the future, and I doubt that any answers at all will be offered. We shall see.

Other Members have mentioned disability access, and I concur entirely with the comments made about WHSmith in general, which I will not repeat. What I will say is that those of us who have been in and out of WHSmith in Cambridge know that it is already a crowded store. It is not listed by WHSmith as one of its wheelchair-friendly stores, and the idea that it is going to be a pleasant experience for people seems almost unimaginable, frankly. We have huge doubts. These services should be available to people and properly accessible. I say to those running the campaign on behalf of the Post Office that they should be careful of who they are taking on, because we have some pretty powerful campaigners locally. Councillor Gerri Bird led a campaign a few years ago to stop the toilets in the Lion Yard shopping centre in Cambridge being moved from one floor to another. After months of campaigning, she won and the other side lost. I say to the Post Office that it should be careful who it takes on. It would do much better to back down soon, gracefully.

Let me turn to some of the wider issues. As we have heard, the Government have said that they are worried about the high street. That is understandable; we all are. There are huge challenges, but we should not make them worse. This is not just about where a service is provided; as other Members have said, it is about the kind of institution. Many years ago, I worked for John Garrett, the former MP for Norwich South—some Members may just about remember John. He wrote a book, presciently entitled “Westminster: Does Parliament Work?”, which is good reading in these troubled times. I remember going around the local post offices in Norwich early in the morning with him, and the thing that struck us was that at every post office, there was a queue. An accountant, I suspect, would say, “Why are these people standing outside the post office when, if they came an hour or two later, they could just go in and be served?” The answer, of course, was that this was the occasion when most of those people got to see their friends. They were standing outside; as other Members have already said, it was part of a wider social issue. For the bean counters who are looking at the Post Office balance sheet, that probably does not count for anything, but it really counts in looking at the NHS balance sheet, in terms of the impact on people’s mental health from loneliness and so on. That is why the Post Office is a public service, not just a business.

People may also remember a recent, much-loved BBC television series, “Lark Rise to Candleford”. Some will remember the inestimable postmistress Dorcas Lane, who was at the heart of that local community. I suspect that series was much loved partly because it spoke to a conception of Englishness—one of fairness, kindness and public service—that many people still crave. As other hon. Friends have already alluded to, that also goes to the heart of the debate that is happening in the Chamber just a few yards away. Others have written eloquently on these related issues. My hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham and Rainham (Jon Cruddas), who was in the Chamber earlier, wrote of the then coalition Government back in 2011:

“The government is not conservative; it is liberal and extreme. Through its indulgence of the banks and corporate and media power, and attempts to sell off parts of our English common life to the highest bidder—forests, waterways, ports, the Post Office, sport and culture—it is systematically destroying the hard-won victories of generations and, in so doing, unravelling the essential fabric of this country.”

[Daniel Zeichner]

These post offices are part of that fabric. For my city of Cambridge—high-tech Cambridge—our post office is part of the essential fabric of our city and our community. I may be dismissed as a romantic socialist, and I would not disown that label, but I will conclude by posing a question to the Minister: what kind of conservative does not understand the place of the post office in an English country town or community?

3.5 pm

**Jim McMahon** (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Graham. You will get the idea that today, tempers are fraught and passions are running high. There is genuine concern about the impact of these policies on our communities, which are met with a Government who are stubbornly pursuing a course of action that has no support. You would be forgiven for believing that you are still chairing the 1922 Committee, but no: this is a debate on post offices, with MPs who are genuinely concerned about the impact of these changes on the fabric of our communities and the future of our high streets. We can dismiss post offices as places where people go just to post a letter or send or collect a parcel, but they are more than that: they are the community. They are part of our collective identity, secure a sense of belonging, and are also important to our sense of place. They are critical to the fabric of our community.

Oldham has seen more than its fair share of changes, and more than its fair share of taking the burden of modernisation and austerity. It has seen every single one of its day care centres and every single one of its council-run youth centres closed. It has seen thousands of staff sacked from the local authority. It has seen its police stations in Chadderton, Royton and Hollinwood closed; it has seen every single custody cell in a town of 250,000 people closed. It has seen the magistrates court closed; it has seen the county court closed. It has seen the taxpayer-supported Royal Bank of Scotland close every single branch in a community of 250,000 people, and when RBS decided to close its high street bank, what did it say? It said, “Part of our consideration is how close our existing branch network is to the post office network, because that will provide an alternative banking function for the local community.”

In these types of consultations, the organisation contacts the MP for the constituency where the branch is based. Ironically, however, Ward Street, where Oldham post office and the Royal Bank of Scotland sit, is on the boundary between Oldham West and Oldham East. My hon. Friend the Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Debbie Abrahams) was contacted and consulted about the closure of the Royal Bank of Scotland branch, and I was consulted about the closure of the post office across the road, but never the two shall meet. There was no consideration of the impact that the Royal Bank of Scotland closing would have on the post office, and the Post Office gave no consideration to the impact on the high street and local community of the closure and relocation that it was proposing. That post office has just undergone a significant modernisation programme, with far more self-service facilities to free up staff time and so provide for a wide range of services that will not be transferred to the WHSmith branch in Oldham’s Spindles shopping centre. That is important—the branch

is heavily used. We have not been given the exact usage numbers, but the Post Office admits that the Oldham branch is one of the largest and most heavily used branches in the north-west. That branch is extremely valued by the community.

Critically, the branch is located on one of our main streets, where buses drop people off. There are 62 drop-offs every hour on that road outside the post office. Interestingly, just beyond it is one of the steepest inclines in Oldham, which is quite a steep town anyway—anyone who has been there knows that it is a big hill with a town plonked on the top of it. That is the steepest incline down to the shopping centre, so to get from the string of bus stops to the shopping centre where WHSmith is located, elderly people and those with limited mobility will have to go down one of the steepest inclines in Oldham. At the moment, they can park in the loading bay, or on the yellow lines if they have a blue badge, and pop straight in without any problem. They cannot do that in the shopping centre: a blue-badge holder visiting Oldham shopping centre pays the full price, the same as every other car park user. Straightaway, people who rely on transport and their blue badge to use a post office will be hit with a charge that they currently do not have to pay, just for using that essential facility.

Oldham has a far wider range of services than neighbouring Rochdale town centre, where the beautiful, stunning Crown post office was closed with the promise that one would reopen in future. We are now years on and the replacement has not followed. In Ashton-under-Lyne next door, the Crown post office, in a beautiful Victorian building, was closed and then relocated to WHSmith in the shopping centre. Many of the services provided in Oldham are not provided in our neighbouring towns, so Oldham provides services for nearly 700,000 residents who need, for instance, to use a biometric enrolment service. If a non-EU national needs a residence permit or a permit to work, they have to go and use the biometric enrolment service there. If they do not use the current post office facilities—I understand the contract has been let out elsewhere—the nearest venue to go to from Oldham is Sheffield. How does that make sense when we are just about—potentially; who knows?—to leave the European Union and we do not know what immigration arrangements will be in place and what permits might be needed in future.

The idea of downgrading and changing the service is an absolute nonsense. Even now, particularly in Oldham, where we have a large Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Indian community, a very heavily used service will be taken away from local people and will be transferred.

What about the Care Quality Commission ID services? If someone working in the health and social care industry needs their ID checked to make sure that they are fit to work, they have to go to the post office to get it checked. If that service is not transferred from Oldham into WHSmith, people will have to go to Gorton or to Harpurhey, and there is not a single direct bus route to either of those places.

What about CRB checks if someone wants to work with young people? Teachers and youth workers have to get their ID checked. The service is currently provided in Oldham’s Crown post office, but is not provided in neighbouring Rochdale or Ashton town centres. The idea of downgrading those services for such a large body of the population is an absolute nonsense that



shows the lack of co-ordination across Government. Has any consultation taken place with a Home Office Minister on the contractual change for the biometric enrolment service? Has any conversation taken place with the Department of Health and Social Care on the changes to the CQC ID services and the CRB check services if they are not transferred to WHSmith? Financial services, ID checking and current and credit card accounts are currently provided in Oldham, but not in neighbouring Rochdale or Ashton town centre, but they have the potential to be lost during the move, too.

We hit the ground running with the campaign in Oldham and started an online petition. Between our street petition that started in December and the online petition, we have about 2,500 signatures of local people. The hallmark of every one of the conversations that took place concerns how baffled people are that the move is even being proposed. People have been told that all the closures and the downgrading of the high street is because of austerity. They have been told how difficult it is for retail and how everyone needs to take their fair share of austerity and that is why they are losing all these other public services. People have been told that and for quite a long time they accepted that that is just the way it is—times are very difficult and that is the impact. Not a single person can explain why the move makes sense. It makes no sense to the community and the people who use the post office. It makes no sense for the high street to lose a vital anchor to support that part of the town centre and our Market Hall and the traders who operate there.

What about the fabric of our community? We have heard many fantastic contributions about the social role that a post office plays apart from the commercial transactions that are provided. When we hear people defending the modernisation programme—I use “modernisation” loosely—they say, “Things have to change. Things will never stay the way they are. You have to keep up with a changing world.” The post office modernisation programme is a good example of how it has tried to keep up with demand. The number of branches in the 1980s was 22,000. It is now down to 11,000, so we have lost half the network over the past 30 years. That is modernisation—if you like closing stuff—but it has taken on a far wider range of services, trying to be more commercial and trying to attract footfall in its premises. By and large, it has done a reasonable job and the community has benefited.

The Crown post offices have shouldered the burden. When we look at the closures across all the post offices, agency post offices are down by 9%, but Crown post offices are down by 29%. We have lost a third of our Crown post office network as a result of successive closures, but still the public pay into the post office network as a vital public facility. What is the deal? There was no public payback with the Royal Bank of Scotland. Taxpayers bailed out the bankers, and what thanks did they get? They walked away from every one of our towns, cities and high streets. What is the payback for the taxpayer with the post office network? What is the community dividend for the investment that we collectively make in essential public services? It cannot be a repeat of the Royal Bank of Scotland’s “to hell with the community, turn your back on the community”, simply because the Minister would not take responsibility and says, “This is just all commercial.” Such decisions

are not commercial when generations of facilities that have been built up to provide that infrastructure in our community will be gone and can never be replaced.

Finally, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy) on securing this debate. She has seen the passion in the room today. I also congratulate the CWU trade union for the work that it does in leading the charge against the changes. The Minister has an opportunity. She is a young new Minister looking to set out on her ministerial career and to make her mark. Let everything that we have learnt over the past two to two and a half years be a lesson for everybody. If we pursue stubbornly a narrow direction that does not have support, ignoring what those with concerns say, we will end up in a cul-de-sac and people will be marked by that. I do not believe the Minister wants that mark on her reputation. I believe she wants a reputation as a Minister who understands that we are all here to represent our communities and to listen and to act on the legitimate concerns raised. Let that be her ministerial reputation and not one of stubbornness and closed-mindedness.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Sir Graham Brady (in the Chair):** Order. Before I call the next speaker, I will explain that we have just over half an hour before the wind-up speeches need to begin. Three Back-Bench Members are seeking to catch my eye. I would rather avoid imposing a time limit, but if the three can consider each other we will avoid it.

3.17 pm

**Ellie Reeves (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab):** I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy) for securing this timely and much needed debate. Much has already been said about the damage that the downgrading of post offices can do, and I want to provide examples of what has happened in my constituency. Over the past few years, both before and since my election, Lewisham West and Penge has seen three post offices downgraded and franchised out in locations in Forest Hill, Sydenham and Beckenham. Two are Crown branches. The Forest Hill post office now operates out of a WHSmith shop, occupying some of the upper floor. Although it is serviced by a lift, it is cramped, the queue is frequently lengthy, and it is potentially an unfit environment for more vulnerable people. We must remember that vulnerable people are more likely to require the services offered by a fully equipped post office, including the elderly, those who might not have access to the internet and those who have difficulty in understanding, speaking or reading English and require a face-to-face service.

In Beckenham, the Crown branch property has been sold off and the service desks moved out of my constituency and up the high street to a WHSmith store. We have heard numerous examples of why WHSmith stores are not fit for purpose as post offices. Some of the services that used to be run in the Beckenham post office are now located in a convenience store, which has the post office that I now have to use, whereas I used to go to the Crown one. I do not want to do a disservice to the very nice chap that runs the post office there, but it is simply not an appropriate location for a post office. It is a convenience shop and space is limited, and it has only one counter. The queue often trails around the whole shop because demand is high, and the one counter

[*Ellie Reeves*]

simply cannot keep pace with the people who want to use the services. For a wheelchair user, or someone like me who often has a pushchair with them or a small child in tow, it is neither an efficient nor a convenient experience. The queue snakes between shelves full of alcohol on one side and the freezer on the other. I have lost count of the number of times when I have been there with my three-year-old and have had to tell him no, he can have neither wine nor ice cream while I am trying to send a parcel.

Joking aside, it is a real issue. The Crown post office in Sydenham has just been franchised out. It is and has always been a hub of our community and I remember using that post office when I was a young girl to get my passport and pay into my national savings account. It has saddened us in Sydenham that the franchise has been awarded to a stationery company, ZCO Ltd, with no good track record of running post offices. We are all incredibly worried. The Crown post office in Sydenham provided biometric services, which a number of my constituents had to use. Now they are being told they have to travel five miles to Brixton to get access to the services. It might not sound far to travel on public transport in London, but let us think for a moment: often it is vulnerable people who need those services. Sometimes they do not have recourse to public funds. Affording the bus fares to and from Brixton is not a very practical solution. With each and every downgrade, initial assurances are offered that services will remain unchanged and facilities will be kept on a par, yet whenever branches in Lewisham West and Penge have been downgraded, the assurances given upon franchising have quickly unravelled, leaving my constituents with a sub-par postal service experience.

As a former employment rights lawyer, I have deep concerns about the employment of staff members at franchised-out branches. When I have written to the Post Office seeking assurances, at the outset, they have always been given, but what is the reality? Some protections exist under TUPE but the CWU found that, in 2014-15, only 10 out of 400 staff from Crown post office branches that were closed were TUPE-ed over to the new retailer. In 2016, the figure was six out of 200—3% of staff. Those are shocking figures. Not only is that bad for jobs and workers' employment; it is bad for customers' experience. People employed by the Post Office service are highly skilled and trained staff, and they are used to the face-to-face interactions that the job requires. When such high-quality trained permanent staff are lost, services inevitably decline.

We should think about the effect that post office closures and downgrades have in the high street. When we ran the campaign to save the Sydenham Crown post office, local businesses said they desperately wanted to keep it because it would mean footfall on the high street. People who went to the post office would shop in local, usually very small, independent retailers. There is now a lot of worry locally about the effect on the high street of the downgrade. Crown post offices provide stability to high streets. A lot can be said about the transition to online commerce, but one step that the Government can and should take to protect high streets is to stop franchising out our post offices. It is not the only solution, but allowing those vital services to continue

on the high street, serving our communities and constituents, is surely in everyone's interest. The downgrades and closures, and the franchising out, need to stop now.

3.24 pm

**Hugh Gaffney** (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Graham, in such an important debate. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy) on securing the debate. I pay tribute to the Communication Workers Union for its tireless work on this issue. Having served as a union representative with the CWU, I have witnessed the dedication of the union and its members in fighting against Crown post office closures. I have been with Royal Mail for 28 years, so I know that post offices are central to daily life in our constituencies. They serve as the hubs for towns and villages, and are the very lifeline of rural communities. It is not just that they serve the public; they have their complete confidence and trust. Post offices are trusted to deliver, receive and collect goods in letters or parcels daily. The public know that they are staffed by dedicated postal staff who are proud to work in the Post Office network and who not only have local knowledge and contacts but are firmly rooted in the communities that they serve.

Postal workers have good jobs that they are proud to do, with terms and conditions second to none, secured through agreement between the CWU and Post Office management. The principle of the Post Office is that it is a business that serves people's needs, not one that pursues profit. That is the reason why it has dedicated staff who are always willing to go the extra mile, who treat their customers' goods as if they were their own, who always provide extra help and support to vulnerable customers, displaying patience and willingness to help customers in need, who will help and guide customers when a form needs to be filled in, who take the time to speak to their customers, and who use their local knowledge and contacts to contribute to daily community life. It is that sheer dedication to the customers that has made our post offices so cherished by the public.

The Post Office is not a new business. It has lasted over 500 years. Postal workers have been proud to wear the uniform and are proud of the Post Office's history. I remember when the Royal Mail was one big network, dedicated to serving the public good, with postal workers united in purpose to support customers—as they still do. We never missed a single letterbox. We delivered six out of seven days a week. We were out in all weathers, come rain or shine. We dealt with the public's goods across the UK, from Land's End to John O'Groats. We worked day and night to collect, transport, separate and deliver goods within a 24-hour turnaround. For 21 years, I fought successive Governments to stop the sale of Royal Mail, but eventually a Tory-Lib Dem coalition was successful in selling it off. I said then—and say it today—that Royal Mail was not for sale.

Despite the sale of Royal Mail, Post Office Ltd was kept in public hands, but post office closures soon followed, and some post offices began to be moved into the private sector. Along with redundancies, there were attacks on terms and conditions by the new management. Good people, who were dedicated to and passionate about their work, were treated as just a number—and that number was the amount it would cost to make them redundant. A choice was put before them of accepting a redundancy package or continuing in their

job with worse terms and conditions than they had enjoyed. Let me be frank: that is theft. They steal our jobs and our terms and conditions, all of which we won through the collective efforts of our unions and their members.

We were told that some closures were necessary—that some were carried out to protect other post offices and that no further closures would occur. Each time, those promises to the workers and the communities that rely upon post offices were broken. We now face the prospect of the Government giving away more public money to help to sell off a further 74 Crown post offices, severing the connection between the post office and the community and leading to the loss of more dedicated staff. It is another blow to Britain's high streets. That public money is being awarded to WHSmith, a company that holds the hotly contested *Which?* award of being voted worst retailer by consumers. It offers low pay for its staff, poor terms and conditions, and service standards lower than those expected in our post offices. This race to the bottom will simply lead to a decline in the service that the public receive and a decline in standards, which will tarnish the proud history of the post office network and its dedicated staff.

I will do all I can—I know the CWU will do likewise—to fight the planned sell-off of our post offices. From the support shown in this debate by the Labour party, we can say that we will be doing all we can, unlike the Tory party, given the empty seats on the Government Benches. Not one Government Back Bencher has turned up to try to defend themselves. The battle to protect our vital post offices is one that must be fought and, more importantly, it can be won. I pay tribute to Liam Murphy, a CWU rep. I stood alongside him, Glasgow and District Amal postal workers and Carole and David Bowmaker, who are good, hard-working union reps. We fought twice, and we won. East Kilbride still stands today as a Crown post office. If the battle comes again, I will stand with the same people, standing up for that local community. I also pay tribute to the CWU national officer, Andy Furey, who is here today. He has dedicated his life to fighting these battles. He has been all around Britain talking to the people now sitting at home, wondering, “What happened to that good job I had?”

This Government meddle, meddle, meddle. It is their job to meddle, but I ask them to stop the closure and sale of post offices, work with the CWU, listen to local communities and invest in our Crown post offices, protect the high-quality service that the public deserve and expect, and provide some long-overdue job security to the dedicated staff.

3.31 pm

**Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Graham.

**Liz McInnes:** Follow that.

**Andy Slaughter:** I will, but in my own manner and style. *[Interruption.]* Do not worry, there is no risk of passion. It is good to see you in the Chair, Sir Graham. We have not quite had 48 Members talking about posting letters today, but I hope you feel at home nevertheless. Labour Members are much less fractious, which is helpful.

We have had such a high turnout because of the excellent timeliness of the debate. We have had a good debate, and that is thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy), who always captures the zeitgeist.

As a former Hammersmith Broadway councillor, she will know how much we have grievously suffered in Hammersmith and Fulham from the depletion of the post office network. Indeed, the Crown post office in her ex-ward moved some years ago and was franchised into WHSmith. In the past few weeks and months, I have had complaints about the service operating there.

One by one, we have lost every Crown post office through closure or through their being stuffed into a WHSmith branch. Last year, we had one left, which was the Shepherds Bush post office on Shepherds Bush Green. It is a good site and a dedicated building, and it is quite famous, because one of its frequent customers was the comedian Richard Herring. When he had his *Metro* column, he used to write about the Shepherds Bush post office and the more eccentric members of the constituency who he used to meet on his almost daily travels there. It was a good, friendly place, and it had wonderful staff with long service there. It was a busy branch, made more so by the fact, as is often the case in town centres nowadays, that banks were closing branches and referring people to the post office. We thought it was good.

Last year, we were told that the post office had to move because the lease was up on the building and the landlord was redeveloping. Reluctantly, we accepted that. I spent a long time helping to look for another site in the town centre. I spoke to the local shopping centre and we tried to provide something else, but talking to the Post Office is like banging one's head against a brick wall, because the only deal in town is WHSmith. I do not know what the commercial terms are, but I suspect that the Post Office gets the space for free, or something like that, because WHSmith is so desperate to increase footfall in its pretty lousy shops. The Post Office is made an offer it cannot refuse on those terms. That is what happened.

The post office closed and moved a five or 10-minute walk away, depending on mobility, to the Westfield shopping centre. As we have heard, the office is hidden away in the back of a WHSmith with no natural daylight. Because it is the largest shopping centre in Europe and has a good footfall, the office has survived and kept its busyness and activity, but with a completely different clientele. I am glad to see that we have the support of the National Pensioners Convention and many disability rights groups in pointing out that it is not just about the facilities in the post office, but about the accessibility. Most of the elderly and local people who used to use that post office now go to sub-post offices half a mile or a mile away because they are more accessible than where the Crown post office has moved to. None the less, things continued.

The one thing we were told was that, despite the disruption and despite moving to a less favourable and less convenient location, the branch would remain a Crown post office. In all the meetings I had with the Post Office—this was only a year ago—it said that the branch would be a Crown post office with all the advantages of that. Guess what? When the wholesale franchising and closure programme was announced last year, we found out that, no, the branch would become franchised and part of the WHSmith network.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill (Hugh Gaffney) and many others, I pay tribute to the CWU, which has run an effective



[*Andy Slaughter*]

campaign drawing attention to the issue. The Post Office thought it could get away with it because the public would not notice a change in ownership. The changes were not necessarily, as was the case with Shepherds Bush, about moving the facility, so the Post Office thought there would be no apparent change. The CWU has done an excellent job in drawing attention to the matter, because the implications are severe.

To take the example of Shepherds Bush, the manager will leave and retire after more than 20 years' service. She has been excellent. Half the staff are similarly going to take the settlements on offer and go. The others all want to move elsewhere in the post office network, to those few Crown post offices and other services that remain open. Not one wants to join WHSmith, even though some of the staff at Shepherds Bush have already moved there from other Crown post offices closed in the recent past, including the Acton post office in the seat of my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq).

Why do people not want to work for WHSmith? It is not too difficult to work out. When I looked at the new rosters, sometimes less than half the number of staff will be on duty. I was there just before Christmas, and it is a busy office with queues, yet WHSmith thinks that where five staff are on at the moment, it can manage with two in future. That is bad for the customers and for staff, too. The terms and conditions are appalling in terms of pensions, holiday and pay. People will be on the minimum wage and could be on half the pay they would have earned as an experienced postal worker working for the Post Office. I am sure that many of the staff at WHSmith try to do a very good job, but as an employer it is appalling. Anyone who does not believe me should follow the Twitter account, @WHS\_Carpet, which is a rather tongue-in-cheek look at the extraordinary way in which that business conducts itself. We do not know whether it will have a future. What a risk to take, putting post offices into those stores.

I am afraid that Post Office Ltd has shown a contempt for very loyal staff, who have often stayed with it over many years. It has also shown an attitude of defeatism. Where is the leadership? Where is the confidence in the services that it provides? There is none. It is all about cutting back.

That comes on top of a number of other initiatives that have depleted the network. I know that we are not talking about sub-post offices today, but within the last two to three years I have also had three sub-post offices—two of which were the nearest ones to Shepherd's Bush Green—close “temporarily”. I think one has been temporarily closed for more than three years now, on the basis that we cannot find anywhere for it to go.

Overall, the service that is available is becoming worse, and for those who rely on it, which is still many people, there are longer distances to travel and longer queues to stand in. I would like to know from the Minister what the justification is for paying out quite large sums from the public purse to try to induce members of staff to retire, move on or take redundancy at this point. Presumably that only helps WHSmith, because it does not have to inherit those staff under TUPE conditions.

I would like to know what happens to all the equipment in the post offices. Very expensive and often quite new equipment has been fitted there. Is that simply handed

over to WHSmith, or are payments made? I would like to know why senior managers in Post Office Ltd have received 7%—in some cases 9%—pay rises this year, given what they are presiding over. The staff have received less than 3%.

I feel that I have been misled over what has happened in relation to the post office network in my constituency. I also think that the Communication Workers Union and the staff have been misled, because they have worked in good faith over many years to try to ensure that the business is profitable. That has meant, in some cases, reducing staffing—by agreement and in the proper way, through collective bargaining—in a joint effort and in the belief that the management were sincere in their efforts to ensure that this viable Crown network would survive. All they have actually achieved is to do the dirty work of the Post Office, which now has fewer staff that it has to pass over to WHSmith. That makes it easier to do, but even so, it is relying on money.

There has not been a proper public consultation. I was struck by the comment from Post Office Ltd to the all-party parliamentary group that this is “a commercial decision for us, not them”, “them” being the public. This is a matter of great concern to the public, and it has not been given proper consultation or publicity.

I end by asking the Minister to consider, even at this late stage, a moratorium on the closures and changes. Please can we look again at the network, and have a proper review of services before we proceed in this way? Otherwise we will stumble through this and be back here again in six months to a year facing more closures of Crown post offices, until the network does not exist at all. It is part of our heritage, and part of something that we can be very proud of in this country. It still provides an excellent public service where it operates, and we are letting down not only the organisation's staff, but all the customers who rely on post offices across mine and each one of our constituencies.

3.43 pm

**Martyn Day** (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Graham. I thank the hon. Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy) for securing the debate and for her very informative introduction, and all those who have contributed for the very consensual nature of the debate. Some 15 Members have spoken so far, which says something about the strength of feeling in the House.

As we have heard, Crown post offices are large post offices that are directly managed by Post Office Ltd and account for about 2% of post offices. I am grateful for the Communication Workers Union briefing, which is very informative. It highlights how, despite that small share of the overall network, Crown post offices have historically brought in between 10% and 20% of the Post Office's overall revenue—a point that several Members have made, and which is well worth emphasising.

There are no Crown post offices in my constituency—unsurprisingly, given how few are left across the country as a whole. Having said that, it is fair to point out that Linlithgow and East Falkirk gained two post offices between 2011 and 2018, increasing their number from 18 to 20. However, that figure includes hosted outreach venues. As we have heard, a variety of services are offered at different ones, which adds to the confusion of the public when such events happen.

On 11 October last year, the Post Office announced an agreement with WHSmith that would see up to 41 further Crown branches relocated within WHSmith stores this year, and WHSmith take over the running of 33 Crown post offices already hosted in its stores. The decision to turn 74 Crown post offices into franchises in those stores is alarming for a number of reasons; Members have rehearsed them well, and I do not need to go into all the technicolour detail again. However, reports that the franchising is being done without consultation with existing local post offices are particularly alarming. That means that competition risks destabilising the existing network even further. There must be more consultation and strategic consideration on franchising. It is alarming to hear that in some cases franchised WHSmith outlets are opening within five minutes of existing post offices, and without any advance notice having been given to existing postmasters.

We know that the Post Office's director of sales and trade marketing has stated that there is no contingency plan in the event of WHSmith collapsing, even though it has, as has been pointed out, experienced 14 consecutive years of sales decline. Although we would not wish that to happen to any business, the reality of our modern high streets is that businesses are folding on a regular basis, so a contingency is, in my opinion, required. That is before we consider the fact that WHSmith was voted the worst high street retailer by *Which?* consumers in 2018, having been ranked in the bottom two over the previous eight years. That raises a serious question about the quality of service on offer from that franchisee.

We must ensure that further franchising happens only after consultation with local businesses. It is essential that our post office network remains robust for communities and businesses across the entire country. Given the mismanagement, the UK Government cannot have that as a priority. Post offices play an important role for our rural businesses and are part of the fabric of our communities. I will not pretend that my constituency is particularly rural, but it has many rural aspects; it is a mixture of small towns and villages between the major cities. Increasingly, as banks have gradually withdrawn from many of our local high streets, post offices have become a last-stop banking facility for many people.

Post offices provide an important part of national infrastructure, particularly as parcel delivery has been growing with the rise of e-commerce, which allows us to have many more businesses throughout our communities. Small businesses, especially rural ones, contribute more than £200 billion to the UK economy. They rely on post offices, with an estimated 80% likely to lose money if rural post offices close. More than 2 million small businesses—62% of all small businesses—use post offices at least once a month, and in rural areas, they are vital, with 36% of rural businesses using post offices at least weekly.

Due to issues including the new postmasters' contract, Crown post offices are closing more and more regularly. The UK Government must ensure that the post office network remains able to cover all areas of the country, especially rural ones. More than 1,500 of the 11,547 post offices in the UK were temporary as of March 2018. That is 426 more than in 2014, according to post office data collected by the House of Commons Library.

**Marion Fellows:** The question of post offices temporarily closing is really down to the fact that Post Office Ltd cannot contract new sub-postmasters to run them. That is not to the benefit of my constituents in Wishaw, who lost their post office for almost four weeks last summer.

**Martyn Day:** I thank my hon. Friend for making an excellent point. I hope that the Minister is listening.

The Scottish National party supports a strong network of post office branches, which are the backbone of local communities and businesses. Many post offices are offering a greater range of services, including paying in money, after many local bank branches have closed. Some 537,000 businesses are registered in rural areas, accounting for one in four of all companies. They are very creative—almost half are considered to be innovators—and they contribute, as I pointed out, more than £200 billion to our economy. Small rural businesses are more likely to use post offices for deliveries and paying bills, and twice as likely to use them for withdrawing or depositing cash. Citizens Advice found that eight in 10 small businesses in remote rural areas would lose money if local post offices were closed. That should be a salutary economic warning to us.

The UK Government's disastrous privatisation of Royal Mail and recent mishandling of post office management show that they cannot be trusted with our public services. The current contracts make it harder for sub-postmasters to afford to keep going, as my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell and Wishaw (Marion Fellows) pointed out. At the same time, Post Office Ltd recorded net profits of £35 million in 2017-18, up from £13 million in 2016-17. As hon. Members have pointed out, its chief executive Paula Vennells got a 7% pay rise last year, while postmasters took an average pay cut of 4.5% and 11,500 Post Office workers received a combined £17 million pay cut. I ask the Minister to take urgent action to review the contract for sub-postmasters that was introduced in 2012.

My final point is about the effect on footfall on the high street. Closing a post office and moving its services to a franchisee will not increase the franchisee's footfall, since many of the customers were already using the high street; it simply reduces the footfall travelling across the high street and has a detrimental impact on other businesses. What we actually need is to ensure throughput on the high street. If a post office closes and is moved out of a town centre location, that can be even more detrimental to the local community.

There are many concerns about the proposal and its effect on customers, staff and local communities. At the end of the day, we must remember that the Post Office is wholly owned by the Government. I implore the Minister to step in and halt the process.

3.51 pm

**Gill Furniss** (Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairpersonship, Sir Graham. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy) on securing this debate and delivering an impressive and eloquent speech. Passions have risen high today, which illustrates the value of the post office network to hon. Members present and to people in the community, so it is hugely disappointing to see the empty seats on the Conservative Benches.

[Gill Furniss]

Post offices are a vital community asset that serve as an anchor for individuals and local businesses, as many hon. Members have highlighted. Citizens Advice surveys have shown that half of Britons say that a post office branch is the most important service in their local community. In rural areas, the importance is even greater: one rural resident in five says that without their local post office they would lose contact with friends or neighbours. Post offices are hubs rooted in community and history, and they have innovated: services have grown and now cover some Government services, while postmasters have been innovative in providing new products to accommodate the rise of online shopping.

At the same time, it is not a revelation that our high streets are struggling. In October, the Chancellor took a “too little, too late” approach to the crisis, showing the Government’s lack of commitment to our town centres. Although they shirk responsibility for the collapse of our high streets, the Government are too eager to discount their own role in overseeing the managed decline of a long-established and vital part of our high street: our post offices.

Our debate today has focused on Crown post offices, the large flagship post offices that are in prominent high street locations and are directly owned and managed by Post Office Ltd. Over the past five years, the Post Office, which is entirely owned by the Government, has announced the closure of 150 Crown post offices—40% of its 2013 Crown post office network. The closure and franchise programme has come in three waves, and the latest announcement in October 2018 stated that a further 74 Crown post offices were being closed, with an estimated 700 jobs at risk.

There is a strength of feeling about the closures across all parts of the country. I anticipate that the Minister will argue that this is not a privatisation process, but franchising is by definition a model part of privatisation. This Government drove the disastrous privatisation of our Royal Mail, many of the consequences of which we are seeing today, with private shareholders creaming off millions in dividends while services are on the decline. I am afraid that the franchising programme appears to be an incremental step in the same direction, privatising our Post Office one Crown at a time.

The impact of the closure and franchise programme is significant for the public purse, for the accessibility, quality and breadth of the service provided to the public, and for the sustainability of the network. Our high streets face a crisis and it is being compounded by the Government-managed decline of the Post Office. As I wrote in a recent article:

“The Government may continue to peddle the myth that it has no agency over our high streets—the truth is they are willingly letting a proud institution and the public down.”

They are letting the Post Office fall by the wayside in an appalling act of negligence.

Plucking post offices out of the heart of business hubs, as the closure of local Crowns does, is bad for local business and bad for the Post Office. It exacerbates financial exclusion in deprived areas, where—in the light of the significant bank closures in recent years—local people may have no access to financial services. My hon. Friend the Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) has been vocal about the proposed relocation

of her local Crown away from the town centre and into an area that has seen a 15% decline in footfall over two years. It is an economic fallacy to suggest that shifting a post office to a quieter part of town, away from the economic activity, will be in any way helpful to the long-term sustainability of the network.

Indeed, in allowing the transfer of counters into WHSmith, the Government risk the viability and sustainability of communities’ access to post offices. It has been suggested that WHSmith is shifting its priorities away from the high street, as highlighted by its acquisition of InMotion, a US company known for airport services. That is worrying and raises serious questions about the retailer’s long-term viability and its desire to be on the high street. As my hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes) told us, there has recently been a 3% decline in profits. It is therefore surprising not only that Post Office is choosing to partner with WHSmith in this way, but that when pressed during a meeting of the all-party group on post offices, Post Office representatives provided no reassurance about any contingency plans that they may have prepared for the event of a collapse.

My hon. Friends the Members for Hove (Peter Kyle), and for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) spoke eloquently about the lack of meaningful consultation in their constituencies. Indeed, during the all-party group meeting, we learned that decisions on closures had already been made and that the consultation process was merely asking for little bits of information about whether people thought they had disability access—someone in the senior management actually said that. I challenged him, saying that the consultations should be asking the public about the closures, and that responsibility for disability access should lie with the management of the post office in question.

**Rachael Maskell:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising the issue of access, because clearly many disabled people use post offices. Does she agree that if the proposal will mean less access to post offices, it should surely be stopped?

**Gill Furniss:** I very much agree, and I will go into that point in more detail later.

Post Office management claim that they will have six months’ notice if a retailer that hosts a Post Office counter collapses, but in reality a collapse could be immediate and would risk the total closure of the counter. It seems reasonable that contingency planning should be done to prepare for all eventualities. Has the Minister had any discussions with the Post Office about the matter? Can she assure us that she is aware of reasonable contingency plans for any of those scenarios?

My hon. Friend the Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) referred to the independent reports published by Consumer Focus in 2012 and by Citizens Advice in 2016, which looked at the impact of closing and franchising former Crown post offices and locating them in WHSmith branches. They concluded that it has led to an increase in queuing and service times, a deterioration in customer service and advice, poor disabled access, and a reduction in the number of counter positions. As hon. Friends have pointed out, the retailer has been voted as providing some of the worst customer service in the UK—surely not a ringing endorsement.



The impact of these changes on local communities is significant, and vulnerable people, the disabled and the old suffer the most. The general secretary of the National Pensioners Convention, Jan Shortt, has said:

“Older people are some of the biggest users of the Post Office, and many rely on being able to talk to expert staff, but the move to franchise services to WHSmith is going to be bad for customers...pensioners will find some of the offices are no longer easily accessible or particularly private. This will become a second class service if we don't stop these plans immediately.”

Similarly, the chief executive of the deaf and disabled rights charity, Inclusion London, and representative of the UK-wide Reclaiming Our Futures Alliance of disabled people and their organisations, Tracey Lazard, said:

“Replacing accessible Post Office premises with a post office counter squeezed into the back of a WHSmith store can leave Disabled people at a significant disadvantage, particularly people with a mobility impairment. Post Office Ltd should be taking action to maximise the accessibility of its premises and services rather than taking this retrograde step that cannot be justified and will instead further Disabled people's exclusion.”

**Liz McInnes:** Given that Crown post offices are Government property, and that Post Office Ltd is proposing a change that may well be detrimental to disabled people, does my hon. Friend agree that it is absolutely incumbent on it to carry out an equality impact assessment?

**Gill Furniss:** I completely agree. I am sure we will be asking the Minister whether she will address that, as it would seem that it is completely irresponsible of Post Office Ltd not to do so. It should be at the heart of any consultation with the public and the organisations I have referred to, which represent many of those people.

Despite fierce local opposition to the closures and the franchising programme, the Post Office has not undertaken serious and meaningful consultation and has been clear the closures will go ahead. At the meeting of the all-party parliamentary group for post offices in October, when asked that the consultation process consider the range of views on the matter, senior Post Office representatives were forced to admit that the decisions about the closures had been made, and that the consultation would merely be an exchange of information and a look at further details. Given the Post Office's public mandate and the fierce opposition to the closures, that is astonishing.

My hon. Friend the Member for Oldham West and Royton (Jim McMahon) highlighted the particular impact that the closures will have on disabled constituents in our communities. There is also the impact on financial inclusion, as well as on the many other services, including the very important biometrics and essential Home Office information and documents that are issued in post offices. In the end, despite huge public opposition, a large amount of public funds have been used, with significant job losses and significant closures.

The Minister will no doubt repeat what she has said before about not having overview of Post Office structures and processes, referring to the fact that these are commercial decisions for the Post Office. However, I refer her to a petition that the current Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), presented in March 2008. My hon. Friend the Member for Wigan cited it earlier, and it is worth mentioning again. That petition urged the Government to “instruct” the Post Office to halt the closure of the post office in Maidenhead and

“to listen to the views of local people in respect of their objection to the closure of this vital part of the local community.”—[*Official Report*, 6 March 2008; Vol. 472, c. 142P.]

Perhaps the Minister could take a lead from the Prime Minister under whom she serves, call in Post Office management and instruct them to halt the closures. Instead of investing in our post offices, maintaining expert staff and broadening the services available, the Post Office under this Government is going backwards.

I applaud the Communication Workers Union for its campaign, Save our Post Office, and its championing and protecting of workers' pay and conditions of service. At the same time as post offices are closing, sub-postmasters are seeing a decline in remuneration. Many have written telling me they are just about breaking even but earning less than minimum wage, and services are declining. My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North East (Mr Sweeney) gave worrying examples of this trend of many sub-postmasters losing their livelihood and acquiring significant debt. I have had correspondence from a sub-postmistress who told me that she is likely to lose her home because the figures she was given when taking on that sub-post office have never been realised.

How is the Minister scrutinising the Post Office's strategy and what it means for the service? Will she outline what consultation there will be to ensure the strategy brings in relevant stakeholders and the public in a proper wide-ranging consultation? I am quite astounded that the Minister did not once come to the House so that parliamentarians could have the opportunity to scrutinise these decisions and what they mean for our constituents.

The Labour party has been clear. We want to grow the service, end the closures of our Crown post offices, maintain good pay and conditions for staff and innovate into the future, because we believe in our public institutions and what they mean to the public. At last year's election, we pledged to create a commission to look into setting up a post bank, which would be an important step forward in financial inclusion and would also provide important income streams to maintain, sustain and grow post office services more widely.

I am pleased we have had the opportunity to debate this important matter today. I urge the Minister to recognise the strength of feeling expressed in today's debate and reconsider her position. I urge her to take a more considered approach with the Post Office—a publicly funded institution—first, by halting the closures and, secondly, by holding Post Office Ltd to account for the decisions it is making that are having a negative impact on our constituents.

4.6 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Kelly Tolhurst):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Graham. I congratulate the hon. Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy) on securing this important debate. Although I am one of only a few Tories in the room, I thank all hon. Members for their contributions. I recognise their passion as well as the importance that post offices represent to MPs.

As a constituency MP, I understand the valuable role of the post office for me and for my constituents. Post offices play a vital role at the heart of our communities and are an essential part of our villages, towns and

[*Kelly Tolhurst*]

cities, so the future direction of the Post Office is important not only to the Government, but to all our constituencies.

The festive season has just passed, when the dedication of Post Office staff across the country was shown. They come out in force to help our constituents and deliver the parcels and letters destined for our loved ones. I thank the Post Office and Royal Mail staff for the efforts they have put in over recent months. It is estimated that more than 60 million customers visited post office branches in the run-up to Christmas, and I want to mention one small rural post office in Herefordshire that opened its doors this year to host Christmas dinner for those who would otherwise have been alone. That highlights the social value of post offices, not only within our high streets, but beyond.

To repeat what I indicated in November's debate on post office franchising, this Government value and recognise the economic and social importance of post offices to people, communities and businesses across the UK. That is why we made a commitment in our manifesto to safeguard the post office network and support the provision of rural services.

**Ian Murray:** On the manifesto commitment to protect post offices, is it still Conservative party policy to make the post office the front office of Government?

**Kelly Tolhurst:** What is definitely Government policy is to make sure that we have a network of post offices that offer a wide range of services to our constituents, and that that is sustainable into the future. Franchising is not a closure programme. It is a way to secure better sustainability for the future of our post offices, and it is a good thing that Post Office is working with high street retailers to recognise that.

The performance of the Post Office over the past decade shows that the network is at its most stable in a generation. Between 2010 and 2018 we provided nearly £2 billion to maintain and invest in the national network of at least 11,500 post offices.

**Jim McMahon:** I thank the Minister for her comprehensive response so far, but it would be good to get confirmation that this will move on, because we cannot keep having these debates every few months. Does she realise that the outreach service counts each and every stop that a mobile post office makes as a branch? A single vehicle travelling to a village for half a day each week or every two weeks would class each stop as a branch, which is where the figure of 11,500 branches comes from.

**Kelly Tolhurst:** I recognise some of the concerns about mobile branches that the hon. Gentleman raises. I can assure him that I am moving on to it, and obviously I have had the opportunity to listen to hon. Members this afternoon. I am sure hon. Members will agree that we do not want to go back to the days when we saw over 7,000 post offices shut, as was unfortunately the case under the previous Labour Government.

The post offices meet and exceed all the Government's accessibility targets at the national level. Government investment in the network enabled the modernisation

of more than 7,500 branches, adding more than 200,000 opening hours per week and establishing the Post Office as the largest Sunday trading network.

The Post Office's agreement with high street banks enables personal and business banking in all branches, providing vital access to cash and banking services to consumers, businesses and local economies as bank branches continue to close. It is right to say that the agreement held with the Post Office and banks benefits our communities, which, as the Minister responsible I have made very clear to Post Office Ltd, to my colleagues in the Treasury and to the financial institutions that I have spoken to. The Post Office is providing a vital service to our constituents, and it should be remunerated for that—in doing so, hopefully that will ensure that our postmasters are also remunerated correctly for the service they provide to our constituents.

**Gill Furniss:** The Minister talks about banking services, and I would like to bring her back to a point made earlier. When post offices supply ATMs—clearly when banks close down, ATMs often just disappear from the high street or village—the rental is so much that they lose a significant amount of money. Does the Minister want to put that right in order to incentivise keeping ATMs in post offices so that they are available to all our communities?

**Kelly Tolhurst:** The hon. Lady is absolutely right to say the loss of banks and access to cash has been a concern for our constituents and high streets. To individual MPs who represent a constituency where they feel that their post office is in a position to add an ATM—it is not always possible—as the Government representative I will always feed in specific issues that relate to individual constituencies or branches where we can improve services. I put that offer out there. Give me the details and I will always follow it up.

**Gill Furniss:** The Minister has been given the details today—they will be in *Hansard*. Postmasters see that they are subsidising the ATM, which just seems wrong to me. I ask the Minister to go back and review that, and to look at finding some way that she can compensate sub-postmasters for that service.

**Kelly Tolhurst:** I have heard what the hon. Lady has said today, and I will go away and look it. Every post office operates differently throughout the country. There is not a standard rule for all branches, but I will continue to look at the issues that have been highlighted. I care as much about our post office network as any hon. Member does, and that is not just because I am the Minister in post.

The Post Office's financial performance has improved significantly, and consequently the Government funding required to sustain the network has drastically decreased and is set to decrease even further in upcoming years. It is the first time in 16 years that the Post Office has made a profit. There was a time back in the early 2000s when the Post Office had a deficit of more than £1 billion. Things have changed, and we are ensuring that we get value for money for the taxpayer while ensuring that we sustain the network.

**Marion Fellows:** The Minister is talking eloquently about the profits that the Post Office is making, but the people who run smaller post offices—the sub-postmasters

—tell me that they cannot live on the new contract. When they have to hand back keys to local post offices, does she think it is right that the Post Office is making profit at the expense of these hard-working individuals?

**Kelly Tolhurst:** I understand why the hon. Lady has raised concerns about sub-postmasters, and she is absolutely right to do so. Whoever has my role in Government—whichever colour of Government—has a duty to defend the Post Office but also to hold it to account. Since being in post I have challenged the Post Office and will continue to do so. Yes, it is commercially independent and operates within terms. We represent the taxpayer, who is the shareholder and owner of the post offices. It is right that we hold the Post Office to account for decisions and that we exert influence where we can.

Changing consumer behaviour has been a serious challenge for post office and small retailers, including many postmasters, which is why in the autumn Budget we made decisions on business rates to ensure that we helped not only some of our sub-postmasters, but small retail more generally.

There is widespread misunderstanding that franchising is a closure programme that will lead to redundancies and the deterioration of services for consumers, but that is not the case. I appreciate that proposed changes to the delivery of post office services can cause concern in some affected communities, but post office branches are not closing—they are being franchised either on site or by relocating them to other high street locations.

Franchising has been common practice since 1635, when King Charles I issued a proclamation allowing the public to use Royal Mail. The model has endured to this day, and the vast majority—11,300 of our 11,500 post offices—are run successfully as a franchise or on an agency basis with retailers, whether large or small. Delivering post office services as part of a wider retail offer is a proven model that brings benefits to the community.

The hon. Member for Wigan raised concerns about the post office in her constituency, which is included in the 40 that will be taken over by WHSmith. Subject to consultation, WHSmith will take over the running of Wigan's central post office. Let me be clear that the community in Wigan like other communities across the UK is not losing its post office. It will be relocated to a nearby WHSmith branch, and the services will be more accessible for customers.

**Lisa Nandy:** I am grateful to the Minister for trying to address some of our concerns, but the community is not being consulted on whether the post office is moved into WHSmith. A consultation is explicitly ruled out in the documents that I have been sent. Although she says that this is technically not a closure, to our community it is. The post office has stood on that site for 134 years. Some of the staff have worked there for decades and offer the sort of service that will not be possible in WHSmith. When she has finished winding up—I appreciate that she needs time to respond to our concerns—will she consider meeting with a group of us to talk this through and consider what we can do to address some of those very strong concerns, which are not being heard at the moment?

**Kelly Tolhurst:** It is right that Post Office Ltd is holding consultations. I apologise; the hon. Lady said earlier that she had been chucked out of the store and

that language of intimidation was used. That is quite an accusation to make, and I would recommend that, if that happens to any Member, they should make Ministers aware so we are able to—

**Lisa Nandy:** That is what I am trying to do.

**Kelly Tolhurst:** Absolutely, but that has not been done prior to today. We will take those things forward. I have met other Members about other issues in their constituencies.

It is right that the Post Office is commercially independent, because that enables us, as the major shareholder, to hold it to account at a ministerial level, and I am always happy to do that. I assure the hon. Lady that the proposed changes would add six hours a week to the Wigan branch's opening times. She is correct—this goes back to an earlier point—that the ATM will not transfer over to the new site, so I understand her concerns about her constituents relating to that service, which would change in that situation.

**Jim McMahon:** Post offices are not the same from one street to the next; branches provide very different services. If these are not closures but relocations, is the Minister saying that the services provided by the post offices today will be entirely transferred across to WHSmith, and that there will be no loss of service?

**Kelly Tolhurst:** The programme of franchising is moving Crown postal services. Our objective is to ensure that, when the post offices are moved, they deliver better services and that constituents have better access to them. Part of the franchising programme is about ensuring we have a post office network for today, which suits the modern retail environment and consumers' changing habits.

**Rachael Maskell:** Will the Minister follow up the question of my hon. Friend the Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy) and meet a group of us? I am seriously concerned about the reduced access—not necessarily to the building but to the high street in front of the post office—and the impact on my high street and the local economy. Will she meet us to discuss those detailed issues?

**Kelly Tolhurst:** As I have said—I thought I was quite clear—I am always willing to meet Members who have issues relating to post offices in their constituencies. I said that earlier. I reiterate that I will listen, hold Post Office Ltd to account and take those things forward. That does not necessarily mean that I will agree with some hon. Members' positions, and they will not always be achievable, but I will make Members' cases on their behalf.

The UK visa and immigration biometric enrolment services for the Home Office were available to a mix of 99 directly managed and WHSmith branches nationwide. However, as was mentioned earlier, the Home Office recently awarded that contract to Sopra Steria, which now runs the service in new locations. On the Post Office being in a position to deliver services for our constituents, I will always ensure that we work together to strengthen the services and add value to the services that the Post Office will deliver for the Government.



[*Kelly Tolhurst*]

WHSmith has been operating post offices since 2006 and has proven to be a reliable and dependable presence on the high street. There are some misplaced concerns about the Post Office's contingency plan should WHSmith go into administration. The latest financial results show that the company's high street businesses recorded their third-highest profit in more than 15 years despite the well-documented challenges on the UK high street. The Post Office is not complacent; it regularly meets with all franchisees to ensure they are delivering on the terms of their agreements. That is an ongoing process.

I am concerned that we are running out of time, Sir Graham, and I think the hon. Member for Wigan may want to wind up—or I can carry on. Post Office staff at franchise branches will have the opportunity to transfer to new franchises under TUPE employment protection, which means that they will benefit from the same terms. Alternatively, staff can leave with compensation, and there may be opportunities available elsewhere in the network. WHSmith's post offices are currently performing well, and I have every confidence that the recent deal will help to secure Post Office services on a sustainable, profitable basis in communities across our country.

I hear the concerns about the consultation process, and I have said that I will take them forward with the Post Office. As the Minister, I will not call on Post Office Ltd to stop the franchising process, but I will work with it to ensure that it delivers its business in the best way possible and benefits our communities.

We need a sustainable network. It is not correct that the Post Office owns all the Crown branches—the buildings are not all freehold and some are leasehold. It is right

that the taxpayer holds the Post Office to account and, as the Minister, I will do everything in my power to harness opportunities and to increase services in the post offices. There will be many opportunities and, as the high street changes—I am also the Minister with responsibility for the retail sector—I will continue to work with the Post Office to ensure that we are delivering for our communities and that we increase the services that post offices provide.

4.28 pm

**Lisa Nandy:** I thank all the many Members who have turned up today to show the strength of feeling that there is in every corner of this country.

I am grateful to the Minister for sitting through the debate, listening to our concerns and taking on board some of the issues relating to the consultation process, but I probably reflect the view of every Member who has spoken when I say that I am deeply disappointed that she has not agreed to suspend the process. There is a moment now—it will not come again—when we can choose to stop this thing that has failed us and our communities for so long, and to start to change course.

I am grateful to the Minister for agreeing to meet me and a group of my hon. Friends to discuss this matter further. I hope she will continue to reflect on it and that she will think again.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered franchising of Crown Post Offices and the effect on high streets and local communities.

4.29 pm

*Sitting adjourned.*

# Westminster Hall

Monday 14 January 2019

[DAVID HANSON *in the Chair*]

## Leaving the EU

4.30 pm

**Paul Scully** (Sutton and Cheam) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered e-petitions 229963, 221747 and 235185 relating to leaving the EU without a withdrawal agreement, 232984 and 231461 relating to holding a further referendum on leaving the EU, and 226509 and 236261 relating to not leaving the EU.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hanson. The list of e-petitions shows that Brexit still exercises our nation. If I may be indulged—this may take longer than the rest of my speech—I will read the text of the petitions, so that we know exactly what we are talking about. We have grouped them by theme. Not all of them have reached 100,000 signatures, but those that did not were similar enough to be put into one of three categories with others that reached the threshold for the Petitions Committee to consider them for debate.

The title of the first petition is “Leave the EU without a deal in March 2019.” It says:

“We are wasting Billions of pounds of taxpayers money trying to negotiate in a short space of time. Leaving the EU in March 2019 will allow the UK good time to negotiate more efficiently. The EU will be more eager to accept a deal on our terms having lost a major partner.

We will save billions of pounds from our EU divorce payment as well as a similar amount from Civil Service and Govt costs. This money will be used to support our own country whilst we await the EU to talk to us to make deals more in our favour. The EU border in Ireland to be managed simply by having a dual Euro / pound currency as legal tender in both the North and South. Exports to the South would be dealt with in Euro and vice versa when importing to the North. Rates fixed at time of the deal.”

A similar petition, entitled “Leave the EU now”, says simply:

“The Government is not going to achieve a satisfactory outcome from its negotiations with the EU. We should walk away now. No Deal is better than a bad deal.”

The third petition is, again, similar. It is entitled “Walk away now! We voted for a No Deal Brexit”. It says:

“Theresa May has failed to negotiate a Brexit deal that is acceptable to Parliament and the British people. The Withdrawal Agreement does not deliver the Brexit we voted for. It is clear that the EU is not going to offer anything else, particularly regarding the backstop. The Government must now be prepared to walk away from the negotiations.

No Deal is better than the Deal that has been negotiated. No Deal is also what we voted for. Give the people what they voted for. Anything less is not Brexit.”

I move on to the second group of petitions, which are about a second referendum. The first one is entitled “Grant a People’s Vote if Parliament rejects the EU Withdrawal Agreement”. It says:

“The Prime Minister has negotiated an EU withdrawal agreement. However, it is clear from resignations and interviews that the deal will not pass Parliament. As no credible alternative has been proposed, the public must be allowed to vote on whether to accept this deal or to remain in the EU.

Dominic Raab’s resignation is perhaps the strongest indication that this withdrawal agreement will not be approved by Parliament. However, he is responsible for this deal as former Brexit Secretary, which suggests that a better deal is not possible. The only better deal is to remain in the EU on similar terms to what we have now - not in Schengen, not in the Euro, deciding on EU legislation.”

Another petition on a second referendum says:

“It’s no secret that a vast amount of people who voted to leave the EU didn’t realise what they were voting for.

The Leave campaign said that leaving would create new trade deals, strengthen the economy and public services and reduce the number of incoming immigrants. But this is not happening.

Theresa May has really struggled so far in Brexit negotiations and time is running out. She’s failing to secure trade deals and my personal biggest fear is the Irish Border, this could lead to a United Ireland. May has lost support not only from the Cabinet but the whole nation. I’m calling for a second referendum”—

this is still part of the quote, please understand—

“because if you voted to remain or to leave we need a final say. The Brexit decision was so tight and I just think that it help everyone if there was a second vote. Sign if you agree.”

The third group of petitions is about stopping Brexit in its entirety. The first says:

“It’s so desperately simple. The Government’s standard response to these kinds of petitions is ‘The British people voted to leave the EU and the government respect that decision’. BUT, the government themselves DO NOT KNOW the outcome of that decision, so how can they possibly respect it???

Quote Theresa May: ‘We don’t know what the outcome will be’. The referendum was advisory, not conclusive. The result of the referendum has now been proven to be illegally biased (something ‘our’ government is choosing to ignore). Hence, the ‘vote’ (actually an opinion poll) is now null and void. The referendum was voted for with no indication of any actual facts. 2yrs ago there was no detail about what ‘brexit’ actually entailed. Today, still no detail. For all these reasons: STOP BREXIT.”

The final petition is a short one: “Stop Brexit if parliament rejects the deal”. It says:

“Brexit is not worth it. A hard border in Ireland will destroy the Good Friday Agreement, meds are being stockpiled and there’s news that a contract has been given to a company with no ferries, and the army is on standby in the event of no-deal too. Stop Brexit if MPs vote to reject the PM’s deal.”

It took me the first five minutes of my speech just to read out those seven petitions, none of which agrees. This is where we are as a country. In this place, we reflect the views of the people outside. The number of signatories to those petitions ranged from 6,000 for the smallest to 330,000-odd for the biggest. Any number of people have supported the petitions. That is what is great about Petitions Committee debates: we talk about the things that people ask us to speak about.

The Government deal is being debated in Parliament today. One reason why not many Members are present is that the Prime Minister is in the main Chamber making a statement about the last assurances she has had from the EU. Members will raise questions with her, then the debate will continue, and the vote will take place tomorrow. The deal is, undoubtedly, a compromise. I campaigned and voted to leave, but I will vote for the deal tomorrow because I see it as the best way to leave in an orderly fashion. It is not perfect by any stretch of the imagination, but it could be made good in the second half of the negotiation.

Unfortunately for people who are bored with Brexit, we are only halfway through. If we can get an agreement through to the next stage, we have to deal with the future relationship with the EU. It will take time to

[Paul Scully]

reach a trade deal and get through all the finer points of security, education, research co-operation and so on. When I looked at the deal and thought about how I would vote tomorrow, I asked, “Does it fulfil the reasons I voted to leave? Can I look other people in the eye and say, ‘Yes, it does?’” Under the deal, we leave the EU political institutions—the biggest thing that drove me when I voted for the Referendum party back in 1997, which is what got me into party politics. This is my penance for having brought in a Labour Government and a Lib Dem local MP.

I wanted to leave the political institutions. This deal allows us to do that, and to end the huge membership fees we pay the EU. It enables us to end freedom of movement, and to start to negotiate trade deals and even ratify them, though we cannot put them in place until we have left the implementation phase—as long as the backstop does not come in. If we have a deal in place with the EU, we can move on to putting those independent trade deals in place. That is why the deal is imperfect—because, looking back to two years ago, by now I would have hoped to be at that place. However, I make my decision based on where we are, not where we started.

We got stuck on the sequencing—the fact that we could not have a twin-track debate on our future relationship and withdrawing, and we got stuck on the Irish backstop issue last year. That has suddenly become a thing over the last year. We are kidding ourselves if we think that we will be able to remove the backstop because we do not like it. I understand the argument about us not being able to leave the backstop unilaterally; naturally, that causes concern to a lot of people. That is why I have asked a lot of questions of Ministers, the Prime Minister and others. The explanation of the backstop sets out why both parties find it uncomfortable, but that is not good enough for me; I want to know why they find it uncomfortable. I have been asking questions and looking at the issue in closer detail. Interestingly, politically, the backstop is incredibly difficult for Unionists, but economically it would be pretty advantageous to Northern Ireland, should it ever come into use. Why? Because overnight, Northern Ireland would then become the most competitive part of Europe.

As part of the compromise with the EU, the whole country would get brought into the backstop. That would give us full access to the single market and the customs union, having left it, without paying any membership fees. Imagine what France, for example, thinks about that. For once, it would be subsidising us; it would still be paying full membership fees for the same access. It cannot be comfortable about that. We would not have freedom of movement, but we would have the same access, so we would be breaking one of the pillars of the EU. Members may remember that at the beginning of the referendum debate, the EU said, “We will not allow the UK to cherry-pick,” but that is exactly what would happen under that system: we would be cherry-picking, because we would still have access, but we would not have freedom of movement or make payments. To my mind, although the rhetoric is sufficient to prove to people that the EU is punishing us for leaving, the actuality—what is written on the bit of paper—is inconvenient but would in no way punish us in the long term.

The final reason the EU finds the backstop uncomfortable is that, suddenly, the whole of the UK would become its backstop should it want to strike further trade deals with other countries. Countries looking to finalise trade deals with the EU will say, “Okay, we understand how we’re going to trade with you and what that’s going to be like, but what about the top-left corner of the map? What about the whole of the UK? What’s its relationship going to be with you? We don’t really understand this.” It will mean those countries dragging their heels even more than they do now.

Some people describe leaving with no deal as leaving on World Trade Organisation terms. As I was preparing for the debate, I had a Twitter chat with a constituent, who said, “Well, it’s not no deal; it’s WTO arrangements.” That is fine—people can call it what they want—but WTO arrangements do not cover non-trade issues. The WTO is only about trade; the withdrawal agreement goes so much further than that.

I would be comfortable leaving with no deal if we were properly prepared, and we had done everything we could to have as orderly a departure as possible. As I said, I believe the withdrawal agreement, although it is not perfect, allows us to do that. Anyone who proposes no deal has to recognise that there would be short-term turbulence. One of the reasons why I am uncomfortable having no deal as my first position is that it would affect real people. When I cast my vote, I always have at the front of my mind what it will mean for my constituents and other actual people. I do not think, “It’s just something on a bit of paper that will be okay later on.”

There will be short-term turbulence. We can survive it; we will get through it. None the less, there are better ways of leaving, and I do not think we would be thanked in the short term for leaving with no deal. If we have the confidence to say, “You know what? We can leave on WTO terms and go it alone. We can work with the other 192 countries and strike our own trade deals,” surely we should have the same confidence that we can get this deal through, go to the European Union with a different negotiating strategy and say, “Look, we want an overarching, ambitious trade deal with you that’s actually going to work for both of us.”

How would that negotiating strategy work? Negotiations cannot all be done by one small cabal of people. We have brought Crawford Falconer, a hugely experienced trade negotiator, in from New Zealand; it does not make sense for him to work on every trade deal around the world apart from the biggest one—the one with next door. Surely it makes sense for him and the Department for International Trade to work on trade. We could then get the Brexit Secretary to work on the overarching issues, and the Defence Secretary and the Home Secretary to work on defence, immigration and security. We should have a far wider-reaching set of negotiations. As well as bringing in expertise and a wider group of people, that would help engender trust, which is sadly lacking in this entire process. One of the reasons why people cannot get beyond a certain point in the debate is that no matter what is said, they just do not believe it. That is the problem.

People are also concerned about our paying the reported £39 billion in advance. The implementation phase is nearly two years, so £24 billion of that is the equivalent of a membership fee. We are quibbling about £15 billion, which is still a lot of money, but it is not



quite the same. We need to work out where that money is going, how the figure is worked out, and at what point we pay it.

The idea of a second referendum has increased in popularity, but I struggle to see how it will get off the ground. Clearly, anything like having a second referendum or revoking article 50 in its entirety would need to come from the Government, because it would need primary legislation. There is clearly no agreement on what the question would be in a second referendum. Some people have said to me, “Hold on a sec. In 2016, we had leave or remain. Leave won, so that’s sorted. Surely remain shouldn’t even be on the ballot paper; the question should be how we leave.” People with a slightly different point of view, shall we say, have said, “The Government shouldn’t be leaving with no deal, so it should be between remain and the Prime Minister’s deal.” We would be back to all the same vested interests I mentioned at the start.

People talk about how divisive the original referendum was and how terrible the quality of the debate was—frankly, both those things are true—but then say, “I tell you what: let’s do it all again.” I know what would happen. We would have “vassal state” on one side and “cliff edge” on the other. There would be a lot of heat but no light whatever. Lord knows what the buses would do at that point.

I tend to agree with the chap who said:

“I’m sorry, I’m not one of those people who thinks we should be calling for a second referendum. I think that would just look like, the referendum was fought under rules we agreed to, a result was delivered, because we don’t like it we now want to replay it again—which will simply entrench a view that we’re some elite, who don’t want to pay any attention to the people.”

That chap was the hon. Member for Streatham (Chuka Umunna), who happens to be spearheading the people’s vote campaign—I should think he is doing so as we speak. A second referendum is unlikely to resolve anything; nor do I believe a general election would resolve anything.

That brings me to why this place is so divided. There is a lot of self-interest at the moment. The Leader of the Opposition could draft his own deal and hand it to the Prime Minister to put to the vote, and he would still vote against it. He wants a general election—that is all. Obviously, there are splits in the Opposition. Opposition Members who want a people’s vote tend to want to avoid a general election because that would be their worst nightmare. It would risk a Labour Government led by the Leader of the Opposition, which I do not think Opposition Members who propose a people’s vote particularly want; they are not exactly close.

The Liberal Democrats and the Scottish National party basically want to pretend this never happened. They just want to unpick the referendum. For various reasons, they want not to leave the UK. At least that is an honest position. The Lib Dems write things like “Let’s have a people’s vote,” followed by “#ExitFromBrexit”. That clearly demonstrates the angle they come at this from. I have yet to meet someone who voted to leave and still intends to leave who says, “I tell you what, before we do, shall we just test the water by having a second referendum?” Inevitably, people want that Bobby Ewing moment—they want to wake up and find that he is still in the shower. At least the people who want to unpick the referendum by revoking article 50 are honest and explain their true intentions, but that would have

severe consequences. The Archbishop of York talked about the possibility of a second referendum causing civil unrest.

We have come to this place and listened to people. Some 17.4 million people put their trust in us doing what they mandated us to do. One of the petitions refers to the vote we had as an opinion poll. It was not; it was a national referendum, which delivered a bigger mandate than any other vote in this country. I cannot remember the figures, but many Members queued up to vote to trigger article 50. In so doing, we put the referendum result into legislation, making those people’s voices heard. We need to redouble our efforts and find a deal that works, so that we can leave the EU in the most orderly fashion possible, demonstrate to people that we can do this and respect their wishes, and move on and gain the inevitable benefits of leaving the EU.

4.50 pm

**Graham Stringer** (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab): I agree with much of what the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Paul Scully) said, except his final conclusion that somehow this deal is a way forward. There are a number of reasons why it is not. First, it is not a deal; it is an agreement to have negotiations for a final deal. On Sunday, Neil Warnock, the manager of Cardiff City—I am not used to quoting him on his political stance or on football matters—spoke for probably the majority of the United Kingdom when he said that the Government should get on and implement what the people had decided in the referendum. After two and half years, that should happen, but the Government have not done so. They have come back with an agreement to negotiate that the Prime Minister should be embarrassed about. It leaves control over the end of that negotiation, and over whether Northern Ireland has different laws from the rest of the United Kingdom, subject to a different legislature. That is an outrage. It is an embarrassment to the Prime Minister and a disgrace to the country that anybody, of whichever political party, would bring back a deal like that.

The debate on the petitions ranges all over the place, but it is worth going back to the referendum. The wording of the referendum was unambiguous and unconditional. There was no condition on the ballot paper. It was absolutely clear that if people voted one way they were voting to remain in the EU, and if they voted in the other box they were voting to leave. The Prime Minister has not managed to deliver the result. Since then, we have had a vote to trigger article 50, which passed by a huge majority. In many cases, although not in all, remainers have looked for ways to undermine the decision, even though it was unconditional and unambiguous. A number of statements have been made, which at first sound quite sensible. I hear regularly in the Chamber, and I have heard it said here, that people did not vote to make themselves poorer. I know they did not—it is true—but they did not vote to make themselves richer. They voted to leave the European Union.

The statement that people did not vote to make themselves poorer has two implications. One is that people never vote to make themselves poorer—that it would be absurd even to think that. But a moment’s thought shows that that is absolutely not true. Right hon. and hon. Members in this Chamber regularly

[*Graham Stringer*]

stand for election on manifestos that contain tax commitments. Tax commitments are a way of confiscating people's income and capital resources, and they make people poorer. We all vote for them, and we all stand on manifestos that make people poorer, usually for social and public benefit. I think it is a nonsensical statement. It appears to have credibility—who could disagree with it?—but its objective and purpose are to undermine the democratic decision that was taken by more than 17.4 million people, as the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam said.

The other implication is that being in the EU always makes us richer and never makes us poorer, and that its decisions always benefit the people of the United Kingdom and the EU. That is demonstrably not true. As a member of the Labour party for many years who opposed the monetarism of the early 1980s, I am astonished that members of the Labour party are so wedded to the EU, which has at the core of its policies the stability and growth pact. The stability and growth pact is, in fact, monetarism; it is Thatcherism internationalised. It is not just abstract thought. It is one of the reasons why youth across the whole of southern Europe have lost the democratic right to determine what happens in Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain, and why there is a whole generation of young people on the dole. The situation has been created by the macroeconomic policies at the centre of EU policy. The policy does not just affect those people; by deflating the EU economy, it affects our ability to export there.

There are many examples of perverse EU decisions that have led, and will lead, to job losses. Last summer, the European Court of Justice, in line with what the EU Commission had said, ruled that the CRISPR-Cas9 technology, which is about inserting parts of genes into crops, was unlawful. That decision has been widely condemned throughout the scientific community as anti-scientific and as having “a chilling effect” on research and the economy. The rest of the world is happy to get on with it, because this technology, where it exists, leads to a drop of about a third in the use of herbicides and a 20% increase in crops. That decision will damage UK and European science, and related jobs in science and agriculture, and it may lead to less food. It is extraordinary that the CRISPR technology has, in effect, been banned, while new crops created by random genetic mutation—using irradiation, so there is no controlling what happens—are allowed.

I use those examples—one economic one, at the huge end of things, and a specific scientific one—to illustrate the point that it is nonsensical to think that the EU always makes decisions that lead to more jobs, more growth and better science. It simply does not. I believe fundamentally that we would get better regulations if we made them ourselves, for our own industry and science, rather than having them designed to fit across the 27 or 28 countries of the EU.

Another argument that is made for a second referendum, or for not implementing the 2016 referendum, is that people did not understand what they were voting for. As I said, it was a simple proposition, and people did know what they were voting for—to leave the European Union. Having talked during the period of the referendum to people I represent from some of the poorest estates

in the country, it is fairly clear to me that they knew exactly what they were voting for. It is an insult to them to say they did not know. The implication is that the educated, cosmopolitan elite are superior, and that their votes should weigh more than the votes of people in poorer parts of the country without degrees and A-levels. I do not believe that, and I guess that if it is stated explicitly, most people in the Chamber do not believe it, but that is at the base of “didn't understand it”. If people did not understand a simple proposition such as the one about leaving the European Union, how are they going to understand the pre-negotiation agreement, with its 585—or perhaps it is 685—pages of nonsensical legal script? They are not going to. It is ludicrous to pretend that that is easier to understand than the simple proposition.

Also, if we are to ignore the first referendum, what credibility would a second have? What credibility would any future referendum have? Would we have to say, when it was agreed to hold a referendum, “We'll have a first one, and if it goes the way the establishment would not like, we will make it the best of three”? That is what the proposition for a second referendum is like. We should not proceed with a second referendum. We have had many debates about it here and on the Floor of the House, and we should not have another.

I have one further point to make about the economic impact of the EU. It is assumed not just that the EU is economically beneficial to us, but that stopping the current trading arrangements, under which we are in the EU internal market, would be wholly negative. We are running a huge trade deficit of between £70 billion and £80 billion a year. I think that if the rules are changed we will get a lot of substitution. Jobs will be created here, because any tariffs—and possibly a drop in the pound—would make it cheaper to manufacture here. Why we consider it so economically advantageous to us to be in an internal market where we have a huge trade deficit, I do not know.

It is worth thinking about why the EU had done as it has. We are in complete regulatory alignment with it, and it has a trade surplus with us. We have been paying a lot of money into it. The reason why many of the university exchanges work is, to put it bluntly, that our top universities are better than the EU's. To take a simple criterion such as the number of Nobel awards, one college at Cambridge has won more Nobel prizes than the top universities in the EU. They need our universities. So what motivates the European Commission to be so unaccommodating in the negotiation? I do not think it is to do with trade. The Commission is prepared to punish EU citizens by coming to what is, from their point of view, a bad deal, given their trade surplus, because it does not want any other states to follow our example. I think that it is partly its non-democratic nature that is responsible for what is happening around the EU—not only economic problems on the southern coast, but the rise of the far right in many countries. It is extraordinary that in my political lifetime there should be a party of the far right in Sweden, and that Sweden—one of the great, long-standing democracies in Europe—should not be able to form a Government. There are other strands to the reasons for the resurgence of the right in Europe, but one is that people can no longer vote for Governments that will do what they want them to, because those factors are determined by the EU.

If it came to a no deal—although frankly it would be better for us to have our cake and eat it, and have a deal beneficial to EU citizens and to us—would it be the end of the world? I agree with the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam that it would not. There would be some short-term disruption, but nothing like the disruption suggested in what the BBC propagates, or in the regular cries of woe heard on the Floor of the House of Commons. However, there is bound to be some disruption. We heard from the sub-prefecture of Calais that there would be no halting of goods there—and why would there be? Why would countries try to make it more difficult for their own industries to export? It has always been a put-up job—the idea that somehow, in support of the European Commission, the French would not want to sell us wine, but would want the people producing wine in Bordeaux, Burgundy and the Rhône valley to be poorer. That is an extraordinary proposition. The same would be true of Spain and other European countries.

Those things are not going to happen, but when anything is changed there will be some short-term disruption. Because we would be making our own laws, in a very short time there would be major benefits. We would also keep most of the £39 billion that the House of Lords EU Financial Affairs Sub-Committee said we had no legal obligation to pay. That would probably give a 2% boost to our GDP. Incidentally, I think I would go to Mystic Meg for predictions about the economy before I would go to the Bank of England, which said that the mere vote to leave the EU would lead to half a million job losses after 23 June. How many jobs were lost? More jobs were created. Yet people regularly state on the floor of the House of Commons that we will have an economic disaster, based not only on the Bank of England but on other think tanks and institutions that are using the same failed models, which do not allow for the flexibility and substitution that exist in the market in this country.

In a more general sense, most of our trade is done under World Trade Organisation rules anyway; most of the world trades under World Trade Organisation rules. I am not saying it is better than what we have—it is not—but it is adequate. The car industry has bleated quite a lot, but the imports of parts are not solely from the EU. Some come from other parts of the world economy. The rest of the world is also where most of the growth is. The EU has been one of the slowest-growing parts of the world economy. It is in Asia, the United States and even South America that most of the growth is occurring, so I do not think we have a great deal to be frightened of on those matters.

I have covered a lot of ground, and one could cover more, because the petitions themselves cover a huge amount of ground, from staying to leaving to what the impact will be. The view that I have set out may not be the majority view in my party or in the House of Commons, but it is the majority view in the country, as the 2016 referendum showed. I remind hon. Members of what the Prime Minister at the time, David Cameron, said—that the people are sovereign. My right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) said in response, “This is not for Members to decide; it is for you, the public, to decide what happens.” It would be quite wrong for us to stop now.

Sadly, the Government have not come back with a deal after two and a half years, and I will vote against what they have come back with. I agree with the leader of my party that if there is a general election, it may well help to put pressure on the Commission, but one thing we know: if this pretty appalling deal is rejected, the EU is master, or mistress, of the last-minute deal. The EU will suffer more than the UK in absolute terms, although less in percentage terms, if there is no reasonable agreement on 29 March. I do not think tomorrow is the end of the story. I think the Prime Minister should have said at the beginning, “We are not accepting a ridiculous deal like this.” She needs either to go back to the Commission and get a better deal, or to go back to the people; hopefully, the Labour party would then get a mandate to negotiate a better deal.

5.13 pm

**Andrea Jenkyns** (Morley and Outwood) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hanson. I will speak in support of the petition that has received more than 300,000 signatures and argues that we should leave the EU on World Trade Organisation terms.

Clearly, a free trade agreement with the EU is optimal. I am an economic liberal and I believe in the benefits of free trade and open markets. However, leaving the EU under the Prime Minister’s deal will restrict our ability to sign free trade agreements with the most exciting and fastest-growing economies in the world. That cannot be allowed to happen. The withdrawal agreement will make the UK a vassal state, a country whose destiny is controlled by the EU and its institutions. That cannot be allowed to happen; it would be a sell-out of the British people.

Leaving on WTO terms should not panic the UK. There are positives to leaving under such a deal when compared with the Prime Minister’s disastrous deal. If we want to take back control of our money, our laws and our borders, keep our £39 billion and trade freely with the rest of the world, a clean WTO Brexit will achieve that. Some in this place have warned that negotiating a new free trade agreement with third parties will be more difficult and we will not be able to achieve such good terms as those negotiated through the European Union, but I believe that argument is flawed.

We all know that the EU is cumbersome; it is over-bureaucratic and full of red tape. For free trade agreements to be signed off in the EU they must be approved by every member state, so the economies and priorities of 27 nations, including individual regions, must be considered. When negotiating our own free trade deals, we can be proactive and seek out opportunities. We can be flexible while the EU is rigid. We can be fast and nimble while the EU is slow and cumbersome. The UK will be free and liberated to sign free trade agreements with the exciting economies of tomorrow.

Let us not talk down the UK. We are the fifth largest economy in the world and a permanent member of the UN Security Council, and we speak the global language of business. We have world-class universities and an incredible global reach, and we sit at the heart of the Commonwealth, which is home to 2.4 billion citizens. I could not be prouder to say that I am British and believe in Great Britain and the United Kingdom. We will succeed no matter what lies in our future; we will prevail because our strength and dynamism lie with the British people, not in being part of the European Union.



[*Andrea Jenkyns*]

The reason we are here today is that the Prime Minister's deal has failed. She has failed to achieve a deal that is good for the UK, but this is the deal before us. The President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, has stated:

"I am totally convinced that this is the only deal possible."

The EU's chief Brexit negotiator, Michel Barnier, has told the European Parliament that

"the treaty that is on the table is the only deal possible."

The President of the European Council, Donald Tusk, has also said that the deal agreed is the only possible one, as has our Prime Minister. Let us not forget what the Opposition's shadow Secretary of State for International Trade, the hon. Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner), said about Labour's Brexit plan—I will not use the swear word in the Chamber that he used then.

**Graham Stringer:** He was right.

**Andrea Jenkyns:** Therefore, if politicians want to respect the outcome of the referendum, WTO becomes a legitimate option and it is right that we are here today discussing it. The world has benefited hugely from the considerable progress made in trade liberalisation in the past 70 years, but multilateral liberalisation has slowed and it now needs a new champion. The UK can be that champion. The benefits of free trade are clear to see. The world needs a liberalising voice, and the UK can be that voice at a time when open markets are threatened.

The UK will prosper as a WTO member. We can immediately start further liberalisation with other WTO members on day one. I acknowledge that tariffs are a concern for some, but I ask them to keep in mind my desire for fewer tariffs and fewer restrictions to trade. Currently, under WTO rules, tariffs vary significantly by sector, but we need to see the bigger picture. In the 1980s, the EU's share of world GDP was about 30%. In 2017 it was about 16% and by 2022 it is expected to fall further to 15%. The EU has a shrinking share of world trade, and Brexiteers can see the benefits of trading freely with the rest of the world, which is growing at a much faster rate than the EU.

The organisation Economists for Free Trade recently released a detailed report that considered the many implications of leaving the EU on WTO terms. In my view, the report shows that, although a deal is preferable, we have nothing to fear from leaving on those terms. From an economic perspective, the report showed that under WTO rules, we would be more prosperous as a country than we are now, and a lot better off than under the Prime Minister's withdrawal agreement, which would leave us worse off by a staggering £100 billion. The report also showed that under no deal, consumer prices would fall by 8% and there would be an additional boost of 15% to the poorest households. I know many of my constituents would welcome that at a time when ordinary families are feeling the pressure.

It is important to note that since the mid-1980s, British exports to WTO countries have grown three times faster than those to the European single market. In fact, our biggest overseas market is America, and we trade with it on WTO terms. All that, taken together, demonstrates that, despite all the fear-mongering and

demonisation of no deal, the reality is that there is nothing to fear. We already conduct much of our trade under those terms, which are essentially a set of global, enforceable rules that outlaw protectionist tricks, discriminatory tariffs and bureaucratic hurdles. The result is free and fair trade for us and our global partners.

After we leave, trade between the UK and the EU can move to WTO rules, meaning tariffs averaging about 3%. Some products have higher tariffs, such as cars, at 10%, with a 4.5% tariff on components from the EU. However, car companies can withstand a 10% tariff on sales into the EU because they have already benefited from a 15% depreciation in the value of sterling. Border checks on components from the EU will be unnecessary, counterproductive for EU exporters, and illegal under WTO rules, which prohibit unnecessary checks. The heads of firms such as Dyson, JCB and Northern Ireland's Wrightbus support Brexit because they see the long-term benefits of our being free from the EU's red tape. A WTO Brexit can achieve that.

I may have agreed with the decision to leave the EU, but it was the British people, not politicians in this place, who decided to leave, and their decision must be upheld. I was only elected to this place in 2015. I am not a career politician and I never worked in the Westminster bubble before being elected. I may not have had the traditional route into politics, but I strongly think that that is a positive. Trust in elected politicians is vital if the public are to have faith in this place and in the democratic process. I aim to uphold that trust. It is naïve to think that we know better.

My constituents know best: they know how best to run their lives and spend their money, and they know what is best for their country. They voted for Brexit, and Brexit must prevail, be that under a WTO Brexit or under a better deal than that agreed by the Prime Minister. My constituency, the Yorkshire and the Humber region and the country voted to leave the EU. We need to leave the European Union and its institutions and take advantage of the opportunities that Brexit can deliver.

I wanted a deal like the Prime Minister's vision in her Lancaster House speech, which would have satisfied the referendum result. However, the Prime Minister decided, mistakenly, to no longer pursue that vision. Moving to WTO rules will achieve that global Britain vision. We want to be in Europe but not run by Europe. We want to be a truly global, free-trading powerhouse. That can still be achieved, but only by trading under WTO rules. Let us now look to the future, where we can all be free from the EU, to make our own decisions and to chart our own destiny.

5.22 pm

**Alex Norris** (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): This may be the first time I have served under your chairship, Mr Hanson. It is a pleasure to do so.

I am a patriot. I love my country. Serving my neighbours, estate, city and country is the most important thing I can do with my life, which is why I come here every week. I leave my family on a Monday morning and desperately hope to get back by the time I said I would, not breaking any promises along the way. I find that that is the best way to do it.

This week we arrive at the significant crossroads that we have been approaching for several weeks. There are a number of paths ahead of us, each with its own advantages and disadvantages. Some options will please some people, others will please other people, and none will please everybody. In fact, I presume that every option will anger significant portions of our society. I say that as a preamble because when talking to friends in a more relaxed setting over Christmas—this may have happened to other hon. Members as well—people would try desperately not to talk about Brexit, but eventually somebody would ask why it is taking so long. This debate, and the petitions that sit behind it, show precisely why it is taking so long. The subject is difficult and unclear, and there are multiple points of view.

I attended this debate because I think it neatly encapsulates that. The arguments in favour of the Prime Minister's deal, as well as those in favour of no deal, a new deal and another vote, all have things going for them—that is not a very popular thing to say, but I believe it to be true—but they also have a lot not going for them. Those who support those options do so with a deep passion, and those who do not often oppose them with a deep anger. I believe that virtually everybody holds a sincere belief that their course is the correct one to follow.

The hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Paul Scully) skilfully introduced the debate, which covers such a broad and contrasting set of views. However, it is interesting that each of the petitions states as fact assertions that the others say are not facts. That shows that this is a difficult subject, which is why it is up to us in this place—we have put up our hands and said that we, as patriots, want to lead our local communities and our country because we care about them—to pick through it and arrive at a solution that serves our nation's best interests.

Tomorrow will be our first test. Our first choice will be laid out in front of us—whether to accept to Prime Minister's deal or not. I will vote against the Prime Minister's deal. I cannot in good conscience bind our nation to a 585-page legally binding withdrawal agreement in pursuit of a well-meant but non-binding political declaration. I believe that this document threatens our historic Union and, frankly, that it does not please or deliver for those who wish to leave or to remain.

The deal is the result of the sum total of 31 months of negotiation. As my hon. Friend the Member for Blackley and Broughton (Graham Stringer) said, probably rather more artfully than me, it is a pre-agreement rather than a deal. Do we think that we will have negotiated a comprehensive deal by the end of 2020? No, of course not; I do not think anybody believes that. We could therefore apply the extension. Do we think we will have negotiated a deal by the end of 2022? Using the narrowest definition, the EU-Canada comprehensive economic and trade agreement took five years of pure negotiation. Do we think that we could do it in less than four years? Has anything suggested that that could happen?

Before Christmas, the hon. Member for Mansfield (Ben Bradley) and I were on our local television channel, Notts TV, as we often are. We always seem to get paired together; I think it is something to do with being younger Members. I am sure that we agree on many things about the world in general, but on political matters he and I disagree on quite a few. We discussed where Brexit would go in the new year and began to

agree that the withdrawal agreement may in time become so attractive to the EU27 that it becomes the deal itself. The hon. Member for Morley and Outwood (Andrea Jenkyns) said that getting deals done with the EU requires the consent of all 27 other countries, one of which might say, "You know what? We've got quite a good relationship here. Why don't we just stick with it?" That risk is another reason why it is not worth supporting the deal.

I read and took seriously what the Prime Minister said earlier today, as I always do. Obviously, I have not heard what has been said in the Chamber, but I suspect it was closely related. I do not take much comfort from the letters from the European Council, either, although I understand where they come from and the intentions behind them. The Prime Minister has said that she will not be here at the end of 2022. How many more leaders on the European Council will have gone by then? The answer is plenty. I therefore cannot in good conscience swap the legal certainty of what will happen to our country in the future for the assurances on a letterhead from those leaders, many of whom will not be here at that time. That seems to me a very poor trade. I am surprised anybody would be persuaded to make it.

The probable outcome, as has been said for a long time, is that the Prime Minister's deal will fall tomorrow. No deal is not and should not be an option. The trade arguments are well played out. At the end of last year I visited Toyota outside Derby to see its just-in-time manufacturing operating model, and it was clear that any delay in the system would be very injurious to it. The economic shock resulting from tariff barriers will be felt by my community, one of the poorest in the country. That cannot happen.

We talk a lot about the economic impact of no deal, but we rarely talk about the security implications. The Select Committee on Home Affairs produced a very good report on that subject. We took a lot of very good evidence from people with differing views. We covered the Schengen Information System II, which ensures that violent criminals, possible terrorists and paedophiles from other countries cannot get into our country; they get the tap on the shoulder, go to a side room and do not come into our country. That database, which we check 500 million times a year, relates to people who present at a UK port. We do not know about it, but it keeps us safe in our beds.

I do not agree with the argument made by the hon. Member for Morley and Outwood about WTO trading terms, but it was well made and I respect it. However, the WTO provides no fall-back in relation to security. I know that people will push for a no-deal option, which is valid. I understand that, and I get emails to that effect. However, those who do so should explain what would happen to someone who presented at a port at 12.1 am—one minute after we have left the EU, while the fireworks or whatever are going on—who would previously have got that tap on the shoulder and not been allowed into our country. The answer to that question is critical, but I do not think there is one; our Committee's inquiry certainly could not find one. As a result, I do not think that any responsible Government ought to countenance no deal.

I shall put that to one side and move on. It is well known that Labour Members seek a general election, as the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam said, so that

[Alex Norris]

we can secure new leadership on this issue and, of course, many others, although this is probably not the moment to go through them. Having said that, I am not averse to a trip to the bookies and I am very aware that the bookies do not think that we will win in our pursuit of a general election any more than the Prime Minister is likely to win tomorrow night, so let us say that both of those fall. What happens then? It means that, come Wednesday or onwards, into early next week, Parliament as a whole will have a real job to find something that respects the referendum result but does not damage our country.

I am here today—I take the chance to speak to and engage with Government Front Benchers when I can—to appeal for a change of tone. I say this very personally. There is no party politics in this; it is my personal feeling. It is a culmination of 18 months of frustration, because I feel that we have been derided throughout this process. I was elected in June 2017, and I feel that since then those of us on the Opposition Benches have been told that we cannot count, that we do not read the documents—that is always a good one—that we are not being honest in our intentions and when we say we are pursuing one goal, we are actually pursuing a second, secret goal, or that we are playing politics in what we do. I believe those to be unfair and untrue charges. As I said at the beginning of my speech, I come here because I want to serve my city and my community.

I believe that the Government will have to change their tone because, frankly, whether it is on Wednesday morning, Thursday morning or next week, the Government will need support from Opposition Members. It does not take a political strategy genius, which I am not, to say this. We are getting to the point at which we know what there is not a majority for in Parliament. We know or may well find that there is not a majority for the Prime Minister's deal. We know from last week that there is not one for no deal. If it is shown that there is not one for a general election, either, we will become defined by what we know there is not a majority for. That means that we will have to look at what there is a majority for, and we will start with the biggest blocs, which are the Government's payroll vote and Members on the Opposition Front Bench. The Government will have to engage with the Opposition. Labour Members are derided for not having a position on Brexit, but our priorities have been on the website for a long time. We have been talking about a customs union for a long time. We have talked about migration, rights at work—

**Graham Stringer:** My hon. Friend is right to say that there is no majority in the House of Commons for a general election at present—partly because a two-thirds majority is needed under the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011—but does he really believe that if the Prime Minister loses tomorrow by more than 100 votes and potentially 200 votes, this Government will have any credibility left at all if the central plank of their existence has failed by so many votes in the House of Commons? Is not the only honourable thing to do to have a general election and see what the public think?

**Alex Norris:** I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. I would not presume to explain any elements of the Fixed-term Parliaments Act to him, given that he legislated it and I did not, but as well as his reference to a

two-thirds majority, the failure to achieve a second vote of confidence within 14 days will automatically lead to a general election. However, I take the point that, on the issue of the day, on the sum total of 31 months of work and leadership—what we are answering tomorrow is the product of all that work—if that fails, it is a fundamental failure for the Government and one that I do not think could be seen off. I think we ought all to be careful, certainly on the Opposition Benches, about setting what we think are good and bad losses. Any loss on this issue is devastating for the Government, whatever the number is.

If they want to carry on, the Government will have to engage with the Opposition on the presupposition that we want to engage on the issue, that we want to make things better and that we might want to find a solution, all of which has been said so far. We all might—this would be of benefit outside the House as well as inside—try to change the way we engage with each other. The petitions show the need for that. They start with assertions that are not necessarily facts; they are just strongly held views, and we all have strongly held views. And we all come at the issue—I assume this is true of all hon. Members present—from the perspective of what we believe is best for our country, so perhaps we ought to engage with one another on those terms, rather than on the basis of what fits into 140 or, now, 280 characters and going down to those very pure binaries. Frankly, if we do not show that there is a parliamentary solution in this place—I have talked about the things that there perhaps are not majorities for—where does that leave this issue? Hon. Members who might passionately have wanted to see a particular goal achieved might end up not getting it at all.

5.35 pm

**Steve Double** (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hanson, and an honour to follow the hon. Member for Nottingham North (Alex Norris). I congratulate my fellow member of the Petitions Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Paul Scully), on the way in which he opened the debate on these petitions.

The referendum vote was the single biggest democratic exercise in our nation's history. More people voted in that referendum than had voted in any election before, and many people who had never voted before voted. I have spoken to many people in my constituency who had never voted before. Some people had voted many years ago and given up voting because they felt that their vote did not make any difference, but they voted in that referendum because they felt that it was their opportunity to make their voice heard and to bring about change. A clear majority voted to leave. As has been well documented, 17.4 million people had the courage, despite "Project Fear"—despite all the predictions of doom and gloom, the world ending, the economy crashing and half a million jobs going—to say, "No, we are voting for change." They did not vote for things to be almost the same; they voted because they wanted things to be different.

The responsibility is now on us in Parliament to deliver on the result. In bringing about the referendum, we made the position clear to the British public. In fact, the Prime Minister at the time, David Cameron, famously said that we were putting the decision in the hands of the British people and we would implement whatever decision they made. This was not a decision to be made



by politicians—not a decision to be made by Parliament—but a decision that the British people would make, and Parliament would implement what they decided.

That was two and a half years ago; indeed, it is coming up to three years ago, and here we are, in this very significant week in Parliament in the process of us implementing the decision that the British people made in the referendum. We have a huge challenge before us. The challenge is this: are we going to do what the British people instructed us to do, or not? For me, this whole process has become about far more than simply whether we leave the EU. It has become about trust in our democratic process. We need to understand that there is a growing sense among many, many people in our country—I receive countless emails; I get them virtually every day expressing this concern—that we are in the middle of an establishment stitch-up. The view is that there is an attempt to prevent us from leaving the EU—that the establishment will somehow manufacture a technical outcome that means we do not actually leave. I have to say that the events of last week and some of the newspaper headlines in the last few days have heightened that genuine concern. I believe that, the people of this country having been told that we were giving them the decision and the choice, the consequences of us now not delivering on that decision would be incredibly serious for our country.

We are here today to debate a number of petitions regarding our leaving the EU. As we have heard, some are calling for us to leave immediately, some are calling for us to leave with no deal, others are calling for another referendum and others are basically saying, “Let’s scrap the whole thing and pretend it didn’t happen.” Clearly, the petitions reflect the deep divisions in our country at the moment. There are strongly and genuinely held views right across the spectrum as to where we are and what should happen next.

It is interesting to note that the biggest petition by far, with, last time I checked, over 327,000 signatures—more than all the others put together—is the one calling for us to leave without a deal. That generally reflects what I get in my postbag. The vast majority of people, particularly of those who voted to leave, say, “On the ballot paper, it didn’t say, ‘Leave with a withdrawal agreement or a free trade deal.’ It didn’t say, ‘Leave with any strings attached.’ It simply said, ‘Leave or remain,’” and they voted to leave.

The majority of the British people—certainly, the majority of those who voted leave—simply want us to get on and do as they instructed us. If that means leaving without an agreement, that is what they want us to do. We need to understand that that is the legal position. The European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, which this House passed, states that we will leave on 29 March this year. It does not say that we will leave if we can agree a withdrawal agreement or a future trading deal. It simply says—it has established in law—that we will leave. We need to understand that. There are Members of this House who voted for that withdrawal Act but who do not seem to understand that that is what we voted for. There were no strings attached to that decision. It simply says that we will leave.

I do not want to leave without a deal. I desperately want a withdrawal agreement and a future trading arrangement that I can support and vote for. Sadly for me, the deal that the Prime Minister has agreed and

brought back to this House is not one that I can support, because I do not believe that it delivers what we promised—delivering on the referendum result. It locks our country into an untenable situation that completely undermines our ability to negotiate a future trading arrangement.

Over the last two years of negotiations, we have had things to negotiate with. Having surrendered those things to the EU, I do not understand how we think that we will get a better outcome than we have managed to get in the last two and half years. We had our £39 billion to negotiate with and we had the ability to say that we will walk away without a deal, and yet we have not made any progress. The withdrawal agreement hands those things over to the EU and leaves us hoping that we can get a decent deal out of it.

The withdrawal agreement works only if we have faith in two things: first, the goodwill of the EU towards us and, secondly, the negotiating ability of those negotiating on behalf of the UK. Given the experience of the last two years, I am sad to say, I would be absolutely foolish to have confidence in those two things—no reasonable person could. The withdrawal agreement would undermine our whole negotiating position and lock us into a situation that we were in great danger of never being able to get out of. Regrettably, I cannot support the deal.

I hope that the Prime Minister will go back to the EU, having lost the vote tomorrow. I believe that a significant loss will give a clearer message to the EU that the withdrawal agreement is completely unacceptable to Parliament, and that the EU cannot tinker at the edges or provide us with reassurances and nicely worded letters to go with it but must come up with something fundamentally far better for our country, or we will have to leave with no deal.

I know people will say that the EU has said time and again that there are no grounds for renegotiation. However, as other hon. Members have said, the EU has a good record of backing down at the last minute when it is up against a wall. I do not think we have really tested the EU’s resolve in these negotiations. Losing the vote tomorrow will give the Prime Minister the opportunity to go back and truly test the EU’s resolve. Is the EU really serious that it will not give ground and renegotiate? Is it prepared for us to walk away without a deal?

Let us be clear that leaving without a deal will involve some huge challenges, but it will not be the disaster that some predict. Time and again, we have heard the doom-mongers say that we will have no medicines and our aeroplanes will not be able to fly, but all the economic predictions have been proved wrong. I find it incredible that people are predicting the impact of Brexit in 10 years, when, in my time in politics, every six-month prediction from the Treasury has proved to be wildly wrong. It is utterly beyond me how they think they can predict 10 years ahead when they cannot get six-month predictions right.

Every scare story has been exposed as being completely untrue. Even the Mayor of Calais has made it clear that there will be no disruption to trucks coming across the English channel from Calais. I am sure that on our side of things, we will not make it more difficult for our exports to go the other way, either. Therefore, I think we can put to bed the scare stories that paint this as an utter disaster. Yes, there will be challenges, but, throughout its history, our country has shown itself to be at its

[Steve Double]

greatest when faced with challenges. I believe in the ability of the British people and British business, if there is no deal, to overcome any challenges as quickly as possible and move on to the future.

It is worth highlighting some of the other things that the petitions call for. There are petitions calling for a second referendum. I certainly do not support that. Not only would it send a hugely damaging message to the British people—that somehow the first referendum was wrong or invalid—and be hugely disrespectful to them, but I fail to see what it would achieve. The first referendum was divisive enough, but in the current climate, a second referendum would be even more divisive and damaging to our society. What will we do if leave wins again? We will have wasted our time. If there is a narrow victory for remain, do we have a third one to make it best of three? I fail to see how it would make real progress.

Over the weekend, I was thinking about today and I suddenly remembered, in the depths of my memory, that the House had actually considered this matter. On 20 December 2017, when the House was debating and voting on the withdrawal Act, an amendment was tabled calling for a second referendum on the deal. I do not know how many hon. Members remember that. Do you know, Mr Hanson, how many Members of Parliament voted for that amendment? I was quite astounded. Having listened to some of the voices from across the House, I thought it would be hundreds. It was 23. When the House had the opportunity to express its view on a second referendum, a whole 23 Members of Parliament—good on them, virtually all the Lib Dems voted for it, so at least they have been consistent—voted for one. That amendment was resoundingly defeated.

As we had the opportunity to vote for a second referendum only a year ago, I find it quite difficult to accept that so many Members of this House are now calling for one. I am not sure what has gone on during that year, but clearly something has. My line is quite simple: the House had the opportunity to vote for a second referendum, the amendment was resoundingly defeated and we should put the matter to bed. Continuing to call for a second referendum after not having voted for one at that time shows a lack of credibility.

Then there are the petitions that say that we should rescind article 50 and scrap the whole thing: “Let’s just cancel Brexit and put it in the too-difficult-to-do pile.” That, above everything, would be hugely damaging to our democracy and would send a disrespectful message to the British people. For Parliament, which voted for the referendum by a huge majority and said, “We put this decision in the hands of the British people,” to now say, “We cannot deliver it. It’s too difficult. Let’s just scrap it and call the whole thing off,” would send a wrong and damaging message to our country.

It is essential that we deliver on the referendum. I am concerned by some of the things that have been said by those, including some Conservative colleagues, who are clearly scheming and trying to find some unconstitutional technical way to overturn it and prevent Brexit. We must be honest with the British people and have integrity. All hon. Members in my party stood on a clear manifesto commitment in the last election that we would honour the referendum and deliver Brexit, so to go back on that and try to prevent it would be hugely damaging and would send all the wrong messages.

I genuinely hope that when it looks as though the vote has been lost tomorrow night, the Prime Minister goes to try to get a better deal that we can support. Let us not forget, however, that the legal position that the House voted for is that come what may—deal or no deal; withdrawal agreement or no withdrawal agreement—we will leave the European Union on 29 March. It is vital that the House delivers on that commitment.

5.51 pm

**Ben Bradley (Mansfield) (Con):** I am pleased to respond to the many petitions on the future of Brexit that have been submitted for our consideration. My constituency voted 71% in favour of leaving the EU in the 2016 referendum, and it still supports that decision. In fact, as Parliament has become increasingly chaotic and unable to reach a consensus, I have felt that determination to leave the EU harden among my constituents. Increasingly, correspondence from constituents makes the point that they voted to leave and that, one way or another—with a deal or without—that decision must be respected come 29 March.

My constituents who have signed the petitions have made their views equally clear. Just short of 1,000 people from Mansfield and Warsop signed the petitions in support of a clean Brexit on world trade terms, while only 150 signed the petitions in favour of a second referendum or of stopping Brexit. Nationally, as has been touched on, the biggest petition by far is the one in support of leaving on world trade terms.

Contrary to the narrative we often hear, I would argue that numbers in my constituency have, if anything, shifted more in favour of leave since 2016. Anecdotally, my experience is that those attitudes have certainly hardened. We argue in this place about precisely what “leave” meant on the ballot paper, but it did not have caveats. It said remain or leave, one way or another, not “leave subject to the EU being willing to grant us a deal.”

Parliament voted to have a referendum, and the result was to leave. Parliament voted to trigger article 50 and start the leaving process. Parliament voted for the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, which set in stone the date of our leaving as 29 March, but which did not specify that we must have a deal to leave, simply that we must leave. That remains the default legal position. It is no surprise that so many have signed petitions to show their strong feeling that that has already been decided, and that the House should respect that.

Politicians should not be debating whether we leave, whether we have another vote, or even whether we should stay in the European Union; the only question on the table is how we leave. There can be no question of going back on the Conservative and Labour parties’ 2017 manifestos, which both promised to leave the European Union and respect the result of the vote.

The hon. Member for Nottingham North (Alex Norris) mentioned our TV appearance before Christmas. If I remember rightly, he was wearing a very snazzy Christmas jumper. We had a good debate, as we often do, but I struggle with his position and that of those who say no to the deal and to no deal. I wonder, in a scenario in which the European Union is clear that this might be the only deal on the table, what else is left that respects the result.

We have to decide how we leave. The deal that we will be asked to vote for tomorrow is, unfortunately, not good enough. It requires us to be part of the customs union, which would mean we continued to be bound by EU rules and regulations, over which we no longer have a say. That is not taking back control; that is worse than being in. As my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) rightly said, we cannot deliver on a vote for change by sticking as closely as possible to the status quo.

If we cannot come to an agreement on a future arrangement, which seems likely, given how the last two years have gone, we will be tied into a backstop that would make that customs union permanent, and that we could not leave without the European Union's permission. That customs union arrangement is only for Great Britain; different rules would be in place for Northern Ireland. That puts our Union under threat, allows the Scottish nationalists to further stir the pot and seek yet more referendums until they get the answer they want, and breaks the Prime Minister's promise to the people of Northern Ireland. The withdrawal agreement that we have been presented with does not fulfil the promises of the Conservative manifesto and is simply not acceptable. That is why so many of my constituents signed the petitions in favour of no deal.

We in this House all know, or can pretty much guess, that the withdrawal agreement will not pass in the House of Commons tomorrow. Some in the media have suggested a losing margin of 200 or more; I suggest that it will perhaps not be as big as that after we have gone through the confusing process of lots of amendments, which are likely to make tomorrow difficult for people out in the real world to follow. In fact, there are scenarios in which even the Government could vote against the withdrawal agreement at the end of the day, if it is amended in a way that they are not happy with. One way or another, however, the most important question is now, and always has been, what happens next. It is not about tomorrow, but plan B.

I want a deal that works, but it seems that none is forthcoming. If that is the case, I agree with my constituents who voted to leave and who expect us to leave. At no point has that been subject to us getting a deal. Although the media and many in this place like to talk about no deal, leaving on world trade terms is not no deal at all—it is hundreds of deals and transitional arrangements, both in co-operation with the EU and independently, that will make sure that we leave as smoothly as possible. Nobody wants chaos, and we will continue to work together to make sure that that does not happen.

Many constituents supported the petition because they have seen through “Project Fear”, and they appreciate the benefits of an independent Britain that will go into the future on world trade terms or with a no deal—whatever we want to call it. World trade terms have several benefits that we should relish, not least the benefit of us being a sovereign nation again, fully in control of our own affairs and able to keep some of that cash.

The withdrawal agreement promises £39 billion for a non-binding wish list of what we might like in a future relationship. I am a firm believer that we should pay our way, and that if we have signed up to projects and if there are things we want to continue to be involved in in the future, we should honour that, but of the £39 billion, only about £18 billion is for such things. Much of the

rest is for things such as EU commissioners' future pensions, which we do not need to contribute to if we are not members. As has been touched on, we have had that leverage in our pocket in the negotiations and we have not used it, and we would give it away if we signed the withdrawal agreement. A significant proportion of the money could be saved and spent on our priorities in the UK.

All hon. Members who have contributed have spoken about the problems and challenges of securing a clean break that would draw a line under the uncertainty when there is no consensus in Parliament, and when everyone has a strongly held view—for all the right reasons—but that is the only way to move on. If everyone knows where we stand and the debate is done, we can focus on the things that genuinely affect the everyday lives of citizens in this country. There is so much that we need to deal with that has been lost in the Brexit melee. The best thing for Britain is to move on.

Leaving on world trade terms would allow us the freedom to make trade deals of our own, in contrast with the withdrawal agreement, which the US, New Zealand and Australia have suggested would make that difficult. The Government are already looking at how to transfer existing deals from the EU, such as with Switzerland, to provide continuity and to ensure that we are trading on better than world trade terms with many advanced economies. In fact, we will never need to trade on world trade terms with Europe either. Article 24 of the World Trade Organisation treaty allows us to continue to trade with Europe on zero tariffs while we negotiate a free trade arrangement.

Leaving on such terms would be a change, of course—change is required whether we have a deal and the withdrawal agreement or not—but the scaremongering about the impact has been ridiculous. People have suggested that there will be queues of lorries trying to get into the UK, which will cause delays to things such as medicines coming into the country. Let us not forget that there have already been occasions when there have been such queues at Dover, because of protests in France or whatever, so we cannot pretend that EU membership has protected us from those challenges. But we should not forget that we, the UK, control who enters our country, and therefore we decide what checks are needed, not Europe. If we do not want to stop goods coming in, we can decide not to stop them coming in.

Both Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs say that no additional checks will be needed; and anyway, most physical checks are made away from the border, at source or at destination. We have the ability and flexibility to make changes, and make things work. The authorities at Calais say that they have every intention of prioritising the continued flow of goods at their port, too.

[GERAINT DAVIES *in the Chair*]

There is not time in this debate to go through all the details, but I recommend that Members read the many works on the subject by Lord Lilley in particular, which lay out the facts about WTO terms in great detail.

The important point to make is that Brexit is not Armageddon. Last night, I watched “Bird Box” on Netflix with my wife, in which strangers' voices kind of sweep in on the wind and make people kill themselves. I



[Ben Bradley]

wondered whether it might be a documentary on the impact of a no-deal Brexit, funded by Lord Adonis, Alastair Campbell or somebody along those lines.

“Bird Box” was not too dissimilar from some of the scare stories that we have heard. We have heard that super-gonorrhoea will come flying in from Europe and take us all; we have heard that babies will die because of milk shortages; and we have heard that cancer patients will die if we are not in Euratom, when Euratom does not even cover medicines at all. The level of scaremongering on this subject has been absolutely unbelievable. In fact, it has got so ridiculous that most people simply do not believe it; they discount it, and it serves only to harden the attitude that we should leave regardless.

Many people have a vested interest in whipping up that fear, but we have to deal with practical realities. We can put in place measures to make leaving with no deal, which in fact requires lots of deals, work for the UK. Preparations for that should have started earlier, absolutely; but now they are well under way.

A second referendum or revoking article 50, which are called for in some of the petitions that we are considering, would be an absolute betrayal of the trust we put in the citizens of this country to decide on this issue, and I will never support those two options.

Operating on WTO terms is not my first position, just as my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Paul Scully) said it was not his. I want a deal that I can support and that is the best option for the UK, but in the absence of a good deal, we still have to leave. If the Prime Minister comes back next week, after the withdrawal agreement has failed, to say that she now intends to pursue a looser free trade relationship with the EU and to try to negotiate something better in all of our interests, then, in the absence of WTO terms, that could be the back-up, but first let us try to find something better; I would absolutely support her in that.

**Paul Scully:** Does my hon. Friend agree that if the vote is lost and we move closer to WTO terms, or no-deal terms, or whatever people want to call it, we must move from contingency planning, which is really important, to starting to negotiate and sign bilateral agreements—that two-way thing—to alleviate some of the turbulence that we have discussed?

**Ben Bradley:** Absolutely, and I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. He is absolutely right that we need to put in place everything we can to make this process work for the United Kingdom. That means we need to move from talking about things that we might need to do and having those contingency arrangements to getting things signed and sealed on paper, so that we can move forward, one way or the other, in the future.

However, as I say, if the Prime Minister wants to go back to Europe with a stronger hand, having seen exactly how much feeling there is against the nature of this withdrawal agreement in the Houses of Parliament, and give the European Union one last chance to come with something that we can all get behind and support for the benefit of both the UK and the European Union, then I would absolutely support her in that, and I hope that is what she will do next week. But one way or another, we have to leave.

Britain can thrive outside the European Union. No deal is very much better than the bad deal that is on offer, and I feel that increasingly my constituents are absolutely adamant—as is increasingly represented in the correspondence that I receive—that this place must support us leaving on 29 March, one way or the other.

6.3 pm

**Tommy Sheppard** (Edinburgh East) (SNP): It is a pleasure, Mr Davies, to serve under your chairpersonship; I think it is for the first time.

Before I get on to the subject of the debate, I will make two points about the manner in which we are discussing it. First, a great many people have taken the time and trouble to read and sign the various petitions, and Parliament has previously said that it is very respectful and supportive of people petitioning this institution; and yet today, to consider a topic that has gripped the country, during what can only be regarded as a political crisis that has no end in sight, only nine Members of Parliament have turned up.

I know why that is so: the main event is still happening only 100 metres away. However, it is not the first time that this has happened. I remember a very similar occasion before Christmas when I was here to respond from the third party to a petition about Brexit while a big Brexit discussion was going on in the main Chamber.

I do not say that to criticise; I am merely making an observation. I say as gently as possible to the Petitions Committee, the Panel of Chairs and the Clerks of the House that we know that this is not a topic that will go away; it will dominate our politics at least throughout the next year. We know that Parliament sits at 2.30 pm on a Monday; we know that after a weekend of not sitting, there are likely to be statements; and we know that any significant event in this process is likely to happen on a Monday afternoon. If, in the months to come, we receive further petitions relating to Brexit, I ask that we do not schedule debates on them on a Monday afternoon—

**Paul Scully:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Tommy Sheppard:** I will take an intervention, but I am really trying not to be divisive or critical; I am simply asking the Petitions Committee at least to give consideration to a different schedule.

**Paul Scully:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. I just wanted to explain that 4.30 pm on a Monday is the slot that is allocated every week, so there is not a lot of scope for flexibility. The Petitions Committee meets in private, but one of the questions that we often ask about Brexit petitions is whether, because we debate the matter so often in the House, we are just duplicating debates. We try to give people a voice as much as we can, but I take his point.

**Tommy Sheppard:** I understand that. The same is true of the Backbench Business Committee, which has no control over when it can schedule debates; it has to work within times that are given to it. Nevertheless, I am raising this issue so that the Petitions Committee might consider it and make representations to whoever is in control of the schedule, to point out the problems that we are having. We can make jokes about it, but if

this continues I think there will come a point when the public ask, “Are these petitions really being taken seriously enough by Members of Parliament?”

My second point is not a major one, but I am not sure about the efficacy of lumping petitions together in a one for consideration. I know that it would take more time if we did not do that. However, although the petitions that we are discussing appear to be alternatives to each other, we cannot necessarily test the pros and cons of each by reference to people who have petitioned on a completely different matter. I think we ought not to aggregate such matters. We should not simply make the assumption that anybody who signs a petition about Brexit will be happy and content to have their concerns considered in conjunction with those of anybody else who signs a petition about Brexit, which may come from a completely different perspective.

I will move on to the substance of the debate. I am against Brexit, my party is against Brexit and Scotland voted against Brexit, so I think people know where I stand. I am not into “Project Fear”; I had enough of “Project Fear” in the 2014 Scottish independence referendum. I do not suggest that the world will end if Brexit goes ahead on 29 March. In fact, I do not even think that it will be that big a historical event, apart from the significance of the date, in terms of what materially happens.

I think that the most horrible thing about this process is that we will enter a process of slow, insidious grinding down of living standards, and with that will come a grinding down of the hope and optimism of the country and a fuelling of many of the sentiments that led to the vote in 2016. My concern is that we are about to commit a degree of national self-harm that we could avoid; it is entirely self-inflicted.

Having said that, all that we can summate from the petitions that we are considering today is that opinion is divided. The big question now: what are we going to do to take this process forward, knowing that the country is divided, knowing that Parliament is divided and knowing that it is very, very difficult to try to chart a course through?

I turn to the question of whether there should be another referendum on the question. I do not think that we should put the same question again, but I do think that there are circumstances in which it is legitimate to go back to the people and consult them further. We cannot do so every day, but in a democracy people have the right to change their minds. Particularly when one decision has created a process and led to things that were not anticipated, people have the right to be consulted again.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): The hon. Gentleman referred to optimism, and the optimism of the 17.4 million people who voted to leave cannot be ignored. I respect his comments. He and I probably disagree on many things, including this issue, but does he not agree that a second referendum would, by its very nature, be divisive and, unfortunately, engineer more disquiet and anger among the people by totally ignoring the referendum of June 2016, when 17.4 million people said, “We want to leave”? Let us honour that.

**Tommy Sheppard:** The hon. Gentleman has pre-empted me. I will come on to those precise points, so bear with me.

In a democracy, people have the right to change their minds, but we cannot provide procedures for them to do that every day, every week, every month or even every year. There are, however, circumstances in which it is legitimate to revisit the question. I would set three tests. The first is: has the information on which the original decision was made changed significantly? In this case, it has. Far more information is available now than was available three years ago, and some of the promises that were made appear, even to those who proposed them, not to be possible to deliver. Secondly, have people changed their mind on the subject by an extent significant enough to suggest that the result would be different were the question asked again? Thirdly, has the legislature—the Parliament—that is charged with the responsibility of executing the decision of a referendum proved unwilling or unable to do so? I contend that the first two of those tests have been met and the third will be met tomorrow night, when the Government’s proposal crashes and burns.

**Steve Double:** I am listening carefully to the hon. Gentleman. I am interested to know the basis for his second point, which is about people changing their minds. If it is opinion polls, we all know that over the past few years opinion polls have been very wrong—those on the referendum predicted a win for remain. Surely, therefore, we cannot trust opinion polls as evidence that people have changed their mind.

**Tommy Sheppard:** I do not know about trusting opinion polls, but they are clearly evidence that people have changed their mind. Yes, 17.4 million people voted in a certain way three years ago, but the aggregate of opinion polls suggests that a significant number of them have changed their mind. We have ignored, up to now, the 48% who did not go along with the proposition, and we are in danger of not only continuing to ignore them but denying the possibility that people might have changed their minds, and ignoring the fact that they have.

**Jim Shannon:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

**Tommy Sheppard:** I will give way one more time, but I am anxious not to labour the point for long.

**Jim Shannon:** In my constituency, people voted 56% to 44% to leave. Over the holiday period, I made it my business to talk to my constituents in fishing, farming, business and ordinary life, and opinion is hardening in relation to leaving the EU. That is happening in my constituency, and I am sure it is happening in others.

**Tommy Sheppard:** I have no reason to gainsay what the hon. Gentleman says about his constituency. Likewise, in my constituency the direction is the other way. Current polling in Scotland suggests that while 62% voted to remain three years ago, if the vote were held today the figure would probably be more than 70%. That can be played either way.

The point is that not only is public opinion fundamentally divided, but there is a churn in that opinion and people are anxious to discuss and to be consulted on the matter again. Some of the arguments that have been made against that are disturbing. Over the weekend, for example, the Prime Minister said that it was ridiculous for people

[Tommy Sheppard]

to ask for a second vote, and that if the UK Parliament overturned a referendum result in Wales or Scotland, people would be outraged. Of course, it was quickly pointed out that she had voted in this Parliament to overturn the referendum result in Wales, but my concern is about Scotland.

The Prime Minister's comparison is a false one, because the 2014 vote in Scotland was to secede from the United Kingdom. Asking what would happen if the United Kingdom Parliament were to overturn the vote of the Scottish electorate is no comparison at all. The comparison would be to ask, "What would it be like if people had voted in a UK-wide referendum to leave the European Union and the EU then decided that they couldn't?" No one would suggest that that was in any way—[*Interruption.*] Hon. Members may laugh, but no one surely suggests that the EU is either trying, or has the legal ability, to prevent the United Kingdom from leaving.

**Steve Double:** Clearly, the EU has no legal right to do that, but I am sure the hon. Gentleman would agree that it is trying every trick in the book to make it as difficult as possible for us to leave, partly because, as the hon. Member for Blackley and Broughton (Graham Stringer) said, it wants to make an example of us to ensure that no one else dares vote to leave.

**Tommy Sheppard:** As the hon. Gentleman says, the EU has absolutely no right to do that. It may be concerned about agreeing to certain aspects of the nature of the United Kingdom's withdrawal, but it has no right to prevent the withdrawal. To suggest that it does is disingenuous.

I am slightly concerned about another thing. People have talked, including here today, about Parliament overturning the will of the people. I ask hon. Members to please consider that language, because it is not particularly helpful. No one is suggesting that Parliament should vote to disregard and overturn the result of the 2016 referendum—[*Interruption.*] The Minister chunters at me from a sedentary position. Okay, perhaps I cannot say "no one", but I do not suggest that and neither does my party. I have not heard anyone in this Chamber suggest that Parliament should vote to overturn the decision of the 2016 referendum. What people are arguing about is whether the people who took the decision to leave the EU should be consulted on whether, knowing what they do now, they wish to continue with that decision.

That brings me to what the question on the ballot paper would be, about which there has been some discussion. As I see it, and I am trying to be logical, in June 2016 the people of the United Kingdom voted to start a process. They said, "This is the direction we want to go in. We want to leave the EU and we want the Government to go ahead and do that." I have many criticisms about how the Government of the day did that, but I cannot claim that they did not engage and commit resources and time to trying to discharge that mandate.

Two and half years later, the Government have got to a position with a deal on the table—let us not even call it a deal; the hon. Member for Blackley and Broughton (Graham Stringer) is right. There is a set of proposals

about how that 2016 mandate could be implemented, and how it should be discharged and executed. The question is: are those proposals acceptable to the people who commissioned the process in the first place? Is this really what they want to do? They should be given the choice of whether to go ahead or call a halt to the process, in which case the status quo ante would pertain and we would remain in the EU. Those are the two broad choices.

**Ben Bradley:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Tommy Sheppard:** I will take the intervention, because I think I can guess what the hon. Gentleman will say.

**Ben Bradley:** Does the hon. Gentleman not see the problem in presenting a deal that a petition of 300,000-odd people say is not Brexit, and that Conservative Members have today said does not represent Brexit? Having "Brexit" on a ballot paper does not give anyone an educated choice about what they are voting on.

**Tommy Sheppard:** But it is Brexit. It may not be the type of Brexit the hon. Gentleman wants—it may not be as hard and quick as he wants—but it is the United Kingdom leaving the EU. The Minister will perhaps confirm that when he makes his statement. I am pretty sure that what we will be voting on tomorrow night is a form of Brexit.

My point is that after two and a half years of intense discussion, argument, negotiation and research, the Government say that this is the best they can come up with. I think it is pretty shoddy and I shall vote against it, but I do not dispute the fact that it probably is the best they can come up with, so that is it. I say to the people who wanted this to happen, "This is what it looks like. Do you want it to happen, or do you not?" That is the question that people should be given.

People have said, "It is impossible to do that by 29 March." Of course it is. Everyone accepts it is impossible to have another referendum by 29 March. That is why the obvious decision for Parliament would be to say, "We want to go back and consult the people, and we wish the European Union to allow an extension of the article 50 process in order for that to happen." I cannot conceive of a situation in which the European Union would not, in those circumstances, consent to a three or six-month extension of article 50—however long it would take—to organise a plebiscite and ask people whether they are really sure that they want to go ahead with Brexit. The European Union has said that it would not countenance an extension of article 50 if the proposal were not changed, but the whole purpose of seeking an extension would be to offer the possibility of changing the proposition. I cannot believe that the European Union would deny the United Kingdom the opportunity to do that; in fact, if it did, I would call foul on the European Union, and I might even change my mind about what our relationship should be, so convinced am I that the EU would not take that position.

Some of the language that has been used in this debate is potentially very dangerous. People have suggested, for example, that we cannot possibly allow people to vote on this question again because if the result went a different way, it would not just be divisive, but the people who lose might go out on to the streets, there might be political violence and the far right in this



country might increase, taking us back to scenes that we saw in the 1970s, when I first came into politics. However, that will only happen if we tell people that they are being excluded from the decision. If we make it clear that the reason for a people's vote or another referendum is to include people and involve them all in the decision, I do not see why that should happen; if it did happen, it would be an illegitimate response to any decision that might be taken. I am assuming, of course, that a people's vote would lead to a change in position, but it might not. In that case, I really think it is better that people get the chance to make absolutely sure that they want to go ahead with the process, with all its potential difficulties.

I turn to the position of the Labour party, and I would like the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield) to clarify something. My understanding is that the party's position, as several Labour Members have said, is that there should be a general election. Now, we are not going to get a two-thirds majority, but the obvious route to a general election is to place before the House a motion of no confidence in the Government. I ask the shadow Minister when, or in what circumstances, that is going to happen. Will it happen when the Government are defeated tomorrow night? Will it happen after the Labour party has given the Government another three days to come back with plan B—of course, we decided on that last week—or will it never happen unless the Labour party is convinced that it knows the result, because it does not want to table a motion of no confidence and be defeated? As much as we need to get over tomorrow night's decision before we can move forward, we also need to get over the no-confidence question before Parliament and the country can move forward.

The leader of the Labour party seems to have been hardening his position in recent days. He has said that were there to be a general election, he would put in the Labour manifesto a commitment to implement the result of the 2016 European Union referendum—in other words, to proceed with Brexit. Perhaps the shadow Minister could clarify whether that is the case. If so, it seems to me that Labour would be in the position of calling a general election on the question of Brexit without offering people the option of stopping Brexit. I think that would lead to political disillusionment on a scale far greater than that which might be caused by another people's vote. It would be helpful to have some clarification, because as far as I am concerned, a choice between the Prime Minister's Brexit and the Leader of the Opposition's Brexit is not really a choice at all.

I will finish by referencing the situation in Scotland, because we have been trying very hard to play a constructive role in this debate. As I say, we have our mandate: 74% of my constituents told me they did not want to leave the European Union, and that figure is probably now closer to 80%. Some 97% of the thousands of people who write to me about this issue are against going ahead with Brexit, so I am quite clear, but I am not saying, "Stop it now." For two and a half years now, we have tried to engage in this Parliament, and the Scottish Government have put forward compromise proposals. However, those proposals have been rejected time and time again, because the manner in which this has been gone about has been an object lesson in how not to do politics.

Last week, the Prime Minister had a cross-party meeting with Back-Bench MPs, which I attended. As the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) pointed out, it was a welcome event; it was just a shame that it had not been done two and a half years ago when the vote was initially taken. It really was a case of too little, too late. However, I ask the Minister to clarify whether, in the event of a defeat tomorrow night, the Government—given that they are no longer able to get their own position through the House—will consider working on a cross-party basis and consulting with Members from different parties and with different views, in order to see whether it is possible to reach a consensual and agreed way forward. At the minute, Scotland is involved in trying to stop Brexit—to create a situation in which the UK does not leave the EU—because it is in the interests of the people we represent, as well as the people of all the UK. However, if our voices continue to be ignored, then we have an alternative, and it will be activated once this Brexit dust settles.

6.26 pm

**Paul Blomfield** (Sheffield Central) (Lab): It is a pleasure to wind up the debate for the Opposition with you in the Chair, Mr Davies; I am sure you will deeply regret having missed many of the contributions made earlier in the debate, knowing your views on these matters. I thank the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Paul Scully) for the way in which he opened the debate—he drew on points made by petitioners on both sides of the argument and on different proposals—and for the way in which he explored the complexity of the issues that we face. In that context, I draw attention to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham North (Alex Norris): the tone of our discussions is so important, particularly given some of the stuff we have seen around the precincts of Westminster over the past week. He was right to say that we are at a crossroads. People are expressing wildly diverse but sincerely held views; the reasons why people voted as they did in the 2016 referendum were sincere, too. We should respect all those views.

The petitions we have debated reflect the divisions in the country, and indeed in Parliament—divisions that have been exacerbated, not healed, by the way in which this Government have approached the negotiations over the past two years. It did not have to be like this. When the negotiations began, we urged the Prime Minister to look beyond the war in her own party, and to reach out to the majority in Parliament and across the country who respected the fact that the people had voted to leave—the hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) and my hon. Friend the Member for Blackley and Broughton (Graham Stringer) are right about that—but also accepted that they had done so by a painfully close margin. We urged the Prime Minister to recognise the vote for what it was: a mandate to end our membership of the European Union, but not to rupture our relationship with our closest neighbours, our key allies and our most important trading partner, and certainly not to crash out of the European Union without any agreement.

The hon. Members for Mansfield (Ben Bradley) and for Morley and Outwood (Andrea Jenkyns), in disagreeing with the deal, both said that it was the only deal that would be countenanced by the European Union—that, in the words of the Prime Minister, it was the only deal

[Paul Blomfield]

possible, a point that I am sure the Minister will make. But it was the only deal possible within the constraints that the Prime Minister had set herself. The European Union made it clear that there were a range of options and relationships that it was prepared to consider, but the British Government had effectively ruled those out with the negotiating terms that they had set. We regret the fact that the Prime Minister allowed the agenda to be set by what her own Chancellor described as the Brexit “extremists” within her party. She set the red line, boxed herself in and ended up pleasing nobody—neither leave nor remain voters—with the deal.

In December, with the clock ticking, the Prime Minister wasted a further month by delaying the vote on the deal that is doomed to fall tomorrow. So what is her strategy now to get the deal through? Threatening MPs and the country with no deal at all. We have made it clear from the start that we would not accept a blackmail Brexit: the choice of “My deal or no deal.” We will reject her deal tomorrow, confident that Parliament will not allow the country to leave without a deal; that is the clearly expressed view of the majority of Members of Parliament. As the Chancellor of the Exchequer has made clear, leaving without a deal would be a “terrible” outcome for the UK economy. He compared it with the dark days of the 1980s.

It is not enough to talk about doom merchants or the car industry “bleating”. I say to the hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay that the stories about stockpiling medicines were not scare stories run by doom merchants. They were the proposals made by the Government in the preparatory papers that those supporting Brexit had urged them to prepare to ensure the country was ready for no deal. It was the Government who said we needed to stockpile medicines and food, and who said they could not continue to guarantee the power supply in Northern Ireland. That is their assessment of the position in relation to no deal.

We should recognise that the voices warning against no deal do not simply come from partisans within this place. They come from the CBI, the Engineering Employers Federation, the British Chamber of Commerce and the TUC—those who are at the coalface of the consequences if we leave with no deal. I have heard it said in this debate, and it is strongly argued by many, that if we leave without a deal, we should reclaim the £39 billion that we are to hand to the EU. Many of the people who make that argument also argue that we should strike out to secure new trade deals with many other countries around the world. The Chancellor was right to ask what country would sign up to a deal with a country that has demonstrated its ability to renege on agreements properly made in good faith.

**Graham Stringer:** We agree on tomorrow’s vote, but disagree on the objectives. I assume we agree that we all should follow the law. Does my hon. Friend not accept the view of the House of Lords Committee about where our legal obligations start and finish? We do not have a legal obligation to pay £39 billion, and the basis of trade deals is to follow the rules and the law.

**Paul Blomfield:** I obviously agree with my hon. Friend that we should follow the law; there would not be much purpose to this place if we did not accept that premise.

The House of Lords Committee expressed an opinion. There are different opinions. I would probably accept that we do not need to pay all of that £39 billion. There are different views, and the hon. Member for Mansfield differentiated between some of them, but reneging on the entire £39 billion, as some Brexit extremists suggest we should, would put us in contravention of agreements.

**Steve Double:** Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, in the EU’s own words, nothing is agreed until everything is agreed? On that basis, we have not yet agreed to the £39 billion. We are not reneging on anything if we cannot come to an agreement with the EU.

**Paul Blomfield:** The hon. Gentleman knows that it was the last but one Brexit Secretary, himself an opponent of the Prime Minister’s deal, who agreed to the sequencing of the decisions, and who signed up to the £39 billion question.

I will move on to another aspect of the no-deal argument. It is important, because those who advocate no deal have said, “If we leave with no deal, it’s easy; we will just slip out on WTO terms. No problem at all.” I highlight the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham North, which echoed what the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam said in his opening remarks: WTO terms cover only a part of our relationship. They do not, for example, cover the critical relationships relating to security and the protection of this country in fighting crime and terrorism.

Even with regard to our trading relationship, there was a suggestion that we could slip into WTO terms easily, seamlessly, and without process, and that those terms are the default position for every member of the WTO. But there is not a member of the WTO that does not have additional trade agreements above and beyond those terms. Our current agreements with some 70 countries are through our membership of the European Union. They were negotiated bilaterally. It is worth noting that some time ago, when the Government’s White Paper talked about expanding our markets around the world, the Government rightly cited South Korea as an example. There have been huge developments in UK trade with South Korea since the EU signed a bilateral trade deal with South Korea.

Those arguing for an easy process have suggested that it will be simple to roll over the agreements in the brave new world, but they have already had to confront the harsh truth that some 20 countries, including allies whom they regularly point to—the United States, Australia and New Zealand—have objected to our simply rolling over agreements because they see an opportunity to gain a commercial advantage. I do not blame them; we would probably do the same in a different situation. The process of simply slipping into the WTO in the way that has been suggested bears no relation to the real situation.

I understand why the idea of no deal has gained in popularity; it is partly because it is a simple and straightforward proposition, but it is partly and very significantly the fault of the Prime Minister. She launched the meaningless mantra of “no deal is better than a bad deal” way back in January 2017 at Lancaster House, and she and members of the Government have repeated it endlessly. No wonder people think no deal is a viable option. She justified it by saying, “We would...be able to trade with Europe. We would be free to strike trade deals across the world.”

However, she failed to make it clear that no deal does not mean the status quo. In that sense, it is not like buying a house, which is how the former Brexit Secretary described it—as someone walking away, after a deal breaks down, with no less advantage than when they entered the negotiations. Walking away in the context of no deal means substantially damaging our position. Yes, it would mean in theory that we had the ability to trade with the EU, but not on the same terms as we currently do. The terms of seamless trade that countless supply chains and just-in-time production rely on would disappear.

Back then, the Prime Minister was happy to suggest that nothing would change in our trade relationship with Europe, but the truth is now out, and she has turned her own slogan on its head. She is now desperately going around the country, and within Parliament, saying that we have to accept her doomed deal because the alternative is no deal. She says that no deal would be a disaster. On that, at least, she is right, but the country deserves better than a choice between shrinking the economy by 4% under her deal and by 8% under no deal.

Clearly, we are in unprecedented times. The hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay said that the EU27 were trying to frustrate the process. What has frustrated the process more than anything has been the Government's inability to agree their own position. I have spent some time talking with politicians from across the political spectrum and across nations within the EU27. Time and again they have said, "We're sorry that the UK has chosen to leave the European Union. We wish you weren't leaving, but we recognise that you are. We would simply like to be able to negotiate with certainty, knowing what your country wants; and once there was agreement, we would like your Prime Minister to be able to deliver on that, even just within the framework of her own party." The war within that party has held back the negotiations more than any other factor.

It is pretty clear that the deal will be defeated tomorrow, but what then? The House has made it clear, against the Government's opposition, that the Prime Minister will have to return within three days with plan B, and cannot try to run the clock down any further. Governments who can no longer govern do not have a place. That is why we are calling for a general election. I will come to the point made by the hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard).

This is the central issue of our time. It is certainly the central issue of this Parliament. The Government have spent two years focused on it above everything. It has caused paralysis in other critical areas of economic and social policy. All the Government's energies have been focused on the deal, so if that deal is defeated tomorrow, the honourable thing—the right thing, and the thing that would have happened in years gone by—would be for the Government to step down. Owing to the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011, it is, as my hon. Friend the Member for Blackley and Broughton pointed out, more complex. After the deal is defeated we will therefore, without wasting time, seek to move a vote of no confidence in the Government.

If the Government run scared from facing the voters, and I understand why they might after last June—

**Tommy Sheppard:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Paul Blomfield:** I will.

**Tommy Sheppard:** May I ask for a little more clarity? The hon. Gentleman says that if the deal is rejected, Labour will seek a vote at some point. Will he give us an indication of the Front-Bench thinking on that? Crucially, would Labour give the Government time to present a plan B before it made a decision on a no-confidence vote?

**Paul Blomfield:** I anticipated that intervention, and the hon. Gentleman will anticipate my response. I said that we would waste no time. I am not going to share with him exactly the way in which that decision will unfold.

I hope that Government Members might recognise at that point that a general election would be a way of resolving the issue, but I recognise that they might not, after their experience last June. I say to those who have signed petitions for a second referendum—we have debated similar petitions previously, and at much greater length—that at that point, if there is to be a general election, we will look at all the options available, including a further referendum.

In that context, it is profoundly irresponsible of the Prime Minister to go around the country rallying the people against Parliament, for the Foreign Secretary to attack the Speaker of the House of Commons in the way that he did on Friday, or for the Transport Secretary to say that if the Prime Minister's deal is not accepted it will lead to a

"less tolerant society, a more nationalistic nation...open...to extremist populist political forces".

Their efforts would have been better spent condemning those who are driving intolerance within our politics, and presenting a united front against that sort of extremism. Briefings to the Sunday papers about a coup in Parliament are clearly intended to set voters against MPs, but we in this place should not allow Parliament to be intimidated.

The truth is that there are no easy choices facing us over the next few weeks, and there are probably no good outcomes. We have to make the best of where we are. Those are the difficulties that Parliament is grappling with. We need calm heads. We should not be ramping up the rhetoric, but should recognise the consequences of all the choices that we face. That is what the Opposition are committed to doing, in the interests of all the people we represent.

6.45 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Kwasi Kwarteng):** I said to myself, I think about halfway through the debate, that I would keep my remarks brief, because we have had an extensive debate, we have had excellent speeches, and frankly we have rehearsed many of these points—

**Geraint Davies (in the Chair):** May I say that you have only 45 minutes?

**Kwasi Kwarteng:** I am fully aware of the timescale. You are lucky, Mr Davies, that my hour-long speech will have to be curtailed. I wanted to make brief remarks because many of these points have been rehearsed at length in debates gone by, and I am sure that they will be in the future.



[Kwasi Kwarteng]

I am pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Paul Scully) introduced the debate on behalf of the Petitions Committee. He read out the petitions and the views of hundreds of thousands of people. It was striking, as he pointed out, that all those viewpoints were, essentially, contradictory. There is a full and wide range of opinion in the country—as evidenced by the petitions—as there are divergent views in the House of Commons. In the Chamber today, with only about nine MPs, we have a wide range of views. We have people who support Brexit but do not like the deal, people who support Brexit but do like the deal, and people who do not like the deal and do not like Brexit. The permutations seem endless, and that is with only nine MPs.

I want to make it clear that that degree of divergence in view—the very different opinions expressed right across the country—shows the level of confusion that there might well be if this exercise of Brexit is not concluded in an orderly fashion. As one would expect, my view, and that of the Government, is that the best way of delivering Brexit in a timely, orderly manner is through the deal in the withdrawal agreement. It is not true to say that it does not deliver Brexit. That is a grotesque exaggeration and caricature of the deal.

I fought very hard alongside many MPs, some of whom are in the Chamber, for Brexit in 2016. I was very clear about the three things that I wanted from Brexit. I wanted to see a drastic curtailment, if not an end, to the club membership—the £10 billion net a year that we were paying indefinitely, and that would have increased as we entered a new budget period. The deal completely prevents that. There is no £39 billion figure in the agreement. That is a snapshot, or a shorthand expression.

It is a lot of money, but it actually equates to only four years of net payments. We were in the EU, or the European Economic Community, for 46 years. Everyone understands that to leave such a commitment—to leave that union after such a long period of membership—will take time. The deal recognises that. It curtails the length of the implementation period. It curtails the money. The £39 billion figure is often quoted, but that is against £10 billion every year from today until kingdom come.

Importantly, one of the big issues in the Brexit referendum was freedom of movement from the EU. Many people, particularly among ethnic minority communities, were saying, “How is it that someone from the EU who speaks no English at all can come to Britain without a job, while my relatives from Commonwealth countries outside the EU do not have that opportunity?” Many others in my constituency, including builders and people working in construction, also mentioned freedom of movement. I remember coming out of Staines station and meeting someone who said that he would vote for Brexit because he had not had a wage increase for 15 years. A clever economist might say that that was simplistic, but that was the view—that was how people felt that their professional experience was developing. Freedom of movement was a big issue.

The withdrawal agreement—the deal that we need to vote on—is not perfect; like any deal in history, it includes some give and take. However, it substantially delivers on putting an end to freedom of movement, and that is why we are introducing an immigration Bill.

As I recall, the third big issue in the campaign was about the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice: would it continue to be sovereign over this Parliament? On that issue, too, the withdrawal agreement delivers. It is a good deal, and it largely delivers on what we campaigned for as Brexiteers.

I say to my Brexit colleagues, as the Prime Minister said in her speech today in Stoke, that there is a marked and strong current of opinion in the House of Commons that wants to subvert or reverse Brexit. I know that those are strong words, and people will say, “Oh, we just want to scrutinise legislation.” Forget all that—it is clear to a child that there are MPs in this House who want to reverse the referendum. They have openly said that the referendum result was a disaster and have pledged to overturn it, but they know that the only way that they can do that is by means of a second referendum. It is not that they like the idea of a second referendum because they want to test the robustness of the decision or celebrate the exercise of democracy, but that the way to reverse Brexit is very clear: it has to be done through a second referendum, to give it the authority that the first had. I do not know about our Scottish National party friends, but it would take a very bold remainder to say that the House of Commons could simply unilaterally disregard the referendum.

If one wants to stay in the EU, one has to accept that the only way of doing so is with a second referendum. Hon. Members who sit on the Conservative Benches or who represent leave constituencies have detected a hardening of public opinion, however. As a Member who represents a leave constituency, I concur: even if a second referendum took place, I do not believe that the remainers would get their wish. Nevertheless, I fully understand that that is their only shot—their only conduit to reversing something that they think is a disaster—so it is the route they want to pursue. The Government’s view is that that would be wholly disruptive, divisive and simply a cheat, because it would be an attempt to circumvent the decision.

The vast majority of Members of this House voted to have the referendum, voted to trigger article 50 and voted to pass the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018. Let us be under no illusions: the debate on a second referendum is simply about trying to reverse the result of the first. The Government simply cannot accept that. We want to move forward and conclude Brexit in an orderly and managed fashion—I was almost going to say an elegant fashion, but I think that that would be pushing things too far.

**Tommy Sheppard:** If the Minister is so convinced that he and the Brexiteers, as he calls them, would win a second referendum, why is he so scared of letting the people have a say?

**Kwasi Kwarteng:** What was interesting about the hon. Gentleman’s speech was that about halfway through it, I realised I had heard it all in a speech he gave before Christmas. It was eloquent and well put, but I have heard all the arguments before.

I am not scared of a second referendum; I am simply trying to focus people’s minds on what it means. It is being proposed not by great exponents of democracy or champions of the people’s voice, but almost exclusively by people who are on the record as saying that the first referendum result was a disaster, that they want to reverse it and that they fully accept that the only way of

getting their cherished aim of staying in the EU is with a second referendum. I reject that approach because it tries to subvert the result of the 2016 referendum. We can pretend that it is a wonderful exercise of democracy, but it is not; it is trying to go against the clear and decisive vote of the people in 2016.

The hon. Gentleman says that opinion polls have changed, but they have not changed that much. And as my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) points out, they are the very opinion polls that said the day before the 2016 referendum that remain would win by 10 points, and that got things consistently wrong throughout the whole referendum campaign. I do not believe that the second premise of the argument made by the hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard)—that somehow there has been a marked shift in public opinion—should precipitate a referendum.

**Graham Stringer:** I agree completely with the Minister's point about the motivation for a second referendum, but some of the people who want to subvert the 2016 referendum result have another string to their bow: attrition. By extending article 50, they want to extend the whole process until the House or the public should get weary of it. Will the Minister give us an assurance that under no circumstances will the Government introduce a statutory instrument that changes the date for leaving the European Union that was set in the European Union (Withdrawal) Act?

**Kwasi Kwarteng:** The hon. Gentleman is right to raise that issue. My understanding is that the Government will not seek to extend article 50. That is the Government's view, but in the light of what happened last week and the fact that we are hearing stories about a potential motion of the House to overturn Standing Order No. 14, it may well be that the House will take a collective view. The shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield), said something to the effect that the House would not countenance no deal—I may be quoting him loosely. That means that the House would take it upon itself to introduce legislation or a motion to bind or strongly encourage the Government to extend article 50.

I know the Government's position, but given that last week, extraordinarily to me, the amendment of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve) was made and was allowed to be made, who knows what will happen? The Prime Minister is quite right to suggest—indeed, it is a statement of fact—that Brexit itself is in danger.

If the House votes down the deal tomorrow, we will have about two and a half months. The House may take it upon itself to stop no deal; I suggest to the hon. Member for Blackley and Broughton (Graham Stringer) that enough MPs have said publicly that under no circumstances will they countenance no deal. Those people will not simply sit on their hands watching the sand running down the egg-timer until no deal happens on 29 March. They are bright people, skilled in parliamentary debate and procedure, and they will do all they can to frustrate no deal—they have pretty much said that, and their actions have shown it. I feel that a lot of my Brexiteer colleagues are showing remarkable complacency in thinking that all we have to do is sit and wait for no deal to take place. What I am saying is that nobody knows.

I think that the best, clearest, most elegant and simplest way of delivering Brexit is simply to vote for the deal. The deal is not perfect—no deal is perfect—but it takes us forward to the second stage of negotiations with the EU. It means that we leave the EU, as the hon. Member for Edinburgh East suggested. He is honest: he says he does not want to leave the EU, which is why he will vote against the deal. It is extraordinary for Brexiteer colleagues to say that they want Brexit but will vote down the deal by marching through the Lobby with people whose sole political aim is to frustrate Brexit. Members who advocate Brexit will, metaphorically, link arm in arm with people who want to frustrate the whole project. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield and my hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Outwood (Andrea Jenkyns) have radically different views on the nature of Brexit, its purpose and its good effects, as she and I see them, but they will probably go through the same Lobby. Frankly, this is a crazy situation.

**Andrea Jenkyns:** The reason we are likely to go through the same Lobby is, quite frankly, because the Government have failed to listen time and again. Behind closed doors we have all been having meetings with the Whip and the Prime Minister and expressing our concerns for months, but they have fallen on deaf ears. With respect, it is no wonder that we are in this situation, because the Government have put a bad deal to the House.

**Kwasi Kwarteng:** That illustrates exactly what I was going to say—in a funny way, it actually makes my argument for me. Two groups of people who think diametrically opposed things have come together to vote down the deal. One group thinks that by voting down the deal it will get to stay in the EU; another thinks that by voting down the deal it will get a perfect Brexit. Both groups cannot be right. They are rational, intelligent people on both sides, yet they think diametrically opposed things will happen, which suggests to me that the deal is probably the best way forward. The unholy alliance between principled Brexiteers—many are close friends of mine, whom I respect—and people who have openly said that they would vote down Brexit shows me very clearly that the deal is the only rational and sensible way forward.

**Andrea Jenkyns:** It takes a lot for somebody who has always been loyal to the party over the past decade or so—and since I have been a Member—to vote against the Government. I have never done so, like many of my colleagues who have resigned as Parliamentary Private Secretaries. Let us not forget that it is the remain colleagues in our party who have been thwarting Brexit and who have voted against the Government so far. To return to my previous point, you have not provided the House with a deal that actually represents Brexit. So many constituents have written to me to say, “Please vote that deal down.” It is you, the Government and the Prime Minister who have done the job of uniting Conservative Members against your deal.

**Geraint Davies (in the Chair):** Just to clarify, obviously it is not me.

**Kwasi Kwarteng:** I urge the hon. Lady and her Brexiteer colleagues to vote for the deal. I am not speaking as a Government Minister but as a Brexiteer, and my real worry is that Brexit will be abandoned because the Brexiteers are divided.

[*Kwasi Kwarteng*]

I am a historian and someone who loves reading about history. There are countless examples of situations where people have won what they were fighting for and then simply fallen out—there have been divisions. That is a very grave danger for Brexit: having won the argument and the referendum in 2016, we see the Brexit side quite fractured. As a Brexiteer, I support the deal. My hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam, as a Brexiteer, supports the deal. Yet there are other Brexiteers here in Westminster Hall, not to mention in the wider House of Commons, who support Brexit but feel that they cannot support the deal. I urge all Brexiteers, and remainers who want to see their manifesto commitments fulfilled—the entire Labour party, according to its manifesto—to vote for the deal in order to move forward. Any other outcome, as a result of voting down the deal, would add to the chaos and confusion, and it would imperil Brexit.

Thank you very much for your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I thank all hon. Members for their excellent contributions to this very high-quality debate.

7.5 pm

**Paul Scully:** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship for the second half of the debate, Mr Davies. I thank the Minister for his excellent speech, and I thank everybody for their interesting and informative contributions, which have been made in such a constructive, passionate and respectful way. We have had a lot of passion running high around the country and there has been harassment and bullying from both sides. My right hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry), my hon. Friends the Members for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) and for Morley and Outwood (Andrea Jenkyns) and others have suffered harassment, bullying and worse. It is possible to engage constructively, passionately and respectfully with people with polar opposite views.

When I was on platforms arguing for Brexit, people said to me, “Well, what does your Brexit look like?” I would say, “Actually, I can tell you what mine looks like,

but that precludes you from having any say in it whatsoever if that’s how it’s going to be. We need to debate this and discuss it.” A number of people said, “Well, if only it was like the Common Market rather than the extra bits we have had over the last 20 years.” Ironically, the original Chequers White Paper was closer to the Common Market. It is important to remember that this deal is not even Chequers—a lot of that comes in the second half of the negotiations.

We know that a referendum is unlikely to resolve anything. We cannot agree on the question, the timetable or even how we would approach it in this place, so I cannot see how a referendum would work. Revoking article 50 because people find Brexit too difficult—they put it in the “too difficult” box—is not something that people will live with in this country. The thing that has saddened me in this House over the past couple of years is its paucity of ambition for our country to take what will be good about Brexit, whether that be reclaiming control or future trading arrangements. We know there will be difficulties to get to that place in the next few months, but I am confident and optimistic that we can do that. The Minister was absolutely right to say that there are two sides and one is going to be wrong: it will lose, and what happens will be the diametric opposite of what they want.

I will not be a heroic loser. If I am wrong and have blinked too early, I will be the first to shake hands with my colleagues who have spoken. I want to ensure that we leave the EU in an orderly fashion, and I thank everyone again.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That the House has considered e-petitions 229963, 221747 and 235185 relating to leaving the EU without a withdrawal agreement, 232984 and 231461 relating to holding a further referendum on leaving the EU, and 226509 and 236261 relating to not leaving the EU.

7.8 pm

*Sitting adjourned.*



# Westminster Hall

Tuesday 15 January 2019

[MR ADRIAN BAILEY *in the Chair*]

## BACKBENCH BUSINESS

### Recognition of Fibromyalgia as a Disability

9.30 am

**Toby Perkins** (Chesterfield) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the recognition of fibromyalgia as a disability.

It is a pleasure to open the debate and to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bailey. I am delighted that so many hon. Members have come to support the raising of awareness of a crucial issue. I thank the Backbench Business Committee for selecting the topic for debate, and particularly the hon. Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess), for his support in obtaining and promoting the debate.

I want to pay tribute to two of my constituents, Adrienne and Leann Lakin of Chesterfield, and all the fibromyalgia campaigners who bang the drum relentlessly to ensure that sufferers' voices are heard. Many intend to come to witness the debate. Their campaigning has been instrumental in persuading other hon. Members to attend or to speak out about fibromyalgia. I was proud to present a petition in Parliament, which reached more than 100,000 signatures on change.org, calling for fibromyalgia to be recognised as a disability and for greater awareness of and investment in treatment. I recognise that the context of the debate spans the responsibilities of both the Department for Work and Pensions and the Department of Health and Social Care, and I hope that the Minister will be able to pass on to her counterpart the topics raised in the debate that do not fall within her purview.

Many in this country are ignorant about what fibromyalgia is, but it is a condition that many people suffer from. It is one of a group of conditions often referred to as invisible illnesses, but sufferers live with its consequences every day of their lives.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds** (Torfaen) (Lab): I warmly congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate. His use of the word "invisible" was telling. Besides raising awareness, is not the debate about getting to the stage where fibromyalgia is diagnosed more easily?

**Toby Perkins:** That is an excellent point, to which I shall return. One of the major problems that fibromyalgia sufferers experience is that it takes so long for their condition to be diagnosed. I shall talk more about what we can do to get earlier diagnosis and better understanding throughout general practice.

Fibromyalgia sufferers experience many different kinds of symptoms. Often there is a heightened sensitivity to pain and extreme muscle stiffness. They often struggle to sleep, which exacerbates their muscular difficulties, and experience extreme fatigue. Sufferers also experience cognitive difficulties—not just headaches but problems

with mental processes, known as fibro-fog, and an inability to process things as they did previously. As if those things were not enough, fibromyalgia sufferers can be struck down with irritable bowel syndrome too. A panoply of symptoms means that people have a terrible time. However, often, when those symptoms are dealt with in general practice they are masked as other conditions. Many time-consuming treatments are undergone, but they do not get to the root of things.

**Paul Blomfield** (Sheffield Central) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate. Sara, a young mother in my constituency, has fibromyalgia, triggered by the birth of the youngest of her three children. She describes a pain so severe that she cannot even hug her kids. She says the personal independence payment assessment process stripped her of her dignity, because of a lack of understanding. Does my hon. Friend agree that there is a need to address unintentional ignorance and a lack of knowledge about what a debilitating illness fibromyalgia is?

**Toby Perkins:** I absolutely agree. My hon. Friend has given a powerful example. Meeting someone with fibromyalgia—this is even more true of those who live with a sufferer—we get to understand what it is like to walk a mile in their shoes. One reason why we asked the DWP to respond to the debate is that, on the face of it, sufferers do not appear to be very ill, but when we hear testimony such as that of my hon. Friend's constituent we may understand what it is really like.

**Wayne David** (Caerphilly) (Lab): Like other hon. Members, I have met constituents at my advice surgery who have complained that their fibromyalgia has not been taken seriously. All too often, not only GPs and clinicians but the Department for Work and Pensions among others see it simply as aches and pains. It is important that, as my hon. Friend has been doing, we develop the argument that it is not something to be dismissed easily. It is far more than that.

**Toby Perkins:** I could not agree more with my hon. Friend. I think that there are many hon. Members here for the debate, on such an important day in Parliament when there are many alternative demands on our time, because we have had a powerful experience of what our constituents go through.

**Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Does my hon. Friend agree that the fluctuating nature of fibromyalgia means that the DWP system is not sensitive enough to respond to the challenges faced by those who experience the condition?

**Toby Perkins:** I agree, and I think that that hints at a wider problem in the benefits system assessment regime, which finds it difficult to deal with fluctuating conditions, whether mental health conditions or muscular problems along the lines of fibromyalgia, that are better on some days, or manageable with a huge amount of medication, so that people can get out of the house and may appear better than usual on the assessment day.

**Paul Masterton** (East Renfrewshire) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate. My constituent Susan says that the pain she suffers is so bad that the

[Paul Masterton]

only time she does not feel it is when she is asleep. She mentions that it is not just that the condition itself is not picked up properly within disability assessment, but that it exacerbates other conditions she has, making them even more extreme. Does the hon. Gentleman agree with that point about wider understanding of the effects of the illness within the disability system?

**Toby Perkins:** I entirely agree. The impact on the rest of the family includes caring responsibilities that fall on them, restricting their ability to develop their earning potential. The consequence is that the entire family of a fibromyalgia sufferer will suffer too. It is a powerful point.

Estimates suggest that as many as one in 20 people suffer from fibromyalgia. Since I secured the debate I have been contacted by many MPs—there have been many interventions in the debate—and by constituents and other members of the public. People say that at last someone is talking about the condition, which they or their partner have suffered with for so long, feeling that no one understood. The feeling of being misunderstood is familiar to many fibromyalgia sufferers. Often employers are baffled as to why on some days an apparently healthy member of staff is the life and soul of the party, but on others cannot turn up for work because they are crippled by their condition. By the same token, those employees often feel tremendous guilt that a condition that decimates their ability to contribute keeps striking them down. That often leads them to conclude that they must go into work even though they are in extreme pain, frequently making themselves even more ill in the process. It truly is a vicious circle.

Fibromyalgia sufferers are also misunderstood, as we have already heard, by those who assess them for benefits such as PIP and employment and support allowance, as their conditions are variable and can often be managed in the very short term. Many fibromyalgia sufferers have taken pills to help to manage the pain and support them through an ESA assessment, only to discover that the assessment outcome bears little relationship to their daily experience of living with fibromyalgia.

I have had constituents speak to me about the fact that the tablets they took to enable them to get in a taxi to travel to their assessment and get through that assessment for an hour meant that, when they got home, they were in bed for days afterwards. I think they thought to themselves, “If only the assessor could see me now, half an hour or an hour after the assessment, they would see why I’m unable to work. I’ve been able to get myself through that assessment, trying to comply with the system, but to my own disadvantage.”

**Jonathan Edwards** (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): The hon. Gentleman is making an extremely powerful speech. As I will say in my contribution, my wife is a fibromyalgia sufferer. Is it not the case that stressful experiences actually exacerbate the condition, leading to hugely damaging flare-ups?

**Toby Perkins:** That point is spot on, and made from the powerful perspective of someone who knows what it is like to live with someone experiencing fibromyalgia. I will come on in a moment to some of the other things

that are believed to be triggers for fibromyalgia, but the hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. We all know—it is one of our worries about the assessment regime within benefits—the stress of that process: the stress of going through the assessment, of believing that benefits will be taken away or of wondering how they will feel the next day. It is an incredibly unhelpful situation where people’s income is tied to their being ill, so they wake up almost hoping to be ill to justify the income, while simultaneously wishing they were better because they want to be able to contribute. That is something that is known much more widely in our benefits system, but fibromyalgia sufferers are very familiar with it.

**Mary Glendon** (North Tyneside) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate and on the awareness day that he hosted last year, which was a very informative and moving event. Given all that has been said about sufferers, does he agree that, without the help of support groups such as the one in Newcastle, people with fibromyalgia would perhaps not have any outside support to help them with benefit queries or managing their condition? Those are voluntary groups that have been set up, but should we have more statutory groups to help people with the condition?

**Toby Perkins:** I pay tribute to the voluntary group that my hon. Friend speaks of. We all recognise the incredibly important role that voluntary groups of that sort play, and it is true that, when someone has a condition that is so misunderstood, speaking to other people who have experienced it and to families supporting people who have experienced it is important. I think we are also all conscious that, in an era where local government funding has been cut, often charitable and voluntary groups are the ones seeing their funding cut. Those groups often do not require a lot of funding, but a small amount of core funding enables them to function. That is something that many of us are concerned about.

I am conscious that there are a number of people who have put in to speak. I am very happy to take interventions, but I also do not want to cut into other people’s time, so I will crack on a little bit. Obviously, if there are other pressing issues, hon. Members are free to raise them.

It is hardly surprising that so many employers and assessment staff misunderstand fibromyalgia when, as has been reflected on already, it is so often misdiagnosed by the medical profession. Most fibromyalgia sufferers will live with the condition for over a year before it is diagnosed, and it is often the diagnosis of last resort, which means that sufferers will often have gone through many painful months of ruling out various other explanations and taking other kinds of drugs not relevant to their circumstances before the true cause of their pain is articulated.

**Liz Twist** (Blaydon) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree with my constituent, Karen Mitchell, who has fibromyalgia, that medical help and support is very variable, that there is great variation in how well fibromyalgia is recognised and that we need to ensure that consistent and helpful treatment is available?

**Toby Perkins:** I do. My hon. Friend will be pleased to know that I will be hot-footing it from this debate to health questions, where I have tabled a question about

diagnosis of fibromyalgia in general practice. Other hon. Members might wish to leap on the back of that question and make their own contributions, and the one that my hon. Friend has just made is powerful. There is variability of diagnosis, and I have met a number of different sufferers who have had different kinds of treatment and, as a result of the treatment they have had, present very differently now. That is something I have seen with my own eyes.

Even with all the medical advancements that have been made, fibromyalgia is a condition without a known cause or a known cure. There are many factors thought to contribute to the condition, including abnormal processing of pain due to chemical changes in the nervous system or imbalances in chemicals in the brain such as serotonin, dopamine and noradrenaline. The condition often appears to run in families, suggesting that there is a genetic predisposition to it and, as we have just heard from the hon. Member for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr (Jonathan Edwards), stressful events can be a trigger.

Many people who are concerned that general practice training, which by its very nature is general, is inadequate on fibromyalgia and that that is a cause of the delays in diagnosis. The petition also calls for greater research into fibromyalgia. With over 70,000 diagnosed patients having made claims for PIP, it is clear that this is a widespread problem, but that number is estimated to understate the number of fibromyalgia sufferers by at least 90%.

**Rachael Maskell:** Does my hon. Friend agree that it is vital that there is a clinical specialist in fibromyalgia within each health economy, whether that is led by a general practitioner or a specialist practitioner, to support people with fibromyalgia right through the pathway in accessing services and in managing their own healthcare?

**Toby Perkins:** I recognise that, and I also recognise how stretched our national health service is more generally and the need for us to have that specialist help as early as possible. One thing that is becoming clear is that the delay in diagnosis allows the condition to get worse, which adds to the cost of treating it further down the line. Anything that can be done to speed up the diagnosis will have many economic benefits, as well as medical ones, down the line.

While the suffering and economic cost of treating and supporting fibromyalgia sufferers is so large and the knowledge base on what causes it and how to treat it is so small, this is an area that is ripe for further research. In the Library note we received before the debate, we were told that in the past five years, funding applications for around £1.8 million worth of research were approved. In a single year—I appreciate why this is a false comparison, but it provides some context none the less—the UK spends over £400 million on cancer research. Of course, I do not for a second underestimate the value of research into cancer, but given the problems that fibromyalgia causes and how long patients will live with it, surely we should be spending more than 0.5% of the investment into cancer research on researching the grave and widespread menace that is fibromyalgia.

**Scott Mann (North Cornwall) (Con):** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Toby Perkins:** What can we do to raise awareness of fibromyalgia? I think we will hear from the hon. Gentleman particularly on that subject.

**Scott Mann:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for bringing this debate to the Chamber; as the number of people here shows, many of us have been written to by our constituents. I did a little bit of research, and it seems to me that the USA and Sweden both have good research teams looking at this condition and how it might be helped. Does he think the UK Government should look at what Sweden and America are doing on this particular disease to see how we might be able to help out?

**Toby Perkins:** I do. While Sweden and America have very different kinds of healthcare system, the hon. Gentleman is right that they both have world-leading research capabilities. Clearly, there is a big question for future UK medical research about our leaving the European Union; a great deal of medical research is much easier to do when we have 28 countries paying into it, rather than just one. However, whether collectively with other countries or individually, we have absolutely world-class medical research capabilities in this country and we should contribute towards the global knowledge base on fibromyalgia. The hon. Gentleman makes an important point in saying that.

What can we do to raise awareness of fibromyalgia? Today's debate is the latest step towards doing just that. We have already had the presentation of the petition, and the fibro campaigners also held a reception in Portcullis House. Around 25 MPs came along to hear more about what life with fibromyalgia is like, and I was delighted that Adrienne Lakin and Billy Mansell were able to present at that reception and to get across to Members a little bit about the impact that it has had. The debate is another important step, and we look forward to hearing more about the Government's strategy on recognising the effects of fibromyalgia on sufferers and what more they will do to raise awareness.

The petition was also specific about recognising fibromyalgia as a disability under the Equality Act 2010, which is an important and contentious issue. Providers of public services are required to make accommodations for people with disabilities. Many fibromyalgia sufferers would qualify as disabled in their own right, but each sufferer has to prove their own disability. Given that, as we have heard, the condition can take more than a year to diagnose in the first place, it is often quite a bit after that before sufferers are actually recognised as disabled. While many people manage their symptoms and go on to enjoy productive lives, the invisibility of fibromyalgia and the difficulty of diagnosis means that many patients are not recognised as disabled and are often invisible sufferers. As we have heard, that has a knock-on impact on their families, who often attempt to manage caring responsibilities alongside their responsibilities as breadwinners, trying to keep food on the table.

Once diagnosed, fibromyalgia sufferers would like the Government and the Department for Work and Pensions to recognise them as disabled under the Equality Act, ensuring that they get any support that they need to lead productive lives. Of course different patients will have different attributes and needs, but it is a chronic



[Toby Perkins]

condition that will not get better. Ensuring that they do not have to fight to be taken seriously would be of real value. We heard previously that fibromyalgia may affect as many as 5% of the population, yet less than 0.2% receive PIP due to having it.

I am delighted to set the ball rolling on this important debate and look forward to hearing the perspectives of other hon. Members. Fibromyalgia sufferers need greater certainty, greater research and greater awareness. Collectively, we as a country need to do more to ensure that we not only understand but support them in their illness and in their desire to lead productive lives.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Adrian Bailey (in the Chair):** Before I call the next speaker, I make it quite clear that I will call the Front-Bench spokespeople at 10.30 am. A lot of Back Benchers want to contribute—I am told 10—so I suggest an advisory time limit of four minutes at this stage. However, I will probably drop that to a hard time limit if the earlier speakers take up an excessive amount of time.

9.53 am

**Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con):** I congratulate the hon. Member for Chesterfield (Toby Perkins) on raising this subject. Frankly, until he became interested, we had not spent too much time on it. Over the years there have been battles to hear voices on autism, dyslexia and ME, but it has taken the hon. Gentleman's raising the subject to get so many colleagues here this morning.

We all know people who, when asked how they are, go into great detail about having this and that wrong with them. We call them hypochondriacs. However, there is a great danger that people with fibromyalgia are somehow not recognised. It is a rotten illness. Some 2.1 million people suffer from it—one in 20 people—and women are seven times more likely than men to experience it. It is awful.

I say to my hon. Friend the Minister that the hon. Member for Chesterfield should be declared the fibromyalgia champion, on a non-party basis. Now that he has started the ball rolling, he should lead on this subject and we should follow. I will not repeat many of the things he said, but I absolutely agree on the importance of recognising fibromyalgia as a disability under the Equality Act and understanding the debilitating and long-term effects on sufferers' lives. For those living with this painful chronic disease, lack of awareness leads not only to many suffering in silence, but to their often receiving inadequate support and treatment.

I also say to my hon. Friend the Minister that I found out what we are doing in Southend, with regard to fibromyalgia provision, and it is not brilliant. We have a chronic fatigue syndrome service across Essex, which also takes referrals from GPs for other forms of fatigue, not only CFS or ME. There is not a single streamlined resource in the Southend area, although three departments provide a service to fibromyalgia patients, meaning that they have different routes to access services. However, it is not really a niche service. I am sure that other hon. Members have had similar experiences.

We have heard about the waiting time for diagnoses and the lack of understanding of GPs. It is also important to ensure that patients themselves have a better understanding of the condition. As the hon. Member for Chesterfield said, we are unfortunately struggling to find a cure and to understand how this happens. I highlight the importance of research in improving the lives of fibromyalgia patients. So much about the condition is still unknown. We do not even have a clear understanding of its cause and, more critically, there is no known cure. We should certainly invest in research. With the right understanding, investment and attention, we can do more to ensure that fibromyalgia gets the treatment it deserves.

I have the highest regard for my hon. Friend the Minister. She will not perform any miracles today. She will agree with all colleagues who speak. However, I am getting a little frustrated about action. That is what I am really asking for. The Health and Social Care Secretary spoke about the 10-year plan. Will my hon. Friend say something in that regard, and cheer us all up by saying that the Government take this illness seriously and have a plan on which they intend to deliver?

9.57 am

**Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bailey. Under the Equality Act 2010, only cancer, HIV and multiple sclerosis are automatically recognised as disabilities. For all other debilitating conditions—including visual and hearing impairments, motor neurone disease, epilepsy, dementia and cardiovascular disease—in order to be defined as a disability under the Act, they must be proven to be a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on the sufferer's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. No doubt many campaigners for the conditions I have named, as well as many others, would like those conditions to be automatically recognised as disabilities, but as the debate is on fibromyalgia I will concentrate on that.

Before I was elected to this place, I worked as a clinical scientist for the NHS and was also a workplace rep for Unite the union. As a rep I represented a colleague with fibromyalgia when the Pennine Acute Hospitals NHS Trust was formed by a merger of four hospitals: North Manchester Hospital, where we worked; the Royal Oldham Hospital; Fairfield General Hospital in Bury; and Rochdale Infirmary. Inevitably, as happens in a merger of that kind, services were rationalised across the four sites, with the main pathology lab where we worked relocated to the Royal Oldham Hospital.

My colleague had a great deal of difficulty with the relocation because of the extra traveling time and because she would no longer be working near her home. She was in constant pain and was just about managing to hold down a job working close to her home, without the added stress and pain of traveling an extra 14 miles every day. Sadly, her manager was unsympathetic and seemed to have difficulty in recognising that she suffered from an extremely debilitating condition. No concessions at all were made for her condition, and she was forced to make the move, which caused her additional pain.

Had fibromyalgia been recognised as a disability, the NHS, as my colleague's employer, would have been obliged by law, under the Equality Act, to make reasonable adjustments to accommodate her condition and keep

her in work. That could have involved allowing her to work shorter hours, allowing for extra rest breaks or even finding her alternative work on the North Manchester Hospital site so that she did not have to travel. Her case emphasises why it is so important that fibromyalgia is recognised as a disability; so that it becomes legally incumbent on employers to make reasonable adjustments.

Sadly, that person is not alone. I have had at least one constituent who has had to leave her job because of this condition. Louise-Ann Wilshaw contacted me last week and asked me to attend this debate. She told me that she had had a very tough year being off sick from work and eventually having to resign because of the debilitating effects of the condition. At just 45 years old, she says that her future seems very bleak. She is uncertain whether she will ever work again. She is also struggling with accepting and learning to cope with her illness and having to support herself financially. Illustrating the effects of her illness on memory and concentration—the fibro-fog, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Toby Perkins) referred—she finished her email to me by apologising for any spelling mistakes that she might have made.

Many of those who have to leave work because of their experience of fibromyalgia often have trouble accessing the relevant benefits. Assessment for ESA and PIP depends not on a person being diagnosed with a particular health condition or disability, but on how their health condition or disability affects what they can and cannot do, as determined by a work capability assessment or PIP assessment. We need to do more to support those affected by fibromyalgia. For many, acknowledging their disability as a disability would be a great start.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Adrian Bailey (in the Chair):** Order. I call Andrea Jenkyns, who has a four-minute advisory time limit. After her speech I will impose a three-minute time limit.

10.1 am

**Andrea Jenkyns (Morley and Outwood) (Con):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bailey.

I cannot remember a day without pain in more than 15 years. When I was first diagnosed with fibromyalgia, it was less understood than it is today. We have come on in leaps and bounds. Fifteen years ago, it was felt to be very much a condition in someone's head, but it is much more widely understood today, so we are moving in the right direction. I thank the hon. Member for Chesterfield (Toby Perkins) for securing the debate, which is important not only to raise awareness but to ensure that we get more research in this area.

I shall speak briefly about what it is like, on a daily basis, to live with this condition and then say a little about the current legislation and what I think could be done to help sufferers a lot more. The hon. Gentleman discussed some of the symptoms. The widespread pain is one of the worst things. I am talking about waking up in the morning and being bent over with pain. You feel like you are 80 because every muscle in your body is in pain, and that continues throughout the day. I have found that the medication provided really zonks me out. It causes me to have even more memory lapses, which in our profession is not good. You do not want to be feeling sleepy all the time.

It is a good job that I have kept my sense of humour about this. I remember one occasion back in 2015, when I was newly elected and a guest on one of the political programmes. Even to this day—three years on from being elected—I get very nervous when I know that I have to speak in a debate or do a media appearance, because I never know when the fibro-fog is going to come on. I remember that during that political programme, I could not think of a word as basic as “economy”, and what other word is there for economy? I do not know whether anybody else can think of one. So I was there, with the cameras on me, and I just wanted the ground to open up and swallow me, but I just laughed it off and dealt with it.

On another occasion, I was at a supermarket, unloading everything at the till—I had a whole week's worth of shopping and baby stuff—and I completely forgot my PIN. The way I have dealt with that problem since is that, just as in “Who Wants to be a Millionaire?” you can phone a friend, I phone my mum, when I have that memory lapse, to remind me of my PINs.

Joking aside, the lack of sleep is an issue as well. Last night I had three hours' sleep, and that is a regular occurrence. But I feel very lucky. My sister has multiple sclerosis. She is only 10 years older than me and is blind in one eye and losing the sight in her other eye, but she is a real trooper and runs her own business. I do think that the way we approach things in life can help. I am very lucky, in that I do not suffer with the depression side of fibromyalgia, and I think that is a real crux of it, so I would like to ask for more support for the depression elements of it. What I find is that each day is a struggle. I just keep focused and keep busy; I am probably living off adrenaline. When you get home in the evening, you collapse into bed and then, when you stop blocking it out, you realise what pain you were in. Then there is that vicious circle of lack of sleep and the cycle begins again. The fibro-fog, extreme tiredness, extreme pain and trouble remembering things are the big things for me.

Trauma can bring the condition on. I think that when I lost my dad, that made the situation worse. As the hon. Member for Chesterfield rightly said, stress can make things much worse. I had a constituent who lost two young babies to cancer. That is how her condition was brought on, and she has struggled since.

I shall wrap up by saying this. There is provision under the Equality Act 2010, but it is on a case-by-basis. I think that is right, because everybody is different, but we need to ensure that fibromyalgia is more recognised and that there is greater support, better medication, which does not zone people out, and better support for depression. Also, the physical treatment is not just about physiotherapy; deep tissue massage is brilliant, but people cannot get that on the NHS. Could my hon. Friend the Minister look at such things, please?

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Adrian Bailey (in the Chair):** Order. I will now impose a three-minute time limit.

10.6 am

**Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP):** This condition, as we all agree, is not widely known about or understood. Often those living with it feel that

[Patricia Gibson]

they are drowning in despair and their loved ones are at a loss as to how best to support them. It is believed that up to 2 million people in the UK live with the condition. The true causes of it have not been established, but it is thought to be related to abnormal levels of certain chemicals in the brain and changes in the way the central nervous system processes pain messages carried around the body. It is also thought that there may be a genetic predisposition. In many cases the condition appears to be triggered by a physically or emotionally stressful event. There is no cure, although there are some treatments that can ease the effects.

I pay tribute at this juncture to the very important self-help groups in my constituency that help sufferers with this condition. There is no denying that it is a complex condition and there is a genuine lack of societal recognition of it. It is a truly disabling condition and must be treated and recognised as such for those seeking support from our welfare system.

Consultations undertaken by the Scottish Government show that current PIP assessments are simply not fit for purpose for those with fluctuating conditions such as fibromyalgia. Where conditions involve symptoms that fluctuate and vary, an effective assessment of illness must be flexible to take account of that. The problem is that disability assessments in the current UK welfare system are tick-box exercises, so the answers need to be yes or no even when complex, fluctuating and distressing conditions are being assessed. How can the assessment of such a condition truly be conducted in that way and still be meaningful? Clearly, simply ticking boxes cannot capture the distress, trauma and debilitation of such a complex condition. However, those living with this disease must subject themselves to that process in order to access essential support.

We need a welfare system that fully understands what those with this condition endure every single day as they struggle with everyday tasks that the rest of us take for granted. We need to ensure that the lives that they are living are reflected in the support they receive. That is the right thing to do, so I urge the Minister to put those laudable aims in motion without any further delay. Any further delay will mean greater suffering for those affected and their families, which ought to shame us all.

10.9 am

**Justin Madders** (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bailey. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Toby Perkins) on securing this debate.

I have an interest to declare: my wife is a fibromyalgia sufferer. I want to talk primarily about her experience of the condition. Perhaps the hardest symptoms to understand are the ones that we cannot see. The fatigue literally wipes her out for days at a time. There is also the pain: to the outside world she looks okay, but underneath she is suffering. In her own words, she said:

“I do experience various aches and pains. These can differ from aching muscles to painful joints, especially knees and ankles; tenderness all over my skin like I’m covered in a thousand small but painful bruises; and sometimes it feels as if every bone in my body is burning.”

Of course, I just want to give her a hug, but doing that makes her wince. It is so frustrating knowing that I cannot help.

My wife considers the cognitive challenges—the “brain fog”, as she calls it—the most irritating symptom. She also said:

“Sleeping does not come easily. It is very difficult to get to sleep and when I fall asleep, I wake up within minutes.”

There is not enough time to go through all the symptoms, but we have heard about many of them today. The biggest thing I would like the Government to take away from today is the experience we had in getting diagnosis and treatment. My wife said:

“When I was first diagnosed with fibromyalgia, three years ago, I was actually quite relieved...I knew things were getting worse. Despite numerous tests, there seemed to be nothing wrong with me.

I recall multiple visits to my doctors where I would tell them how exhausted I felt and they told me that I was probably depressed—that being a working mum with three kids was tiring and difficult.”

Hearing that just made her despair.

**Alex Sobel** (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): On that point, my constituent James wrote to me saying that a lot of medical professionals look at him as if the condition does not exist, and that the worst part is that nobody understands it and it is not recognised. He got zero support. He suffers from physical depression. The antidepressants do not work and he cannot get the support or the treatment that he needs from the NHS.

**Justin Madders**: That is exactly the experience that we have had and so many other hon. Members’ constituents have had. Speaking about how she felt before she got her diagnosis, my wife said:

“Sometimes, just having a bath would wear me out. I spent most weekends in bed or on the sofa...I just had no energy to move. I couldn’t do stuff with my children or even cook dinner. And I couldn’t understand why I felt like this. I knew other people got tired, but they still managed to live their lives. And so I thought I must just be lazy or completely lacking in any self-control...So when I was finally given my diagnosis, I was pleased that it wasn’t just me making it all up. It was not all in my head or character flaws leading to laziness and ill-discipline. I was and am actually ill. This is something beyond my control. And although it might be unfortunate, at least I now knew what it was.”

I was relieved as well. I knew that something was wrong, but I did not know what. On reflection, I think we both realised that she probably had the condition for years and all the time it was getting worse. We knew something was wrong, but we felt that nobody was listening.

**Tonia Antoniazzi** (Gower) (Lab): The most shocking thing about fibromyalgia is that it mostly affects women—seven women to one man. My constituent came to visit me on Sunday at a surgery and she has just emailed me now to say that after that five-minute meeting it has taken her until today to recover. Does my hon. Friend agree that we cannot continue to ignore this?

**Justin Madders**: That is certainly something I recognise. My wife tries to live by pacing herself. That is the only way she can manage her condition. She knows it is a lot worse in winter than in summer and it will flare up if she over-exerts herself. She can save energy for specific



occasions, for example a conference, work or an evening out, but no matter how much she plans, it can catch her out. She will be too exhausted or in too much pain to meet a deadline or go to a meeting. She ends up giving her apologies and feels that she is unreliable. She has practically given up trying to plan social things in advance. It is incredibly frustrating.

Unless more research can be done into this condition and more awareness raised among the medical profession and employers, fibromyalgia sufferers will continue to be disadvantaged by more than just their symptoms. For us, this is not just about how fibromyalgia is classified under the Equality Act 2010, but, in common with many recurring and fluctuating conditions, about how people with these conditions are treated and supported. There needs to be much more research into the condition alongside consistent treatment pathways, with better training for medical professionals to recognise and then treat the symptoms.

Services should be in place to support fibromyalgia sufferers to enable them to live their lives as fully as possible. It has taken my wife two years, at her insistence, to be referred to a pain management clinic. A year on, she is still waiting to be seen. All the time she is suffering and her condition is deteriorating. I hate what this condition has done to my wife and our family. It is so frustrating not being able to help her make the pain go away, not being able to help her find a way for her to live her life as she should. It is so frustrating that there appears to be no hope on the horizon that things will get any better soon.

10.14 am

**Jonathan Edwards** (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): Diolch yn fawr, Mr Bailey. My wife is also a sufferer of fibromyalgia. I asked her if she wanted me to make a speech publicly declaring her condition and she was eager for me to do so, because one of the biggest feelings felt by fibromyalgia sufferers is helplessness.

My wife was recently diagnosed, but she has been suffering from the symptoms for five years. The trigger event was the birth of our second child—giving birth is of course a very physical, traumatic experience—and she has suffered since that day. It is a terrible, life-long condition, once it catches hold of an individual. Chronic pain is the main characteristic of the condition, as we heard from an actual sufferer, the hon. Member for Morley and Outwood (Andrea Jenkyns). The pain is constant, but the condition flares. The flares can last for weeks. The symptoms then are extremely severe—there is no reprieve.

Chronic pain is always associated with chronic fatigue, because sufferers cannot sleep and find themselves in a vicious cycle. The other main condition is hypervigilance, and sensitivity to noise and sound. My wife has gone from living a very active lifestyle to now living minute by minute, which has a huge impact on her social life and our ability to enjoy a family life. It is life-changing.

The medical pathway is extremely convoluted. There is a lack of awareness at not only primary care, but secondary care. My wife has been fortunate to be referred to the Royal National Hospital for Rheumatic Diseases in Bath, but she is at the start of a very long waiting list, five years after being diagnosed. There is a huge amount

of work to do in Wales, where health is devolved, for us to improve pathways for people who suffer from this condition.

Before special care is provided, treatment is based on the painkiller continuum—different painkillers of different strengths—and then also different antidepressants, which have their own very serious side effects. The major symptoms are fatigue, widespread pain, joint aches, migraines, carpal tunnel, drug resistance, sweating hands and feet, slurred speech, light sensitivity, noise sensitivity, memory loss, food intolerances, irritable bowel syndrome, lower tolerance of physical activity, non-restorative sleep, confusion, anxiety, depression, hearing problems, menstrual issues and chemical sensitivity.

I wanted to say far more about the process of us helping these people, but there is insufficient time. These are very sick people. The health systems and the social security system that we have within the British state at the moment offer little support.

10.17 am

**Wera Hobhouse** (Bath) (LD): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bailey. I congratulate the hon. Member for Chesterfield (Toby Perkins) on securing the debate.

I am here today because Julie Britten, my constituent from the Bath fibro group, came to see me a couple of weeks ago with her partner and very movingly described what fibromyalgia is. We have heard today from two hon. Members whose wives are suffering from the condition. We need to listen to the carers, too, because they feel as helpless, if not more, to see a loved one suffering. They also suffer from the fact that a lot of people, because they do not understand what fibromyalgia is, suggest that it is made up. Suddenly something has changed in their family member and they do not really understand why. That helplessness is one of the most painful things that the sufferers themselves and the carers who live with loved ones have to put up with.

We have already heard a number of points about the condition. As was mentioned, in Bath we have an excellent facility, the Royal National Hospital for Rheumatic Disease, previously known as the Royal Mineral Water Hospital. It is a very old hospital, locally known as “the Min”. Again, because it is not a rheumatic condition, but far more complicated, we need to find facilities where we can directly address fibromyalgia as a disease, rather than tiptoeing around what it is. The main difficulty is that the pain that people with fibromyalgia feel is not directly caused by damage or injury to the area that hurts. Instead, as I understand it, the problem lies in how the brain and the nervous system process pain from that area, so it is complicated.

Fibromyalgia is recognised in the Equality Act 2010 as a disability and an invisible illness, but again, because of the uncertainty, the most important thing that we in this place can do is push for more research and funding for research into the condition. That is at the heart of ending the uncertainty.

Hon. Members may know that I am working on eating disorders, and a similar picture has emerged on a couple of occasions. People do not understand fibromyalgia, which leads to stigma, and our rules and regulations do not fit with it. We need more funding to get to the bottom of what fibromyalgia really is and understand

[*Wera Hobhouse*]

it, so we can end the suffering not just of the people who feel that incredibly debilitating pain, but of their loved ones who also live with it and are affected by it. I ask the Minister to make sure that there is more funding for understanding fibromyalgia.

10.21 am

**David Linden** (Glasgow East) (SNP): In three minutes, I cannot possibly do justice to the many emails I received from constituents; suffice it to say that I thank Lorraine Deacons, Ellie Woodburn, Caroline McGarvey, Geraldine Kennedy and Marie Christie, who all live in Glasgow East and are affected by fibromyalgia. I deeply regret that such a pathetic time limit means that I cannot read out their testimony—I am actually quite upset about that.

I will touch on a number of issues that were raised by charities. On training and education, there is clearly inconsistency among GPs and they need to come into alignment. We cannot have what seems to be a postcode lottery for some of our constituents. If they have a sympathetic GP, that makes all the difference.

**Sandy Martin** (Ipswich) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**David Linden:** No I will not, because of the time limit.

Work capability assessments are also a major issue. I understand that one charity worked up guidance with Maximus. I would be grateful if the Minister clarified whether that guidance has been cascaded through the Department for Work and Pensions for decision makers.

The issue of reasonable adjustments has been well covered, but there is a role for the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to play. I hope the Minister can have conversations with her colleagues about that.

On alternative medicines, we all accept that patients know their bodies best, so it is important that we respect their wishes. That is a message to health practitioners.

Finally—because I want to show courtesy to the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon)—a major concern that was raised with me was that social media platforms are hosting groups where misinformation is being perpetuated and where people are talking about suicide. Social media platforms have a real responsibility to get a grip on that.

As I say, I am conscious that many hon. Members want to speak in the debate and had the courtesy to put their names down. On that basis, I will stop talking and allow other hon. Members, who were here at the beginning of the debate, to contribute.

10.23 am

**Luke Pollard** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Toby Perkins) who has become a real hero for many people with fibromyalgia, because he has given them a voice. Ahead of the debate, I posted on Facebook to ask people to share their feelings and experiences with the people of Plymouth, because there

are many fibromyalgia sufferers there. The number of people who have got in touch is extraordinary. Among those people, the common view is that they want to be believed and supported. My hon. Friend's work has done much towards that. The suggestion of the hon. Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess) about a fibromyalgia champion is a good one that has cross-party support.

It is important to say, and to say clearly, that fibromyalgia is real, that the pain is real, and that the people who suffer from it should be believed. That should not be controversial, but I am afraid it still is. The campaign to have it recognised as a disability is good and important. It would make such a difference to many people's lives to have that recognition.

Sarah wrote to me to say that,

“the pain is chronic and never goes away...Physically it started with the horrendous pain, constant viral infections, walking along and suddenly my legs would give way and I would end up lying in the road, being unable to change the gears in my car suddenly as I didn't have any feeling and being unable to function due to feeling so fatigued and having zero energy.”

Among the people who got in touch, it was common to talk about how fibromyalgia rips away the ability to do things that many of us take for granted and how, in many cases, they did not understand why that happened and could not explain it clearly to people. The delays in diagnosis contribute to that suffering.

Fibromyalgia should be classified as a disability. That is a necessary step to dealing with the horrendous stigma around the disease and to directing the attention that people with fibromyalgia need to get the support they deserve.

The real-life stories I have heard from people in Plymouth were about not just their diagnosis and the health system, but how the DWP treated them, especially in their healthcare assessments. Our assessment system does not adequately understand the real-life experiences of many people with hidden illnesses, in particular fibromyalgia and ME, but also many more besides. It really needs to, because they are precisely the people who need support from our welfare system, but are not getting it.

One thing that all hon. Members can do is tackle the stigma around fibromyalgia, as we have done for ME and many other hidden illnesses. To do that, we need to talk about it, give a platform to those people who suffer from it, and recognise that we will not receive mass lobbies in Parliament about it, simply because coming to London—especially from Plymouth and further away—takes a lot of energy and knocks people out for weeks afterwards. We need to recognise that it is real and do something about it.

10.25 am

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Member for Chesterfield (Toby Perkins) on securing the debate and other hon. Members who have made contributions in a restricted time. Without a doubt, the subject is worthy of a three-hour debate, as the number of hon. Members present indicates.

My introduction to fibromyalgia has come through my constituents in my position as a local representative, a councillor, a Member of the Northern Ireland Assembly and now a Member of Parliament. My constituents

have told me about the sensation of being in pain and feeling ill. One lady said that her day-to-day life was having her sight affected and having no energy.

Clearly, my heart went out to that constituent, not simply because she has a difficult life, with days where she cannot get out of bed, eat or even really drink, or simply because she is young, but because I want her to get so much more out of life than a daily battle to do the things that most of us can do, such as showering and basic hygiene care, but that she cannot. The diagnosis of fibromyalgia will not automatically entitle her to the help that she needs, which is why the debate is so important. She will have to fight another battle to have her illness and needs recognised and accepted. We all know what the issues are.

The specific treatment for fibromyalgia syndrome is a multidisciplinary approach that includes physical rehabilitation, access to hydrotherapy, psychological support, behavioural therapy and education sessions. Alongside that, the European League Against Rheumatism's guidelines on the condition say that treatment should incorporate collaboration with a range of professionals, including pain specialists, psychologists, physiotherapists and occupational therapists. All that tells me how complex fibromyalgia is, with a lot of different departments managing a lot of different facets. It is little wonder, with respect to the Department and the Minister, of whom I am very fond, as she knows, that some people feel abandoned and alone in the middle of all of those people and departments. It is for them that we stand here today.

We want research and legislation. We need protection under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. I conclude with a comment from a lady, who says:

"I know a lady who is an absolute whirlwind when she is well. She could be in my office cheering everyone up with a winning smile and charming personality and literally an hour later, she is wiped out and can't move for days at a time. To expect this lady to be able to attend job centres weekly for hour-long job interviews without understanding that she physically cannot do this is absolutely absurd and yet she is not automatically entitled to ESA and other helps. To believe that she will"—

by some miracle—

"be able to attend her PIP assessment on a certain day is a nonsense and yet she faces losing PIP if she doesn't present herself to be assessed."

It is because of people like her, and all those people who live a life of darkness and pain, who battle to live, to eat and to turn their lights on, that this debate is important.

10.29 am

**Angela Crawley** (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Bailey. I congratulate the hon. Member for Chesterfield (Toby Perkins) on securing the debate and on his efforts to ensure greater recognition, research and understanding of fibromyalgia through the mechanisms of the House. I am only sorry that the debate is in Westminster Hall, where the amount of time is so compressed, and that, because of the structures of this place, most hon. Members have had less than three minutes to say what they wanted.

I will try my best to say as much as I can in the limited time I have, but many constituents who have written to me will not be given a fair hearing, which is unfortunate. I know Brexit is going on today and that is important in its own right, but this is equally important to my

constituents and it impacts on their lives. I do not think that we are doing them any justice with the limited platform that we have.

As we have heard, fibromyalgia is a chronic condition with symptoms that can be constant or intermittent for years, or even a lifetime. Hon. Members of all parties have said that fibromyalgia can be difficult to diagnose, because the nature of the conditions fluctuates and symptoms often vary. As various Members have said, it has a huge impact on loved ones. The personal contributions of the hon. Members for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr (Jonathan Edwards) and for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders), and the personal experience of the hon. Member for Morley and Outwood (Andrea Jenkyns)—who called for the Government to recognise and support people, especially those experiencing depression—are really important.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) rightly called on the Government to recognise the condition as a disability and to look at the way that the Department for Work and Pensions system assesses it. The tick-box exercise is not flexible and does not recognise the impact of the condition. I share the frustration of my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow East (David Linden) that this platform does not do justice to the subject at all. It is unfortunate that limited speaking times have taken over the debate and a lot of people have not been able to say as much as they would have liked.

Many of those suffering from the condition continue to work. Many constituents who have contacted me are not solely reliant on the social security and welfare system of this Government. They continue to work and want to contribute. There is nothing more soul destroying than having a debilitating condition when all they want to do is go out and provide for their families.

When people are unable to work because of fibromyalgia, it is right that the social security system should help them. For many people, additional support from personal independence payments and other forms of support allows them to reduce their hours and manage their condition. Yet many people find, when it comes to reassessing and reapplying for support, that being seen to be self-managing or trying to manage their condition goes against them. The current process goes completely against trying to manage a condition and continue working. That is exactly what anyone would want to do, and hopefully any self-respecting member of this Government appreciates that these people are trying their best to hold jobs as well as manage their condition. The DWP system should not hold that against them.

I will take the limited time I have to give voice to my constituents. Vivian says:

"The problem is, I look okay on the outside. I can string sentences together. I also make eye contact in social situations, but the process itself is so degrading. Stress makes my fibromyalgia worse, meaning more pain for me and I can hardly move. I take as many painkillers and diazepam as I can to lower my pain to a point where I can move without looking sore. What makes me mad is the appeal board know how fibro affects people, yet still have these processes in place. Surely our system of benefits must shake-up if this is how people with genuine illnesses are treated?"

I hope that the Minister will take that on board.

The reality is that for someone to sit there with a form and tick boxes, and fit people into a condition that says they can make eye contact, do their make-up, walk a distance, is a degrading process. I do not think that is



[Angela Crawley]

something that we would want to go through ourselves, so why would we administer a process that puts other people through that, especially when we have the ability to change it? I do not think it is that hard to devise a process that fits the condition. Alter it slightly, vary it, create flexibility, but for God's sake do not have a system that degrades people further when many are already at their lowest point.

I do not believe that the Government are doing enough to support people who wish to return to work or self-manage their condition. Another constituent, Donna from Carlisle, recently decided to return to work on a part-time basis. She has had to adapt to her illness and, after two years of treatment, agreed to return to work. She works only mornings because she needs the afternoons to sleep, in order to manage her condition and look after her children in the evenings. She was claiming personal independence payment to allow her to work part-time and to supplement her earnings. However, Donna is currently in the process of challenging a refusal to be granted personal independence payment; the process assessor thought she did not need that additional support, because the tick-box exercise does not recognise her condition. The cut in the support that she receives from the disability element of the working tax credit and a council tax reduction means that her household budget is cut by £750 per month, which is more than she earns for working part-time. She still wants to continue to work. She feels she would be better off not working, but she continues to maintain her part-time job and to manage her condition because she has two young boys and she wants to set them an example. That is nothing short of admirable. This woman has gone through years and years of trying to get a diagnosis and a lot of personal stress and trauma in her life, yet she continues to work and give a prime example to her sons. I do not think anyone should be penalised for that.

William from Netherburn was forced to give up work because of the dramatic changes to his lifestyle. He has many other conditions on top of fibromyalgia. He is in constant pain, goes numb and has acute memory problems, yet he was awarded the lowest rate of care when moving from disability living allowance to personal independence payment. This is a flaw in part of the process of transitioning people from their legacy benefits. It is something that could have been altered. There have been countless debates about that in the House. Obviously, it is easy for the Opposition to criticise the Government, but we have given ample opportunity and made many suggestions about how to review, change and adapt the system. It cannot be that hard to adapt a system, even slightly, to recognise that it is not user-friendly for anyone with a condition.

A close friend, Emma Richmond, who I have known since I was 17, was one of the most lively, vivacious, bubbly people I have ever met, but in the last two years I have seen a huge change in her because of this condition. I want to use her words, not mine. She said:

“At the age of 30 I'm using a cane and find I'm losing my social life to pain. Every day I'm in pain and it has never let up. There are days when I can't get off the sofa due to the pain and fatigue. It's a debilitating condition. It's a humiliating condition. I get to the stage where I don't see why I'm here anymore. I fight to be normal every day. It's not like me to feel like giving up.”

Emma, like others I have spoken about today, has a full-time job. She works for Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, of all Departments. They have been an understanding employer, which prompts the question that if a person who works for a Government Department can have that level of understanding and flexibility, why cannot an individual in society, who engages with other services and other Departments, have exactly the same flexibility and understanding? It seems highly hypocritical, but it shows it can be done—I believe it can be. The Government only have to make minor modifications and changes to the system to deliver the best services they can. With respect to the Minister, I know she always wants to do that.

I ask the Minister to discuss this with her colleagues in the Department and look at the many ways in which the initial assessments can be made fair for people with fibromyalgia and mental health issues to avoid them needing to go through the taxing and arduous appeals process. An appeals process that consistently overturns decisions is clearly flawed. I ask her to get to the root cause, and make the process fairer and more flexible, for my constituents and for my friend. I want to be able to ensure that they enjoy their lives as much as we all can.

10.38 am

**Marsha De Cordova** (Battersea) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bailey. I am afraid that my stop clock has just died, so do help me with the time and bear with me as I will not be able to see a clock.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Toby Perkins) on securing the debate. I think that all of us across the Chamber would agree that he has done an excellent job of raising the matter on behalf of his constituents and fibromyalgia sufferers across the UK. He made some powerful points. He talked about the desperate need for more research, stressing the point that although this debate is about the work of the Department for Work and Pensions, the subject crosses over into the work of the Department of Health and Social Care. I am sure that the Minister will take that forward and work with her colleagues in that Department on the issue.

My hon. Friend spoke about the impact that fibromyalgia has on sufferers, and how it affects all aspects of their everyday lives. We are focusing on social security matters, but there are also issues with work, as many colleagues have expressed today. Obviously, the huge challenges with access to social security should not go unnoticed. Many Members have made that point today, and I am sure that the Minister will address it when she responds.

Many hon. Members—some are no longer in the Chamber—made some really valid contributions and interventions. My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield) intervened to highlight the lack of understanding of the effect of fibromyalgia on day-to-day living and, in particular, on accessing social security. Members highlighted the challenges that fibromyalgia presents and the problems it brings, including in being assessed and qualifying for personal independence payment. My hon. Friend spoke about fibromyalgia being a fluctuating condition, which it is.

I agree with the hon. Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess) that my hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield is a champion for people with fibromyalgia; he has certainly brought it to my attention. My hon.

Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes) shared her experience of cases of fibromyalgia and recognised the impact that the condition can have in the area of work.

I thank the hon. Member for Morley and Outwood (Andrea Jenkyns) for sharing her personal experiences, particularly in relation to memory and fibro-fog, as well as the fatigue that fibromyalgia causes. I commend her for being so open about the condition and for the way she is just getting on with life, as many people with a long-term disability do, including me.

I congratulate Adrienne, the constituent of my hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield, as well as Fibromyalgia Action UK and Versus Arthritis, on all the work they are doing to raise awareness of the condition. Fibromyalgia was first recognised by the World Health Organisation back in the 1970s, and we know that in the UK up to 2 million people are affected by it and that as many as one in 20 people suffer from it. Yet it remains a condition that is still often unrecognised, under-diagnosed and, in many cases, totally invisible.

As we have heard, the symptoms associated with fibromyalgia include widespread pain across the entire body. In the words of one sufferer, it is a

“generalised pain that can be anything from a shooting pain in my arms, hands, fingers, legs, feet, toes, back and shoulders.”

It can also cause headaches. Another sufferer has said:

“Sometimes it feels like I’m hitting a brick wall...I get irritated easily and am quick to get frustrated and angry”.

The symptoms include an increased sensitivity to pain, fatigue and difficulties in sleeping. There are often also problems with memory and concentration, which is sometimes known as fibro-fog. Many Members mentioned those problems today.

For those who suffer from fibromyalgia, the symptoms are life-altering and the pain they experience is very real, but to the rest of the world—including the general population—the condition can sometimes seem invisible. We also know that many healthcare professionals find it extremely difficult to diagnose fibromyalgia, which helps explain why it is only on a case-by-case basis that the condition is recognised under the Equality Act. Many people face constantly having to go back to get diagnosed, making visit after visit to their GP practice, and the fact that the condition has many different symptoms relating to different areas of the body makes it even more challenging for sufferers.

There is no specific diagnostic test for fibromyalgia. Instead, there have been many accounts of sufferers facing years of referrals, MRI scans and so forth. Even if people are diagnosed with the condition, they are forced to wait for months, if not years, to receive treatment. Many hon. Members spoke about the urgent need for more research. One hon. Member—I am not sure whether they are still here—mentioned the research taking place in Sweden and the US, and called on the Minister to look again at how we can commit to more research into fibromyalgia, because we know that the condition affects so many people.

We know that there are many difficulties in diagnosing fibromyalgia. In response to the petition that my hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield presented last April, the Government pointed towards the National Institute for Health Research. However, we know that fibromyalgia affects all aspects of life, so I will now turn to the

impact it can have on employment. Fibromyalgia sufferers face difficulties in being able to stay in work and in getting the right support while they are in work. We know that the disability employment gap has remained at 30% over the last year. However, one of the best employment support programmes is the Access to Work programme. It ensures that those who suffer from fibromyalgia are actually aware of the programme, but it also raises awareness of its work among employers, because it can be a valuable resource for employers making reasonable adjustments for employees and for sufferers. Many sufferers want to stay in work and can stay in work. I will continue to press the Minister to ensure that the Access to Work programme is adequately funded, so that more funding is available for those suffering from fibromyalgia.

We have heard many accounts from many Members today that show that it is not only employment but social security that is a huge problem for people suffering from fibromyalgia. We know that 3% of PIP claimants have fibromyalgia, of whom the vast majority are women. Assessments for PIP are carried out by private companies, and in some cases they have insufficient knowledge of fibromyalgia and the impact it has on daily life, because it is one of the “invisible” conditions. That is really important.

We know that the framework for the current assessment process, not only for PIP but for employment and support allowance, is flawed. Fibromyalgia, because it is a fluctuating condition, is not being picked up in PIP assessments, and we know that the assessment framework is failing far too many people. That presents challenges for sufferers when it comes to accessing that essential additional payment, which contributes towards meeting the extra costs of living with fibromyalgia. I say to the Minister again that we must listen to all the testimonies about how PIP affects people and we must recognise that the assessment framework is not fit for purpose. She must commit to reviewing it.

Finally, I will talk briefly about the Equality Act. Because of my own disability, I come under it, and there is no reason why fibromyalgia cannot also be seen as a disability under it. We know that fibromyalgia is assessed on a case-by-case basis, but in the future it is fundamental that the Act begins to recognise the impact that fibromyalgia has on people’s daily lives.

10.48 am

**The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work (Sarah Newton):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship today, Mr Bailey. I begin by paying tribute to Adrienne, who I believe is with us today in the Public Gallery. It is through her persistence and determination to use the mechanism of petitioning Parliament that we are here in Westminster Hall today. It is a really good example of how people all around our country can ensure that their voices are heard in this place, so I congratulate her on that.

I also pay tribute to the hon. Member for Chesterfield (Toby Perkins), because he picked up on that opportunity and worked with his constituent. I am very pleased to say, as my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess) and everybody else has done, that the hon. Member for Chesterfield is a champion. It is great that he has championed this cause, raised awareness

[Sarah Newton]

of the issue and made sure that all of our public services are doing everything they can to help people with fibromyalgia, because we have heard today how absolutely debilitating the condition can be and how many people it affects.

Today has been a really good opportunity to build on the work that has been done with the petition and have this debate. I share the frustration that so many people have mentioned that we do not have time to address all the issues that have been raised and hear from the many people who have written to Members across the House because they want their individual voice to be heard.

Before this debate, I extended an invitation to the hon. Member for Chesterfield to bring his constituent into the Department. What we are discussing is a cross-Government issue; it affects the Equalities Office, which is the custodian of the Equality Act 2010. There has been much discussion about what more we can do about health services and research, so I will ensure that, along with me as Minister responsible for the main disability benefits, we have Ministers from the relevant Departments at a roundtable and summit, so that we can properly work with the information that has been provided today and with the great organisations that are undertaking research and standing up for those with fibromyalgia.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Outwood (Andrea Jenkyns), and to the wonderful husbands who have spoken about wives who are suffering. It is brave of Members of Parliament to stand up and talk so personally about situations that have such a detrimental impact on them. It is difficult for MPs to admit to any sort of weakness; we live in fear of our constituents thinking less of us for expressing that we have a condition or disability that might be perceived as a weakness. However, it is vital that people with disabilities and health conditions are in this place, because they have an important role to play in society. I am absolutely determined to ensure that we have a society in which we focus on what people can do rather than on what they cannot, and in which they are supported to reach their full potential.

I will now draw on some of the points I have been asked to raise. On the support in the health service, we have heard that it is clearly too intermittent. I know that there are good examples; colleagues in the Department of Health and Social Care have told me that there are bespoke services for people with fibromyalgia, but we have heard from colleagues today that it is too much of a postcode lottery and that the services are not consistent. That stems from the fact, which has been recognised today, that it is a difficult condition to diagnose. Because the way in which fibromyalgia manifests is unique to each person, general practitioners want to ensure that they rule out the possibility of other conditions. We have heard so powerfully today that no two people are the same, so GPs, in the absence of a diagnostic tool, need to explore many different avenues before they can get to a diagnosis of fibromyalgia.

**Justin Madders** It is not just about the postcode lottery. Many GPs do not really know about the condition, and we need to get more understanding out there. My wife saw a number of doctors before she got a diagnosis.

Also, her experience of gaining specialist help to access the pain clinic, which hopefully she will do later this year, was that she had to be referred to a rheumatologist to get a diagnosis and then was referred back to the GP, to refer her on to the clinic. That is a pretty inefficient way of doing things.

**Sarah Newton:** The hon. Gentleman makes a very important point, but I understand that to help GPs the Royal College of General Practitioners and Arthritis Research UK have developed an e-learning course on musculoskeletal care, which includes fibromyalgia and is free to all healthcare professionals. It aims to improve core skills in diagnosing and managing any musculoskeletal condition. A medical guide on diagnosis and treatment has also been developed by the Fibromyalgia Association UK, and a mandatory core component of all GPs' training is an applied knowledge test. This AKT is a summative assessment of the knowledge base that underpins independent general practice in the UK, within the context of the NHS. The content guide for the Royal College of General Practitioners, which serves to prepare trainees for the test, includes specific reference to a required knowledge of fibromyalgia. Clearly, therefore, there is now a consistent attempt to ensure that GPs going through training and coming into general practice have a much better understanding of how to diagnose and treat fibromyalgia than we have seen hitherto.

**Sandy Martin:** Fibromyalgia affects one in 20 women, so it seems bizarre that so many GPs still do not know about it. Training for incoming GPs is clearly effective, and needs to be so, but an awful lot of GPs still possibly need retraining. Fibromyalgia is not the only such condition. An awful lot of GPs have never heard of endometriosis, for instance, which affects one in 10 women. Ought we not to have a system in which GPs are regularly trained in these additional diseases and conditions that affect so many?

**Sarah Newton:** The hon. Gentleman is right. There are so many conditions that we are beginning to understand, as more research and information comes forward, and continuous education for GPs is vital. I understand from the Department of Health and Social Care that such education is ongoing and that there is free learning material for GPs on fibromyalgia.

**Wera Hobhouse:** Will the Minister give way?

**Sarah Newton:** I am really tempted to give way to lots of colleagues, but the more I do the less time I have to address the issues that have already been raised. I have taken a number of interventions, but as the clock is against me I will now press on and try to address as many of those issues as possible, bearing in mind that there will be a follow-up meeting and, as always, I will write to those Members whose particular concerns I do not address in my few remaining minutes.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southend West invited me to invest. We clearly have long-term investment in the NHS, and plans for significant extra investment over the next 10 years have recently been communicated, with a disproportionate amount going into primary care and community services. Since each person is affected in such different ways, the pathway and range of care that people need will largely be co-ordinated in the



community, with GPs. The new investment gives us hope, but alongside it we need to ensure that there is both education and training, and improved pathways. The one message I have heard clearly today—I know this from cases in my own constituency, of working with women affected by fibromyalgia—is that people are ping-ponged around the system, between physical and mental health services, with no joined-up care pathway. With so many other chronic conditions, the NHS has got so much better at having evidence-based pathways, so that once people have their diagnosis they understand the pathway they are on, and those who are able to support them know what support is available.

We need to take away and work on so much more from this debate. As many Members have said, it is about getting the ball rolling, ensuring that voices are heard loud and clear, and that we work across Government and the House to improve the quality of life of people with fibromyalgia.

On the benefits system, I want to assure people that fibromyalgia is recognised as a disability under the 2010 Act. It is really important for people to understand that. We have heard today that no two people are affected in the same way, so it is important that we have a person-centred approach to providing support, whether that is encouraging employers to be more aware of fibromyalgia and of the reasonable adjustments they need to make to enable people to stay in work, or looking at how the benefit system supports people.

The benefits system uses a person-centred approach, and I can absolutely reassure Members that the healthcare professionals who undertake the work capability assessments for the employment and support allowance, which is the income replacement benefit for people who cannot work, and the assessment providers for the personal independence payment, or PIP, which is a non-means-tested benefit for people both in work and out of work, have had training in fibromyalgia. A lot of that has been done in the past year, in association with voluntary sector organisations that have provided support. Members will know, because we are often in debates about improving PIP, that I am absolutely determined to ensure that we make the improvements to which we have already committed, so that everyone has access to the support they deserve.

10.59 am

**Toby Perkins:** When Members secure a debate, they always worry about whether they will fill the time, so it is great that this has been one of those debates that could have filled twice as much time. It is hard to pick out any particular contributions, but what the hon. Member for Morley and Outwood (Andrea Jenkyns) said was particularly compelling and, as the Minister said, the contributions from my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) and the hon. Member for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr (Jonathan Edwards) about the impact on families were also powerful. We will take the Minister up on her generous offer. Thank you.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered the recognition of fibromyalgia as a disability.

## Pubs: Business Rates

11 am

**Mrs Anne Main** (St Albans) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the effect of business rates on pubs.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bailey, and I am happy to have secured this important debate. Pubs, particularly our historic, independent pubs, add vibrancy and attractiveness to our high streets. They support tourism, help to encourage footfall and add hugely to our local economy. They are the lifeblood of my constituency and, I am sure, of many others. Pubs in St Albans generate over £40 million a year for our local economy; the industry employs 1,600 local people and pays around £20 million a year in wages. In St Albans and Herefordshire, we are net contributors to the Chancellor's coffers. My constituents, particularly businesses in my constituency, are the Chancellor's golden goose, and he therefore needs to listen carefully to ensure that that golden goose thrives.

I have been contacted by many local pub owners since this debate was announced, who have all shared with me their frustrations and concerns about the impact that business rates have had on their businesses. They are under huge pressure. The Government were absolutely right to target business rates as a way of helping small businesses, pubs and the high street as a whole, and the cut of 33% in rates for businesses with a rateable value of under £51,000 is a major step in the right direction. However, in some areas such as St Albans, that rate reform is not having the positive impact that the Chancellor was aiming for. Many landlords expressed the view that the new business rate formula, designed to help pubs, has had a perverse result, with a hike in business rates for their pubs. That hike could mean that they have to cut staff numbers, or even worse, close their businesses altogether.

**John Howell** (Henley) (Con): I fully understand the point that my hon. Friend is making about business rates. I wonder whether she has calculated how much of the problem that pubs have is due to a change in drinking habits and why we go to pubs, and how much of it is actually due to business rates.

**Mrs Main:** I have not calculated that, but if my hon. Friend waits for the rest of my speech, he will hear how the huge hikes in business rates mean that pubs would have to sell so many extra drinks that they cannot possibly make up for those hikes. The fact that some people are declining to go to our pubs is one issue, but I am talking about successful, thriving pubs.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Lady on bringing this issue to Westminster Hall for consideration, and I support her entirely. With some small pubs experiencing a rate increase of some 80%, does she agree that we are at risk of losing the independent retailer—the one who takes the keys off the customer and will ring somebody to come and get them, and says when enough is enough? Does she further agree that this is something that is not provided by the off-licence or the supermarket chain, and that society will lose out if we lose the restraining hand of those small local pubs?

**Mrs Main:** The hon. Gentleman makes an excellent point. Indeed yesterday, I took some representatives of pubs to meet the Minister with specific responsibility for this issue, and interestingly they were all from small independent pubs. The big pub chains can cross-subsidise in other areas if they are hit in this way; it is the small independent pubs, often run by one or two people who have put their lifeblood into those pubs, that are suffering. Those people are the ones whose voices need to be heard today. This cannot be the message that we are sending out as a Government. We must ensure that we are supporting small businesses, such as our smaller pubs, which drive our economy and play an important role in communities.

In high-value property areas such as St Albans, there is not a standard Government model that fits. The average house price stands at over £600,000: if a struggling business closes, it will quickly be snapped up by a property developer who sees it as a lucrative brownfield site ripe for housing, and often turned into an individual house or a pair of houses. That practice of turning commercial space into residential space is affecting businesses across St Albans with, for example, a staggering loss of office space over the past few years since the planning laws were changed. That is a double whammy for pubs. Businesses, particularly pubs, are struggling under the current system, and the new rate simply provides a cliff edge that penalises successful businesses in areas plagued by high property values. We must devise a system that helps all small businesses and pubs to thrive, not just the ones with low retail value.

The 2017 business rate formula for pubs uses a methodology for setting the rateable value based on a fair maintainable trade, which is a difficult phrase to interpret. The rateable value is driven mainly by the pub's turnover. The calculation also takes into account property valuations in the area, which means that even small pubs, such as many of the pubs in St Albans that have been hit the hardest, can have a high rateable value because the area they are in has high property values. Sadly, the current formula does not take into account the many models of pub ownership that are often used by landlords and owners. That formula effectively penalises small business operators through an arbitrary taxation system that significantly reduces any profits a pub landlord can make while trying to pay staff wages and other costs.

**Dr Lisa Cameron** (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): I thank the hon. Lady for bringing this important debate before the House. We are at risk of losing our Glassford Inn, the only pub in its village, because of the issue that she has spoken about: the high rateable value of property in the area. It is the last business in the area, yet the rateable amount cannot be varied. Does the hon. Lady agree that this situation has to be changed to sustain these businesses over the long term?

**Mrs Main:** I absolutely agree with the hon. Lady, because I do not believe that what she has described was the Government's intention. As I have said, the formula does not take into account the current models: some of these pubs are leasehold, and some are owned; there can be no bigger incentive to sell a pub than knowing it could be worth a heck of a lot more as a house than as a pub.

**John Howell:** Does my hon. Friend agree that there should be some business rate relief when a pub has been bought under the asset of community value scheme?

**Mrs Main:** Actually, we have tried to save pubs under the asset of community value scheme, and we have not been successful in St Albans, because the developer wins every time. I can see the point that my hon. Friend is making, but I am not going to take a diversion down too many tracks about the price of beer and community assets. Pubs and businesses in my constituency want a fair system that does not, as the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) has said, discriminate against a business because it is located in a high-value area.

**Andrea Jenkyns** (Morley and Outwood) (Con): I completely agree with my hon. Friend regarding high-value areas. The Old Griffin Head pub in Gildersome in my constituency has business rates of over £21,000—that is in a little village. Does my hon. Friend agree that that is an extortionate amount of money, and that it is no wonder that 21 pubs are closing every week in the UK?

**Mrs Main:** I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend, and that is why I think the Government need to hear why their best intentions have not hit the mark. As I was saying, and as the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow has described, pubs want a system that does not discriminate against businesses because they are in high-value areas. That is especially the case when they see a neighbouring, lacklustre pub—and by “neighbouring”, I mean literally three doors down in my constituency—that seems to have either had poor management or low investment, but perversely has benefited from a rate cut. How is that for a trading market? Hard-working landlords of successful pubs are penalised for their strong personal investment; they are enduring eye-watering rate hikes for their trouble.

The hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow mentioned high rates in her area; I suspect that anyone who comes to St Albans will take a deep gulp. This is not what they expect from a Conservative Government, or any Government, especially one that has recognised the pressures our pubs are under and tried to help. I accept that, as I was told yesterday, the formula potentially has helped up to 90% of pubs nationwide, but it only benefits 60% of pubs in St Albans, and for some of them, the benefit is only marginal. That leaves many of the small, independent pubs that the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) referred to facing massive hikes. The formula must be revised. The current methodology for pubs and the high tax-rate multiplier are barriers to new investment in small businesses and pubs, and we have to tackle that issue and find a fairer formula.

In November, I visited several pubs in St Albans—I think it was 10; that is how easy it is to walk around the pubs in St Albans—that are being hit the hardest by these rate increases. The campaign group, Save St Albans Pubs, took me on a tour of the pubs that face huge increases because of the system.

One of the pubs I visited recently, The Boot, is a tiny heritage pub that, as has been pointed out, will have to sell an additional 22,000 pints to cover the additional £51,000 in business rates that it now has to pay. That is a 280% rate increase, which is unsustainable and unfair.

Mr Christo Tofalli of Ye Olde Fighting Cocks told me that unless we have proper reform and relevant taxes, licensing laws and duty costs, his pub is finished. He speaks from experience because he has already come in and pulled the Fighting Cocks back from being closed under a former owner and not trading. He has invested considerable money and effort in the pub since then and has turned a closed, failed business that was an eyesore in St Albans into a successful pub that is an asset. However, under the new model, his taxes and rates have gone up to such an extent that he is now personally funding his pub to keep it open. Who would run a business like that?

Ye Olde Fighting Cocks has seen an increase in its rates of 66%, or £33,000. I hope the Minister will appreciate that that is an enormous increase for any pub owner to cope with and it does not show the level of support that the Government said was needed for small businesses.

The Six Bells, another great pub in my constituency that I visited on my tour, had an increase of 87% in its business rates: £31,000 a year. It has 1,000 square feet of operational space, which is smaller than many people's homes. It exists in a neighbourhood where the average residential property is valued at more than £1 million. It is vulnerable to property developers wanting to move in, as they did recently with The Blue Anchor, which was located in a similar area and has now turned into a house. As Alan Oliver of The Six Bells said in his letter to me, he simply wants a level playing field for his business. It could take up to three years for Mr Oliver to appeal the unfair rate revaluation system. Meanwhile, he faces enormous penalties. He told me:

"If we put our prices up our customers will go to the pub next door which has the same size and offering but which has not had a rate increase."

How unfair is that in the trading environment that we tried to achieve? No wonder he feels hung out to dry.

The landlord of the White Hart Tap also wrote to me and said that he risked losing customers if he put his prices up. He, too, has invested significantly in his business, a small heritage pub. When all costs are taken into account, his annual pre-tax profits are £24,000, which results in £12,000 each for him and his partner. They take no other salary. Many pubs operate with a business model that pays about £12,000 to £15,000. It is not sustainable. Those are just two examples. I have all their details and will send them to the Minister.

In fact, 30 of the 50 pubs in St Albans have seen a rate increase. Astonishingly, they need to sell around 180,000 more pints per year to cover those increases. The Blacksmiths Arms has had an 82% increase and The Beech House a 59% increase, meaning they pay £74,000. I invite the Minister to come and see those pubs, which are less than half the size of this room. Pubs in St Albans saw an average increase in rateable value of more than £27,000. That is a 56% increase in rateable value since the business rate reform. So far, 10% of pubs in St Albans have closed because of such pressures. Sadly, further closures are expected. I know the Minister talks to representatives from the industry, but I am concerned, as has been indicated, that he is not hearing the voice of small independent pubs such as The Boot.

CAMRA, which is based in my constituency, recently provided a comprehensive submission to the Chancellor ahead of the Budget in September. It has called for a

full review of the business rate system with regard to pubs. It maintains that the current system is not fit for purpose and a review is needed to tackle the unfair penalisation of property-based businesses like pubs, especially given the vastly reduced levels of taxation paid by online retailers. I hope CAMRA will engage with all the pubs I have mentioned today to ensure that everyone is singing from the same hymn sheet and that their voices are heard.

The British Beer and Pub Association has rightly pointed out that pubs pay 2.8% of the total rates bill, yet contribute only 0.5% of rate-paying business turnover. That is an overpayment potentially of £500 million. Not only are pubs hit hard by business rates, but many other shops on our high streets face similar rate hikes. Save St Albans Pubs, the campaigning group in my constituency, is calling for the 33% cut to apply to all pubs for the first £51,000 to prevent the cliff edge that I talked about. If there is an ambition to help all pubs—the Government believe 90% have been helped—why not help the other 10%? I seem to have a lot of them in my constituency and they are also in the constituency of the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow. Why not ensure that all pubs get the help that they need for a favourable trading environment?

I welcome the freeze on beer duty that was announced by the Chancellor. It will help pubs across the country, and it will certainly help many pubs where the margin is narrow, but it does not help to make up for the major hit on business rates that pubs in St Albans have to endure. As I have said, small pubs, particularly ones with 1,000 square feet of space, cannot possibly have enough people coming through their doors when they are already busy and trading to make up for the huge hike in rates. In the long term, Save St Albans Pubs is calling for a fundamental review of the business rates formula for small businesses, particularly pubs. It rightly points out that pubs are complex with various business models. It is not a one-size-fits-all tax. There are many examples, particularly in high-value areas, where property values drive up the rates, meaning pubs risk being closed.

The Government have rightly identified business rate cuts as a method to support our high streets and pubs. Now we must alter the system to make sure it works for all of them. I hope the Minister will take that on board. Time is running out for pubs. Three years to challenge a business rate is far too long. The whole idea of demonstrating a sustainable trading market is obviously not working. I hope the Minister will come to St Albans. I invite him—in fact, I demand he comes to do the same pub crawl that I did. Pub owners in my constituency would be delighted to welcome the Minister to their pubs so that they could show him their premises and tell him why the model has got to be altered in line with a fairer system that respects the heritage pubs that are the lifeblood of constituencies such as mine.

11.16 am

**The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mel Stride):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bailey. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for St Albans (Mrs Main) for securing the debate, and I do so for two reasons. First, this is an important matter; pubs lie at the heart of our local communities and the Government's view is that we should do whatever we



[*Mel Stride*]

can to assist and support them, although, as my hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell) pointed out, there are issues other than rates at play when one looks at the pressures that pubs are under. Secondly, I know that my hon. Friend is a strong campaigner on these matters, and this debate is yet another reflection upon the assiduous approach she takes to her duties as a Member of Parliament.

Undoubtedly there are great pressures on pubs, as we have heard. At the same time we should recognise that there are some rays of light in the overall story. The Office for National Statistics has published data showing that the number of larger pubs—those that employ 10 or more—has grown since 2011. In fact, we now have the largest number since 2011. If we look at the pub and bar sector in total, we see that employment has grown by some 6% since 2008, to 450,000 employees. That does not mean that pubs are not under pressure, as my hon. Friend set out at length and in detail, so the Government have taken action, and she has recognised the things that we have done.

For example, in the Budget last year we introduced a discount of one third to the business rates for retailers, including pubs and bars that have a rateable value below £51,000. I know that my hon. Friend's constituency is in a relatively high-value property area and that the discount will not have had the same impact as it has had on the estimated 90% of all pubs and bars across the country. The figure for her constituency is 63%, so it is certainly the case that the majority of the pubs in her constituency are at least entitled to the discount of one third that we announced.

**Mrs Main:** I encourage the Minister to come and see my pubs. Many of them are in historic listed buildings within a conservation area. They have small square footage and it is difficult to grow a business beyond the growth it has already seen. They are in areas where the house prices drive up their rates to an unsustainable level. I appreciate that some of the bigger ones—not the independent ones—have been helped, but I want to help all the pubs, and particularly the ones I have referred to.

**Mel Stride:** As I said, 63% of pubs and bars in my hon. Friend's constituency—typically those with lower rateable values, which probably correlates to the kind of pub she describes—will benefit from the one-third reduction that we announced in the Budget. That reduction will be worth about £900 million to the sector over the next two years. She also rightly referred to what we have done in freezing beer duty and spirit duty. In 2013 we withdrew the beer duty escalator, so the price of a pint is now some 14p less than it would have been otherwise, and we froze beer duty yet again in the last Budget. Across the country, around half of the income of pubs is driven by beer sales alone, so those are important measures. The further reliefs that we have been introducing come on the back of a great deal of activity, particularly since 2016. We have introduced a total of about £13 billion-worth of reliefs across the business rates terrain. That includes making 100% small business rates relief permanent, and doubling the threshold for small business rates relief in 2017.

My hon. Friend asked what we are doing for all the pubs in her constituency. That is a valid point. We have changed the uprating from the retail prices index to the consumer prices index. We initially announced that that would come in from 2020, but in the recent Budget it was brought forward by two years. That will lower the level of business rates right across the pub sector, irrespective of the size of the particular establishment. That is worth about £5 billion in additional relief over the next five years. We have doubled the level of rural rate relief to 100% from 2017.

My hon. Friend referred to specific examples of where there have been very large increases in rateable value—I think she quoted a figure in excess of 60% in one case. In 2017, at the time of the revaluation, we introduced the transitional relief scheme, which was worth some £3.6 billion of relief, to ensure that we smoothed out some of those increases. I would be happy to meet her at some point to look in detail at one or two of the examples she raised, which might be useful for us both. An increase in one year of more than 60%, given the transitional relief that would be available, would be on the high side, but I would be very interested to look at that with her in detail.

**Dr Cameron:** I thank the Minister for all the work that he is doing for the sector, which needs as much support as possible. Does he agree that it cannot be right that the rateable value of our Glassford Inn, for instance, is so high that even if it sold beer every night of the week to every single person in the village, it still could not pay the rates that have been set? Will he agree to look at that issue for me?

**Mel Stride:** I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention. Of course, I am not familiar with that particular establishment—although I would probably like to be—or with its current trading conditions. My point is that a pub, or any business for that matter, will be under pressure for a variety of reasons—my hon. Friend the Member for Henley raised, for example, the change in drinking habits as one factor. Importantly, the Government have a responsibility on the tax front to ensure that we ease those pressures to the greatest extent that we can, while taking a balanced and responsible approach to the economy.

**Tonia Antoniazzi (Gower) (Lab):** I want to raise the plight of some of the Gower pubs. Owing to the rural nature on the peninsula, many are closing and have great challenges ahead. As the Minister mentioned, those challenges are for a range of reasons, but several members of the community and I have set up a working party to address that. I look forward to informing the Minister of the good work that we will do.

**Mel Stride:** I thank the hon. Lady for that intervention. I would be very interested in hearing from her and her working group when she is ready.

It is important to say that pubs are typically central to high streets. It is an issue not only of providing whatever support we can in terms of reliefs, many of which I have outlined, but of assisting high streets, and pubs as part of high streets, to evolve and transition. The high street is under a huge amount of pressure, not least through the online retail marketplace, which takes around 18% of all retail sales. A decade ago, it would have been a fraction of that.

The high street, and pubs at the heart of it, will therefore have to transition. That is why we made an important announcement in the Budget about the future high streets fund—£675 million to assist local areas to develop plans to ensure that they transition their high streets into a format that works more effectively. That includes the review being conducted at the moment into the change-of-use regime, and how it operates to allow certain businesses to change to different businesses, or to retail premises.

**Mrs Main:** May I ask the Minister in the few minutes that are left specifically to discuss anomalies such as fair maintainable trade—where the rates of one pub are hugely increased and those of another, which is not making so much investment and effort in the community, are cut? It cannot be right that businesses that are trying their best are penalised. Fair maintainable trade is an undeliverable anomaly, as is the fact that it takes three years to challenge the rates.

**Mel Stride:** My hon. Friend has astutely pre-empted my very next set of remarks, which relate to the fair maintainable trade approach to valuations. The British Beer and Pub Association has looked at that approach with us and is broadly comfortable with it. We recognised the importance of revaluations in the Budget. We have talked about bringing forward the next revaluation, and having more frequent revaluations so that we have fewer changes of a more dramatic nature.

On the way in which the system works, I think it is broadly a fair approach, because it does not take into account the actual value of the property; it recognises, however, the turnover that a pub can achieve if run appropriately. If a pub is extremely well run and is a very successful business, the Valuation Office Agency is not out to penalise the owners or tenants of that particular establishment in its valuations. There is an established check challenge appeal process through the VOA that can ultimately lead to an independent assessment of the VOA's decision.

I would like to discuss the three-year point that my hon. Friend raised with her after the debate. If there are cases where it is the fault of the VOA that we are not responding across that period of time—of course, there

are many reasons for delays that may come from either party—that would be of concern to me. With the VOA, we are in a position where the backlog of valuations, from when we had speculative valuations, before we changed the process, should all be cleared by September this year—and 1 million had to be gone through.

**Mrs Main:** I thank the Minister for making various offers to talk outside the debate. Of course, the debate is being watched hotly by people in my constituency and outside it. I ask that the Minister commits to coming to St Albans, because those conversations need to take place with the people who are running the businesses. They are beginning to think that whatever they say is not listened to. I would like him to come and put to them the same arguments that he might put to me. I am not that closely involved, and would be unable to reply in the way that they could, so please will he come to St Albans?

**Mel Stride:** The commitment that I will give my hon. Friend is that I would certainly be very happy to meet with publicans from her constituency, if she would like to arrange such a meeting. I have some very fond memories from many years ago of having many a very satisfying pint in Ye Olde Fighting Cocks. Perhaps we could discuss it afterwards. Whether I go on a pub crawl with her in her constituency is another matter, but I am certainly happy to meet her and the constituents to whom she refers.

Once again, I thank my hon. Friend for introducing this extremely important debate. She has once again ensured that it is very much at the forefront of the Government's agenda. I hope that she will accept that we have done a great deal in this area to do what we can. Of course, we keep all taxes under constant review, and I will certainly bear in mind her representations at future fiscal events.

*Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).*

11.30 am

*Sitting suspended.*

## Local Government Funding

[MR CHARLES WALKER *in the Chair*]

2.33 pm

**Mr Charles Walker (in the Chair):** Colleagues, I am extremely sorry for disrespecting your very precious time. You can admonish me afterwards, one after the other—it is unforgivable. I hope that you accept my apology, but I will understand if you cannot.

2.34 pm

**Preet Kaur Gill** (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move,

That this House has considered local government funding.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Walker. I declare an interest as a vice-president of the Local Government Association, a superb organisation that fights for the interests of local government on many levels, delivering services, empowering communities and investing in our future.

The Government's obsession with austerity has targeted many areas of people's lives in the UK, but the largest proportion of cuts has fallen on local government. I applied for this debate in order to ask the Government to recognise the folly of that approach and truly end austerity. As a councillor and council cabinet member, I have experienced the cuts at first hand. I have taken part in extremely difficult budget discussions and decisions in the face of increasing demand, which itself has been brought about by other Government policies that have made life harder for my constituents. I have also worked with local communities to try to offset and alleviate the most damaging impacts of Government policies.

To achieve real co-operative change in transport, housing and economic growth, however, councils and local communities need to be given sufficient resources and power. Under this Government, the opposite has happened: local authorities have had to cut staff levels, scale back many non-statutory services and try to save money in other ways. After nine years of cuts, first from the coalition Government and then from the Conservative Government, I am glad to see that the Government have now managed to find more money: an extra £1.6 billion has been found for 2019-20 in comparison with the initial funding plans set in 2016.

**Catherine West** (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. Does she agree that on a day on which the House is debating Brexit, it is particularly galling that £4 billion is going into some sort of no-deal black hole while our children's centres, libraries and important council services are all desperately at risk?

**Preet Kaur Gill:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The Government can do it when they try—instead of wasting that money, which is the kind of money that local government absolutely needs right now.

I am sure the Minister will tell us that the extra £1.6 billion is a great success that shows that the Government are listening, but can he tell us why has it taken them so long to acknowledge the failure of their own funding plans? Before he says that everything is

going to be okay, let us look at some of the facts: 361 of Birmingham's 364 schools are facing cuts, almost a quarter of West Midlands police funding has been cut and, as a result of scything cuts since 2010, Birmingham City Council has lost £642 million from its annual budget and is expected to be forced to make further savings of £123 million per annum.

**Ellie Reeves** (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for securing this debate. Lewisham Council has had to make cuts of £165 million since 2010. Despite its best efforts, it now has to make difficult decisions about things like grants to the voluntary sector, libraries, street sweeping and lollipop people. Does she agree that central Government need to fund our councils properly so that they can serve the community properly?

**Preet Kaur Gill:** My hon. Friend rightly describes the plight of her council, and it is the same for many councils up and down the country. I hope that the Minister will really take stock of hon. Members' contributions today; it is great to see so many Members present to debate local government finance, which is such an important topic.

**Janet Daby** (Lewisham East) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for securing this significant debate. As my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham West and Penge (Ellie Reeves) rightly says, Lewisham Council has experienced significant cuts since 2010. Those cuts have had an effect on our Lewisham population; social workers' caseloads have increased and we are seeing difficulties in securing beds for people with mental health problems. Does my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Preet Kaur Gill) agree that the Government need to stop making these silly cuts and start investing in local government?

**Preet Kaur Gill:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I hope that the Government really listen to what Members say today about the devastating impact of cuts to councils in their constituencies.

**Lloyd Russell-Moyle** (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): Does my hon. Friend agree that the problem is not just the direct cuts to councils, but the extra services that councils are expected to take on? In my area, the NHS has stopped funding the low vision clinic, so Labour-led Brighton and Hove City Council has had to pick it up—whereas my other local council, Conservative-led East Sussex County Council, is refusing to do so, leaving partially sighted people with nowhere to go for the vital adaptations that they need.

**Preet Kaur Gill:** My hon. Friend's important intervention tells us about the plight of councils as a result of non-statutory services not getting the investment that they need. We will end up with councils delivering only statutory services, which will by no means meet the needs of our diverse communities.

In the context of Birmingham's projected population growth of 121,000 by 2031, the cuts will mean even less money in real terms per person. Nor is the situation unique to Birmingham, as we have heard from many hon. Members across the country. The Institute for Fiscal Studies reports that



“funding from government grants, business rates and council tax is still set to be 1.4% (£0.6 billion) lower in real-terms than in 2015–16, which is equivalent to 4.2% per person after accounting for forecast population growth.”

Whatever the Minister and the Secretary of State may say, that means that councils will have less money to deliver services. This is not about the need to find minor efficiencies following a period of high spending; it follows a period of dramatic and coalition Government-enforced reduction of 22% per person, in real terms, in council spending on services between 2009-10 and 2015-16.

**Graham Stringer** (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making a very strong case about the damage that is being done to local services by cuts in the Government grant. Does she agree that there is no resilience in local government’s tax base, which is strangling local democracy, and that there needs to be a reversal of the changes that were made in the late ’80s and early ’90s to councils’ abilities to raise their own money?

**Preet Kaur Gill:** My hon. Friend raises an important point, which I will touch on later.

Not only was that devastatingly large amount taken across the country, but the spending cuts hit more deprived areas far harder than other areas, a point which I will come back to later. The Government often mock Members asking for more money for a particular cause, but that misses the point. These cuts are not just about money; they are about what the money allows local government to do, or not to do—it is about the services and support that local government can provide to empower communities and support individuals to fulfil their potential.

New research by Unison shows that 66% of local councillors do not think that local residents are receiving the help and support they need at the right time. Does the Minister understand that that is not because councillors and council workers are not working hard enough? Does he agree that the reductions of £16 billion to core Government funding between 2010 and 2020 have led to that situation? Will he make public all the data and analysis his Department have put together on the scale and variation of local responses to cuts, as well as on the impact of almost a decade of austerity on local government, and the inequalities it has reinforced and perpetuated?

What does the Minister say to Lord Porter, the Conservative chair of the Local Government Association? In the most recent copy of *First*, the magazine for local government—I have a copy that I am happy to share with the Minister—he said:

“Next year will continue to be hugely challenging for all councils, which still face an overall funding gap of £3.1 billion in 2019/20.”

That figure is not what is needed to make progress or to invest further in the future of our families and communities—that is just to stand still. Does the Minister agree with Lord Porter?

I know that universal credit is not the Minister’s brief, but I hope he will take the opportunity to discuss his understanding of the problems that universal credit is causing for citizens and therefore for local government. What analysis has the Department done of the impact on local government of rent arrears from council tenants on universal credit? Residential Landlords Association

research reveals that the number of private landlords with tenants receiving universal credit and going into rent arrears rocketed from 27% in 2016 to 61% in 2018, with the average amount owed in rent arrears by the universal credit tenant rising 49% between 2017 and 2018. If there are similar findings for council tenants—there is no reason to think universal credit impacts differently on council tenants from those in private accommodation—local authorities will be put under further pressure by a failed Government initiative.

This is not party political. This is not about Labour councils wasting money, or Conservative councils being frivolous. Lord Porter said:

“Councils can no longer be expected to run our local services on a shoestring.”

Does the Minister think that those Conservative councils that have gone bust or reduced services to the legal minimum have received enough funding? Will they receive enough funding through the latest funding settlement? If so, does he think that they went bust because of their own failures—and will he outline those failures?

When the Prime Minister took office, she promised that the mission of her Government would be to tackle injustices. Since 2015-16, the most deprived councils have seen a cut of 2.8%, while the least deprived have seen a small real-terms increase of 0.3%. That is not tackling an injustice—that is embedding and reinforcing one.

**Emma Hardy** (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making a fantastic speech. In Central ward in Hull, more than 47% of children live in poverty. That is one of the highest rates of poverty in this whole country. More people in Hull claim jobseeker’s allowance than the national average. At the same time, there have been £120 million of cuts. Does my hon. Friend agree that that could never be justified by any Government that are serious about giving every child equality of opportunity?

**Preet Kaur Gill:** My hon. Friend makes a really important intervention. The figures are harrowing. I hope the Minister is listening carefully and will respond to Members’ interventions at the end of the debate.

Local government is not homogenous. The service needs of their populations, ability to raise revenue locally and reliance on central grants all differ substantially. Proposed and existing policies such as business rates retention and council tax limits will mean different councils can raise significant amounts, which may not match the spending pressures those councils face.

As academics from Cambridge pointed out in October 2018, the Government’s austerity politics have led to

“a shrinking capacity of the local state to address inequality...increasing inequality between local governments themselves and...intensifying issues of territorial injustice.”

Local authorities vary in the needs of their population for services, their reliance on central grants and their ability to raise local revenue. With the Department planning to introduce 75% business rates retention for all local authorities, and access to public services for citizens increasingly reliant on the local tax base—whereby poorer areas are not as able to provide as many public services or the same quality of infrastructure as areas with healthier, more wealthy tax bases—without a strong

[Preet Kaur Gill]

redistributive element, the under-investment, or even lack of investment, in communities and the people who live there will see them unable to prosper.

Will the Minister ensure that no council has its funding reduced as a result of a new distribution system? What actions will he take to that end? The National Audit Office has highlighted the dangers of bringing in a business rates retention model that has not been fully tested. Will the Minister commit to making public a full and thorough evaluation of the pilot schemes before committing to any further roll-out?

I could raise any number of areas where Government cuts to local government are causing immeasurable immediate and long-term damage—from homelessness to fire safety, from crime prevention to children's services and public health. Reductions in any of those areas are not impact-neutral, as they influence and prohibit the capacity to prevent and support. As I was cabinet member for public health at Sandwell Council, I will focus on public health, and I hope my colleagues will pick up on other areas.

Councils' public health budgets are being cut by £531 million between 2015-16 and 2019-20. The Government are taking with one hand, while, at the same time, putting more money into the NHS. Preventing illness and catching problems early so they do not develop further down the line will save the NHS and social care money, so the short-sightedness of cutting public health funding must be due either to ignorance, or to a political choice to undermine councils' abilities to improve the health of the public. Which is it?

**Laura Smith** (Crewe and Nantwich) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. The underfunding of social care is a travesty in itself, but it also has consequences for our hospitals, including avoidable hospital admissions and delayed transfers of care. Does my hon. Friend share my concern that the cuts to local government funding are far-reaching and could have a profound impact on our NHS?

**Preet Kaur Gill:** My hon. Friend raises an important point. The NHS spends only about 5% of its funding on preventive measures. That just cannot be right. As she rightly says, social care costs will soar, and that makes no sense at all.

The Government have announced that they will phase out the public health grant after 2020-21. Instead, they expect business rates retention to entirely fund public health spending. Health inequalities will increase. While they have proposed some kind of top-up system, as with many areas concerning local government, it is unclear how that would work and to what extent that top-up would support the local authorities that need it.

**Catherine West:** Does my hon. Friend agree that one area of particular concern is sexual health services, which are being particularly hard hit?

**Preet Kaur Gill:** My hon. Friend makes a really important point. We need to invest more money in public health and not siphon it away from councils, for issues such as sexual health, drug and alcohol strategies, mental health—there are a number of issues, and I could go on.

Does the Minister agree that preventive services and approaches are the most efficient and effective way to improve outcomes for our residents and tackle many of the issues that they face? If so, does he agree that local government needs appropriate and sufficient funding to achieve that goal by providing frontline services and working with civil society to develop and sustain multi-organisation and agency approaches? If he agrees on those two points, does he believe that, as things stand, our local authorities have the resources necessary to deliver those services and approaches now and in the future?

I thank all Members who have attended this debate and who are waiting to contribute. The turnout reveals the depth and strength of feeling about this important issue. We all work with our local councils and know the vital services they provide and the work they put into care for our multitude of residents and citizens, particularly support for families, protection of children and care for older and disabled people. We all know that the Government's current attitude and approach are not sustainable, and we need this Administration to wake up to that fact and address it properly.

I have waited until now to mention Brexit, which we must discuss and examine, if only briefly. The Government have committed billions to many Departments in preparing for Brexit. With the Treasury giving the Department only £35 million for preparations, will the Minister allay the fears of councils around the country by promising that any additional financial commitments and burdens that are placed on councils as a result of Brexit are fully funded by central Government? We need fully funded local government to drive many of the things that make Britain a great country in which to live and work. With councils already facing a funding gap of £7.8 billion by 2025, the Government must take the opportunity of the final settlement and the 2019 spending review to deliver truly sustainable funding to local government. Are they up to the challenge?

**Mr Charles Walker (in the Chair):** I apologise again to colleagues for my unforgivable lateness. We will start winding up at 3.40 pm, so everybody should keep their speeches quite short, because there are about 13 speakers.

2.51 pm

**Priti Patel** (Witham) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak in the debate and to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Walker. I congratulate the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Preet Kaur Gill) on securing this debate, and I thank her for her remarks. It is fair to say that she has covered a full gamut of aspects of local government. Like her, I pay tribute to the many thousands of councillors up and down the country who work tirelessly in their community as public servants, delivering some very difficult portfolios and in some very challenging parts of the country. At this time of year, councils across the country are in the process of finalising their budgets for the next financial year, which is why the hon. Lady's debate is so timely.

My constituency covers three lower-tier authorities—Braintree District Council, Colchester Borough Council and Maldon District Council—as well as an upper-tier authority, which is Essex County Council. I pay tribute to all my colleagues at all the authorities, particularly

Essex County Council, who are faced with a number of pressures, including growing demand on services—it is a theme that no doubt we will hear throughout the debate—and the overall impact of the Government's financial settlements on them and on councils across the country. My colleagues at Essex County Council work very well with the Local Government Association, which has campaigned clearly and robustly on areas where more needs to be done. There is always scope for innovation, efficiency and transformation. Naturally, these local councils look to central Government to provide more certainty on the future of their finances and the level of support they receive from the Government.

**Dr David Drew** (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): Does the hon. Lady accept that one way central Government give certainty is by letting authorities that had the benefit of the retention of business rates know what the Government's plans for the future are? At the moment, it is very uncertain.

**Priti Patel:** I will touch on business rates later. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right, and councils need to be getting on with their own plans.

With the comprehensive spending review taking place later this year, rate reform and the fair funding review—I know the Minister is well aware of this—the Government have the opportunity to consider carefully the various submissions and representations from local authorities. Compared with other local areas, we are underfunded in Essex not just through local government, but through our police and health services. I very much hope that the Minister and the Government will be sympathetic and understanding, and that they will use this as an opportunity to rebalance resources towards our county, particularly our county council, which has the responsibility for adults and children. Essex County Council is experiencing considerable budgetary pressures, which the Government will know about from the various representations that my colleagues across the county and I have constantly made to the Department.

Essex faces significant financial challenges in adult social care, which accounted for 45% of the council's total spend, with a budget of £646 million in 2017-18. The council is collecting over £82 million in fees and charges from residents, but budgets are being squeezed and it already faces demographic pressures and challenges. The number of people aged over 80 is set to grow over the next decade by 61%, and those over 90 by 100%. The council is facing rising costs as it seeks to provide support to around 4,000 residents with learning disabilities, including cases that are very complex to resolve. Its objective is to provide those residents and all citizens with a good quality of life.

On top of those pressures, provider costs for care packages are increasing while the supply of beds and residential accommodation by providers is falling. Some 362 beds were lost to the market in 2018 as seven care homes closed, and contracts from domiciliary providers have been handed back. These are continuous pressures on funding social care. We know that money has been put aside for social care, which is of course welcome, but it is not meeting the growing pressures and demands in Essex and around the country, too.

I hope to work with the Government and my councils to look at how we can constructively address these pressures and constraints. The council faces pressures

on education and special needs in addition to social care. I appreciate that this issue rests primarily with the Department for Education, but resources are being squeezed and I have many concerns. I have a vast number of constituents coming to me, and it is pretty clear that their needs, challenges and concerns are not being met in the way that we as a Government would like. The council has been proactive in its own representations to Ministers, and I very much look forward to the Government working with it.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston made a strong and important point on public health. Across the country—I see this in Essex—we are seeing pressures on public health. We can do much more to prevent many of the pressures on A&E, our hospitals and GP surgeries. One of the greatest challenges that we face, which relates directly to planning, is that the population of my constituency, and the number of houses, is growing. We have to meet those challenges by ensuring that the right kind of support goes into public health and infrastructure provision, so that we can get a new health centre for primary care in Witham and invest in our roads and in other aspects of local amenities and public services, too.

I come back to the point on education. When the provisional settlement was announced last month, Essex County Council was very keen to ensure that it was part of the pilot round for local business rates. It was pretty disappointed not to be, and I make a plea to the Minister for some kind of reconsideration or to ensure that Essex features in future schemes.

Essex is a county that constantly innovates. We want to strive for excellence while delivering value for money and meeting our service requirements to deliver to the public. There are endless pressures. Across the county of Essex, there are some big challenges that we want to work on with central Government to look for innovative solutions and ideas about how we can address many of those concerns.

2.59 pm

**Joan Ryan** (Enfield North) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Walker. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Preet Kaur Gill) for securing this important debate. It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Witham (Priti Patel).

We have heard many worrying examples today of how eight years of Government-imposed austerity and cuts to local government funding have damaged communities up and down our country. Sadly, and not surprisingly, that is also the case for our community in Enfield. Since 2010, Enfield Council's central Government funding has been slashed by £178 million—a cut of £800 per household in the borough. If we had known that in 2010, we would have dismissed it as completely unsustainable.

Enfield's adult social care budget has been gutted by £30 million since 2010, and there was a loss of £3.2 million from Enfield's youth services budget between 2011 and 2016—a reduction of more than 57%. Almost every school in Enfield faces further cuts to their already stretched budgets. By 2020 they will have lost £12.5 million due to central Government cuts—a reduction of £273 per pupil. The Government's willingness to cut those services



[Joan Ryan]

is denying a generation of young people the best opportunities in life, and making it much harder for them to realise their potential and achieve their aspirations.

On top of that, Enfield Council is being forced to find another £18 million of savings next year. To put that in context, £18 million is more than the council's current combined net spend on housing services, parks and open spaces, leisure, culture and library facilities. Our Labour Council is doing all it can to protect our local public services, and squeezing every penny to make ends meet, while having to cope with increasing need and the demands of a growing and ageing population. Some 34,000 young people in Enfield are now living below the poverty line, food bank usage has rocketed by 13% in the past three years, and the borough now has the highest eviction rate in London. That is the background to the cuts.

When the Government make cuts to Enfield Council's budget, they are making a clear choice: they do not see the needs of local people as a priority. That is also reflected in their position on community safety. The cuts have had no greater impact than on our police service and the safety of our communities. Whenever I talk to people on the doorstep about crime in Enfield, as I did this Saturday morning—nobody in north London is unaware of the situation—many residents tell me how concerned they are about rising crime in Enfield. They have good reason to be concerned, as violent crime has soared by more than 90% since 2010—the figures sound unreal. In the year to November 2018, there was a 20% spike in knife crime offences in Enfield, compared with a 1.1% rise across London. We are at the top of that league table, where nobody wants to be. In the same period, our borough saw the highest serious youth violence rate in London—up almost 9%, in contrast to a decrease of 5.2% across the capital. I think we can make a special case for Enfield, alongside the case for London and the rest of the country.

Neighbourhood policing should be at the heart of our communities, but the Government have cut the Metropolitan police's budget by £850 million since 2010, resulting in the loss of 3,000 police officers and 3,000 police community support officers across London. The Met is expected to make a further £263 million cut by 2022-23. That has led to the loss of 241 uniformed officers from Enfield's streets over the past eight years.

Enfield's Labour council has funded 16 police officers from its own budget to ameliorate that loss and tackle crime and antisocial behaviour. By working with the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, the council has secured a second dedicated police officer patrolling the streets in every ward of Enfield. We cannot blame the people of Enfield for thinking that Ministers are reducing the priority they place on keeping our young people and our communities safe, given the Government's staggering cuts to the police budget.

To tackle the rise in violent crime, we need a fully-funded, multi-agency approach. That means properly and adequately funding the police and local government, which has an important role to play. As I have set out, those agencies and our public services are being put under severe financial pressure. The Government should be ashamed. The effects of eight years of austerity have been laid bare. They must end the cuts to Enfield's

public services and invest in our communities and in our children's futures. Until that happens, I fear that the safety and aspirations of people in Enfield will continue to be put at risk. We will continue to see rising crime, youth violence, knife attacks, loss of life, serious injury, robberies and muggings.

No matter what Enfield Council and the Mayor of London do to address the situation, the ultimate responsibility and solution rests with the Government. Only they have the resources to provide our communities and our public services with the financial support they desperately require. I hope that the Minister will address those issues, and that the Government will prioritise properly funding our councils and public services.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Charles Walker (in the Chair):** There are still plenty of Members who want to speak, and the winding-up speeches will start in 35 minutes. I will let the debate run for an extra two minutes—I will not deprive Members of two minutes—but we need to manage time a bit better.

3.5 pm

**Dr Dan Poulter** (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Walker, and to speak in this debate. I congratulate the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Preet Kaur Gill) on securing it. She made some excellent points, particularly about the challenges that local government faces in prioritising public health spending. In respect of any contributions relating to health, I draw hon. Members' attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests: I am a practising NHS doctor and a member of the Royal College of Psychiatrists.

It is undoubtedly the case that when austerity began almost a decade ago there was a need, in view of the economic situation that the country faced, for some belt-tightening and efficiency savings in local government and elsewhere in the public sector. We all have to accept that that was inevitable at the time, but nobody envisaged that the period of belt-tightening would last almost a decade. During that period we have seen an unprecedented squeeze on NHS and local government finances.

The Government talk about devolving powers to local authorities, but it is very difficult to give local authorities the responsibility to deliver more services without adequately funding those services and those that local authorities are already delivering. There is talk of improved integration between health and social care, and between the NHS and local authorities, but in fact we have seen a retrenchment of the delivery of services by many local authorities. As their budgets are squeezed, they have not had the money available to better join up and integrate services with the NHS. Patients have suffered as a result, particularly those with long-term conditions and disabilities, at both ends of the age spectrum.

I will talk briefly about some issues that are important to all Members, including the challenges that local authorities face in delivering improved care for people who are homeless or street homeless, which is a growing problem throughout the country, including in Suffolk

and Ipswich; the challenges faced by addiction services; and the challenges faced by social care. The Government are rightly talking a good game on homelessness—they want to do more—but street homelessness is continuing to rise. The failure to tackle it is a result of both a lack of joined-up thinking and a lack of funding in the right places.

In particular, funding for addiction services has been squeezed. Many people who are street homeless have challenges with drug and alcohol dependence, but the funding to help them address those problems is simply not there. In addiction services, access to and funding for certain medications is being severely squeezed. Housing pressures, particularly in urban areas, mean that long-term solutions to tackle street homelessness are not there. The welcome changes that the Government put into place have failed to manifest in any meaningful change, and street homelessness continues to rise.

At the same time we see addiction services cut off completely from NHS care and working in a silo. There is a complete failure of joined-up thinking. I know that the Minister is scrolling through his iPad, but he would do well to listen to this point, because there is a failure and a lack of integration between what is happening in the NHS and mental healthcare and addiction services. There is a silo mentality in commissioning; local authorities commission addiction services and mental healthcare is commissioned by the NHS. That was a failure of the Health and Social Care Act 2012, and I urge the Minister to look at that if he wants to meaningfully improve care for people with addiction problems and begin to tackle the problems that a lot of street homeless people face.

Finally, on the issue of social care, we have an ageing population with multiple medical comorbidities—some 3 million people in England now have three or more medical comorbidities. That is a huge financial challenge not only for the NHS, but for social care. In spite of that growing challenge, at the other end of the age spectrum, thanks to improvements in modern healthcare, children with what would have been considered terminal illnesses often now live into their teenage years and sometimes into adulthood. Because of those twin challenges, the social care system faces unprecedented financial demands in delivering better care, yet funding for social care has been reduced by billions of pounds over the past few years.

Without that funding, the integration that the Government speak about will simply not happen. There will not be integration of health and social care. Money will continue to be diverted into acute services. One-off spending on winter pressures is all very well, but it does very little to address the chronic financial and human challenge that this country faces in improving and joining up better care for people with long-term conditions.

Welcome soundbites from the Government are all very well, but we need to see delivery on the ground. We need legislative levers to help drive better integration and we need the funding to back it up. Without the money, local government will be unable to deliver improved care, let alone continue to deliver the care that it does at the moment. I urge the Minister to look at the local government funding settlement, at the legislative levers and at what more can be done to support local authorities to raise additional money at a local level to help fund important local services.

3.12 pm

**Faisal Rashid** (Warrington South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Walker. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Preet Kaur Gill) on securing this important debate. Local government services are integral to building the vibrant, inclusive communities that our constituents deserve. They are also vital for safeguarding the most vulnerable in our communities and ensuring that no one is left behind. It is for precisely those reasons that I am sure many Members will share my frustration at seeing their communities' potential sapped by wave after wave of Tory austerity. As a former councillor in my constituency, I know only too well the scandal of local government underfunding. Warrington Borough Council has faced budget cuts of £122 million since 2010, and by 2020 it will have to save at least another £38 million.

**Hugh Gaffney** (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (Lab): In Scotland the situation is exactly the same with Tory austerity cuts, and the Scottish National party simply follows the Tory line in Scotland. I hear exactly the same stories all over Britain. It is time to give the councils money and get poverty off the streets.

**Faisal Rashid:** I agree totally with my hon. Friend.

Warrington is one of the lowest funded of the 91 unitary and metropolitan authorities outside London, and it is the second lowest funded in the north-west. Cuts have been imposed on the local authority while pressure on services is growing. People are living longer and the borough's population continues to rise. I commend Labour councillors from my constituency who, despite having to make difficult decisions in such challenging circumstances, have always tried to put fairness and the need to protect vulnerable people ahead of politics. Sadly, that is not enough to stem the tide of disastrous Tory cuts. Critical services such as adult social care and children's services are coming under severe strain. Preventive measures that seek to reduce the long-term overall cost to the council have to be cut. The Government must surely recognise that that is not the way to provide services to an ageing population with increasingly long-term needs.

The Government have also tried to offload blame for their cuts on to local councils by shifting the burden on to the taxpayer. My constituents face council tax rises of 6% to mitigate the impact of the cuts. However, in order for services to run effectively, the council would still require an additional £30 million because of cuts in central Government funding. Warrington taxpayers are paying more and getting less because of the Government's austerity agenda. In October last year the Prime Minister declared that austerity was over, but I cannot see that it is over. How does the Minister justify that statement to my constituents, who face yet another round of spending cuts and tax increases in the new year?

While the Prime Minister was announcing the end of austerity last October, more than 5,000 councillors signed the Breaking Point petition, calling on the Government to cancel their planned cuts for the new year and immediately invest £2 billion in children's services and £2 billion in adult social care to stop those vital services collapsing. The Government must heed the advice of local representatives from all over the country by investing properly in our communities.

[Faisal Rashid]

At the general election, Labour pledged £8 billion extra to fund social care, alongside an additional £500 million a year for Sure Start and early intervention services. If the Government are serious about ending austerity, that is the kind of investment that local government requires to rejuvenate our communities after eight years of crippling austerity.

3.17 pm

**Vicky Ford** (Chelmsford) (Con): We have an east of England flavour on the Government side of the Chamber. It is a great pleasure to be the second Essex woman to speak in the debate and a great pleasure to be an Essex MP. I am constantly impressed by the exceptionally good work in my parish councils, and in Chelmsford City Council and Essex County Council. The county council has been ranked in the top 10 of the most productive councils in the country and is celebrating a huge achievement in getting an outstanding rating for children's services. The Ofsted report for children's services talks about the inspiration provided by senior leaders and the importance of the political support given to them. It discussed their tenacious ambition for our children and how social workers are passionate about improving outcomes for them. Such tireless work is absolutely vital to focus on the most vulnerable. The outstanding ranking is for preventive services and the focus on getting early help to those who need it. In Essex, we know that top-class services are not just about pouring more money into the system. It is also about being really focused on the outcomes.

**Thelma Walker** (Colne Valley) (Lab): I agree with the hon. Lady that the issue is not just about pouring money into services, although I wish we had the money to do that. It is also about having the funding to employ and skill up a workforce. Does she agree that we face not only the loss of frontline services, but the skills and knowledge of local government officers, many of whom have been made redundant in many of our local authorities, such as Colne Valley, my authority? The skills and knowledge are not there to advise local communities because all the local knowledge has been lost.

**Vicky Ford**: I agree about the importance of local services, but the lesson from the restructuring of children's services in Essex was that they became an outstanding service through a focus on the most vulnerable, who most needed support. When they were focused more broadly, and were not necessarily so targeted on the vulnerable, they did not achieve the same outcomes for the young people who really needed them.

I shall not say that there is not a challenge in Essex County Council. Indeed there is. There is huge pressure from population growth, inflation growth and increasing demand for services. The county council is announcing today that it will increase council tax by just under 4%. It would dearly have liked to be in the pilot scheme for business rate retentions, and is disappointed not to be. There has been some more money from the Government, which is welcome, for winter pressures, social care and highways, but those have been short-term amounts. They are not for the long-term planning that is needed.

As my colleague and neighbour, my right hon. Friend the Member for Witham (Priti Patel), pointed out, the impact on adult social services is severe. About 45% of the county council's budget is spent on adult social services. We are expecting a nearly two-thirds increase in the number of over-80s in the next decade, and a doubling in the number of over-90s. Seven care homes have been closed and while the county council has tried to minimise the impact of that, and to support those who are affected, the impact on residents is necessarily huge. We need a longer-term solution for the funding of adult social services. The council is making quite sensible, radical changes in its thinking on insurance schemes, lifetime individual savings accounts, possibly more of a local sales tax, and other ways to take the business rate retention scheme to the next level. We need to focus on that.

We are a rapidly growing part of the country. In Chelmsford, it is planned to build about 18,000 homes. We need those new homes. People want to come and live in the county, and we need to help young people on to the housing ladder, but we need the infrastructure to go with it. The county council is spending about a quarter of a billion pounds this year on roads, and primary and secondary school places, but there are some long-term projects, such as our second railway station and the north-east bypass. Those are infrastructure projects for which people have waited decades, and they are vital to go with the housing. I wanted to pick up on the point about homelessness raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich (Dr Poulter).

**Mr Charles Walker (in the Chair)**: Order. Will the hon. Lady begin to wind up, just to be generous to other Members?

**Vicky Ford**: Yes, I will, Mr Walker; thank you.

There are huge pressures in tackling homelessness. Local charities work hard, but they need more support from Chelmsford City Council. It is the only city that has not had extra support for homelessness. We have projects to secure more social lettings and supported housing, and more help for those at risk of becoming homeless. I hope that the Minister will see that those funding bids are granted.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Charles Walker (in the Chair)**: We have seven speakers in 16 minutes, so I shall let colleagues divide that among themselves.

3.23 pm

**Jo Platt** (Leigh) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Walker. I declare an interest as I am a vice-president of the Local Government Association. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Preet Kaur Gill) on securing the debate. I have the enormous pleasure of co-chairing Labour Friends of Local Government with my hon. Friend. I hope that the group will use opportunities such as this debate to shed light on the funding realities that councils face.

As a former councillor, I know at first hand the enormous pressures that councils face. I became a councillor in 2012, just as the austerity measures were about to be implemented. In 2014, I was appointed to the cabinet



with the children and young people portfolio. It was not an easy time. Owing to the cuts, some difficult decisions had to be made. One included Sure Start. I was adamant that we were not going to lose our much-valued Labour policy, but I knew that changes were needed to ensure its survival. Those difficult decisions are made every day by councils, but they do not often receive the same publicity and attention as the decisions we make here, despite the enormous consequences for our constituents' lives.

The coalition Government of 2010 knew that. They knew that if they heaped responsibility on to local authorities without the funding to deliver, councils would take the blame for cuts. There have been budget cuts of £160 million to the budget of our local council alone. That means that every year, £160 million has been taken. It would have provided services that we rely on. The £160 million has been found from libraries, roads, bin collections, social care and children's services. Those are the stark decisions that councils are forced to make, and they all have far-reaching consequences. To put the challenge into perspective, by the end of the year, local authorities will have lost 60p in every pound from the funding that Government used to provide.

There is no light at the end of the tunnel. The Government want councils to be more and more self-sufficient, which means there will be less in grants from Government. Under the Tory proposals, areas less able to raise council revenue will have less to spend. Areas with the highest demands and council pressures will not have the budgets to cope. It is likely that in areas with the least pressures there will be council tax reductions. The Government tell us to trust them on the funding formula that we have yet to see, but with their record how can we possibly trust them?

Such pressing challenges are the reason why my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston and I established the Labour friends of local government group last year. It brings together councillors, MPs and stakeholders to call out the Government for their recklessness, and so that we can support one another and share ideas on how hard-working Labour councils can continue to deliver quality services despite Tory austerity. Most of all, we came together with one united message: hard-working Labour councils are not to blame for austerity and we have a duty as Labour MPs to make that crystal clear.

Councils are critical to our constituents' social mobility, and to boosting young people's life chances, but the Government's contempt for local government, which is shown in their underfunding and under-resourcing, is restricting the economic and social transformation that town economies such as Leigh desperately need. I welcome the debate as an opportunity to highlight the damage caused from Westminster by Tory handling of local government, and the enormous challenges that the next few years will present to councils. We desperately need a fair funding settlement for councils that will not just give them the bare essentials to cope, but will utilise our incredible councils to get the best out of their areas.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Charles Walker (in the Chair):** Will everyone do three minutes each? The Opposition Front Bench has given me back six. Clive Lewis, three minutes—please.

3.27 pm

**Clive Lewis** (Norwich South) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Preet Kaur Gill) for securing this debate on an issue that affects communities and constituencies across the country. The latest stark example of what we are talking about is the plan by Conservative-led Norfolk County Council to close 38 out of 53 children's centres, including three out of five in my constituency. At the same time, without a hint of irony, the Government have designated Norwich an opportunity area, to increase social mobility. I politely advise the Minister that trying to improve social mobility while targeting early years provision for such cuts is a bit like trying to fill a bath without a plug—an impossible, Sisyphean task.

There is no doubt that the proposals will hurt some of the most vulnerable people in the city. At a Norwich children's centre I heard from a mum how, following a difficult and traumatic birth, support from the centre protected her mental health. Another parent who had fled domestic violence told me that her centre was a safe place to go when she needed it most. No one judged her and she was able to get specialist help safely and quickly to protect her children. I also spoke with a mother who had a learning disability and epilepsy. She told me how the outreach provided by her centre before her child's birth gave her the skills and confidence to join the ante-natal class. She said, "It made me feel normal, like the other mums, like I fitted in. I made friends". Where are they expected to go if their local centres close? What is the future for their children if the centres are shut?

A long, complex path has led to where we are today. Between 2011 and 2019 Norfolk County Council made £364 million of cuts. Over the same period, the council had to absorb additional costs of £386 million. Despite facing huge cuts under the previous coalition Government, between 2013 and 2016 the Labour-led administration at County Hall managed to keep every children's centre open and protect the budget of £10 million a year. Tories at Norfolk County Council now want to halve the budget for children's centres to £5 million a year.

Local Conservatives are trying to con us by stating that they can make such a cut and close most of our children's centres but still provide a good service, and they justify the closures by saying that replacement services will get to the people who need them via outreach. Given that those centres already provide outreach, as well as helping people who come into the centre, how can we expect them to provide the same level of support when funding has been decimated?

It is well known that for every £1 invested in early intervention and in places such as children's centres, the state saves £13 further down the line. Children's centres plug the gaps left by other services that have already been cut. People in my city do not want their children's centres to be shut. It is beyond doubt that closing so many centres will cause great harm to parents and children in Norfolk, and there was a bitter irony in Tory county councillors citing cuts by their own Government as the reason for those closures. They may try to pass the buck, but the blame rests with them both.

Let us consider the challenges that this country and our children will face in the coming century, such as climate change, the loss of biodiversity, rampant inequality, threats to our democracy, and undreamed of technological

[Clive Lewis]

changes. Surely it is nothing less than criminal to pursue policies that will cut the social and educational tools that people will need to navigate their way through those coming challenges.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Charles Walker (in the Chair):** Fantastic. There are five speakers left, which means about two minutes and 25 seconds each. Let's go.

3.31 pm

**Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Thank you for chairing this debate, Mr Walker. Although £44 million has already been wiped from York's budget, another £4.1 million will go this year—hardly austerity coming to an end. Local authorities are the game changer for introducing early intervention and prevention into a system. Thanks to a perverse decision by my local authority, the budget to tackle substance misuse was slashed by 25%—a £2 million budget lost £500,000—even though we have the highest level of deaths due to substance misuse in the country. We see the consequences of such cuts across York, and I can give many such examples.

York also has the worst funded education in the country. Schools are on tight budgets, and that is matched with the highest level of attainment inequality in the country. Such a diminution in funding has consequences that are harming my community, and I implore the Minister to put his money where his mouth is and end austerity by ensuring that local authorities have the resources they need to transform our communities.

Labour councillors across York are ready to transform our city, with incredible ideas about early intervention and prevention. Without those resources, however, they will be constrained, and if we are to see a game changer in the way our society works, we must make the right choices. In particular, I reflect on housing investment in our city. Hardly any social housing has been built in York since 2015, and that has had serious consequences for many other factors. We need only turn to the work of Michael Marmot to know the impact of such policies on public health. We need not only resources but the right leadership to make real changes in our community. This debate is just a start, and it is important to follow it up. I would welcome a meeting with the Minister to talk about the difficult issues and challenges our city faces, because the funding formula is not working across the board.

Finally, the business rates system has failed our community. It is driving people away from the high street, which has a perverse effect on the income received by local authorities. We urgently need the review that was promised two years ago, and I implore the Minister to speak to Treasury colleagues so that that comes to fruition.

**Mr Charles Walker (in the Chair):** Outstanding timekeeping.

3.34 pm

**Lloyd Russell-Moyle** (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): Last year's bankruptcy of Northamptonshire County Council was the first of many, and although the Government's answer to it may have been well meaning,

it involved a totally pointless reorganisation that was a little like shuffling the deckchairs on the Titanic. A crisis in local government is also coming to my local authority. East Sussex County Council, which covers just over a third of my constituency, is following a similar path. It has declared that it can make only a core offer to meet its basic statutory duties to the very vulnerable, thereby undermining the principle of universality and its social contract with residents. The most vulnerable people will still be affected by cuts in East Sussex, with cuts to meals on wheels, which have gone in many places, the end to the locally supported bus service, and the closure of libraries and many residential centres—we have about heard that in other areas as well.

It is shocking and shameful that the most vulnerable and lonely in our society are being forced into further isolation, and it has been reported that the cash shortfall at East Sussex will leave the county bankrupt in under three years. We will see the human consequences of that dire situation for many years to come. Recent cuts to services for disabled children have led to the charity Embrace East Sussex being forced to pick up the pieces, and parents now have to crowdfund for clubs and support for their children. Local parish councils have to provide the medical support for disabled children that would otherwise have been provided by the local authority. How have we arrived at a situation where our communities rely on voluntary groups and crowdfunding donations to support our children?

East Sussex County Council has planned to cut £854,000 from safeguarding services such as training programmes, and numbers of social workers are to be slashed, leaving families vulnerable. We are literally putting our children in harm's way. The council acknowledges that more children will now be subject to child protection plans and stay longer in care because of those cuts, which in the end will cost both us and our children's future more.

Both in Westminster Hall and the main Chamber I have spoken regularly about the £1 billion cuts to youth services nationally, which is a real problem. In Brighton and Hove the local authority spends all its council tax budget on adult social care. We need a new funding formula. Funding for adult social care needs to come directly from the Government or the NHS. We must transform the way it is funded.

3.37 pm

**Lilian Greenwood** (Nottingham South) (Lab): Since 2013, Nottingham City Council's main Government funding has been cut by three quarters, from £127 million to £25 million. Even worse, at the same time as the Government have been handing out extra cash to some Tory shires, cities such as Nottingham that cope with high levels of deprivation have been disproportionately hit. For example, in 10 years Surrey gained £19 per household while Nottingham lost £529.

The cuts come at a time when the council faces rising demand for its services, especially adult social care and child protection, and that inevitably means cuts to vital frontline services. Last year the city was forced to cut public health programmes to help people lose weight or stop smoking. It cut youth and play services, and there have been new restrictions on bus passes for disabled people. Fares on supportive buses have increased, and there are higher fees for leisure centres and other services.

It is all short-term and self-defeating in the long run, as it will place extra burdens on our NHS, police, and other local services.

One of the most visible changes is the increase in rough sleeping. In 2010, when Labour left government, Nottingham city had an estimated three rough sleepers per night. This year that number has risen to 43. Despite the fantastic work done by the council, it faces an incredible challenge. That is just the most visible element and affects only 5% of the total number of people who need help with housing. In Nottingham, 15 families a week present as homeless. Is that any wonder, when the local government's housing allowance cap has been frozen since 2016 and will not rise until at least 2020?

The Government say that properties can be found for £42 or £54 per week, but recent research by Advice Nottingham found that the cheapest house was £63 a week—£20 more than the Government claim. For a family of four who need a two-bedroom house, Advice Nottingham found only two homes in the entire city that fell within local housing association rates. Social housing is an ever-rising demand to add to that list.

The cuts keep coming. Nottingham City Council is currently undertaking its budget consultation for this year—I wonder whether the Minister can advise us which vital services he would cut next. I hope that he is listening and will consider the damage that cuts to local government funding have already done and will continue to do to my constituents and my city. It is time for that to change. It cannot go on.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Charles Walker (in the Chair):** I call Jamie Stone, who has three minutes, before Emma Hardy, who will also have three minutes.

3.40 pm

**Jamie Stone** (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): Thank you, Mr Walker. I congratulate the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Preet Kaur Gill) on what was a very eloquent speech indeed. Much of what I am about to say has been summed up in a characteristically pithy intervention from the hon. Member for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill (Hugh Gaffney). As a Scottish Member, the question for me is: "Where are the Scottish Government in this debate?" It perhaps speaks volumes that we do not have any Scottish National party Members with us today—enough said.

It would not be normal if I did not talk about the remote far north of Scotland, so I will do so again. We face enormous problems in the Highland Council, of which I was a member until I was elected to Parliament: a sparse population, huge distances, inclement weather and the sheer cost of services and goods. Those elements militate against running the council cheaply. Over the last four years that I was a councillor, I found the cycle of going through budget cuts year after year a sickening process, because we felt that we were cutting right into the flesh, blood and bone of what we were trying to do for the good of constituents.

Of course, this is a devolved matter—I take heed of that—but I want to make two points arising from that. First, the settlement that the Scottish Government give councils such as the Highland Council is questionable,

but they are not here to answer that point. Does the settlement from the Treasury to the Scottish Government accurately reflect the needs of Scottish local government? Would the Minister consider an audit of the money that goes to the Scottish Government and how much is actually delivered to councils to become council services?

As I want to leave some time, my second and final point is simply this: I recognise that local government is the foundation stone and building block of proper democracy. If the public's faith in local government is damaged, we damage something that is so important to the way the country works: our democracy. Even on tempestuous days such as today, that democracy is hugely important and, I believe, an example to the world.

**Mr Charles Walker (in the Chair):** Thank you. Last but not least, I call Emma Hardy.

3.42 pm

**Emma Hardy** (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): Thank you very much, Mr Walker. I stand here to represent an incredibly proud city. I hope that the Minister bears that in mind, because I am asking not for the Government's pity about the poverty faced by people in my city, but for fairness and justice, and for the Government to acknowledge that not everybody lives in the leafy shires. I am sorry, but the suggestion that one solution could be greater investment in ISAs is so breathtakingly out of touch that it shocked me.

In my city of Hull we have the lowest average weekly wage in the country, at only £376 a week. The cuts to local government are devastating my city and creating a huge problem for the children living there. The Government talk a lot about the importance of social mobility, but those are meaningless words if people are not given equality of opportunity. My point about fairness is that there is deeply entrenched regional inequality, which is shameful to the country.

In an earlier intervention I mentioned that in one of my wards—Central ward—over 47% of people live in poverty. In my constituency there is an average life expectancy difference of nearly 10 years—the number of years that someone is expected to live a healthy life is lower in Hull than in other areas of the country. That should shame the Government into action.

Another problem is that we have £1,300 less per pupil spending on schools than in the rest of the country. We cannot rely on increasing local council tax to plug that gap. Hull City Council is 81% reliant on Government funding grants, and when that money is taken away it has a greater impact in Hull than it does in other areas of the country. Some 86% of people in Hull live in a band B or band A property, so a 1% rise in council tax would bring in only £2.90 per person in Hull, compared with £7.08 in the City of London, or £6.33 in the wonderful South Hampshire. For a city such as Hull, with highly significant deprivation, a very low tax base and limited ability to generate its own income, it is essential that the Government's future financial settlement calculations recognise and make allowances for that. I ask the Minister not for his pity, but to give Hull its fair share of money and the money it needs. I ask him to reverse the cuts.



[Emma Hardy]

We heard today that Marks and Spencer is leaving the city of Hull. Our high streets are being decimated, so will the Government take action quickly and do something about business rates as well? To pull the funding from Hull—and from under the feet of the people of Hull—without making proper and necessary investment was always going to be a disaster. The Minister has the opportunity to own the Government's past mistakes, recognise the failings of his predecessors, and do something about them.

**Mr Charles Walker (in the Chair):** Order. I call the shadow Minister, whom I thank for his generosity with his time.

3.45 pm

**Jim McMahon** (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab/Co-op): Thank you, Mr Walker; it is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Preet Kaur Gill) for securing this absolutely critical debate at such a critical time, as local authorities enter their budget-setting cycle. The council meetings will take place over the coming months, and councils will be forced again, for another year, to make absolutely devastating cuts to their local communities.

That is what this is about. When we talk about council cuts, it does not gain a lot of interest, but when we talk about people and communities, the impact on the future life chances of our young people and the way older people are cared for, it absolutely matters and is crucial to our communities. In truth, the fabric of our communities—the very foundation on which the Government are trying to rest future English devolution—is fragile and near breaking point.

There has been passion in the room today: 16 speakers on the Opposition Benches and four speakers on the Government Benches, including the Minister, who will speak shortly. That shows the real interest in the issue. None of us comes to Parliament to make our communities worse off. We have heard the desperate pleas from hon. Members who really care about the impact of the cuts on their communities, not for political advantage or to try to embarrass the Government, but because we live in our communities and see the impact on our neighbourhoods: the lack of funding in our schools, the effect on all those who cannot get the social care that they need, and the young people who have been denied the best possible start in life because children's centres are taking cuts or being closed entirely.

One of the Minister's colleagues has said that the way to revive our high streets is to open libraries on them, when hundreds of libraries are closing every year because the money is just not in the system. We need radical change and radical reform, because quite frankly, we have seen tinkering around the edges far too often, and that does not get to the crux of the issue. The crux of the issue is this: council tax and business rates have a role to play—they are important property taxes—but both have limitations and will be pushed to breaking point if the Government do not do something.

Council tax is a hugely regressive tax. It takes 7% of low-income families' incomes, compared with just over 1% of higher-income families' incomes. The more pressure

that is applied to council tax, the greater the pressure that is applied to low-income families. Time and again, the Government duck their responsibilities to provide central Government funding to support local communities, and the burden falls on council tax payers. Council tax will again be increased this year to the maximum level of 6%. On top of that, more money is required to go to the police, and in the case of combined authorities or mayors, even more money is applied to that precept as well, because the Government are walking away, saying, "Well, it's not our problem," when it is a problem absolutely of the Government's making. Those are political choices.

It was absolutely right that austerity meant that every Department had to take its fair share of cuts, but the evidence says that local government has lost 800,000 members of its workforce—it is at its lowest level since comparable records began—while the central Government workforce figure is at its highest level since comparable records began. That is not a fair distribution of cuts or austerity. Local government continues to take the pain and the burden.

Many important points have been made today and I would love to go through the list of hon. Members who spoke. One thing that inspires me about Parliament is just how rooted in community our parliamentarians are—particularly Labour parliamentarians. I congratulate my hon. Friends on giving their communities a voice. The Minister, who is respected in local government—I am not trying to make a ding-dong match out of this, some real questions need real answers—has an opportunity to set out his stall, to say what he stands for and what he believes in, and to stand up for the pressures that local governments face. Any Minister at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government who presided over a local government family that can barely afford to make ends meet would not be fulfilling their responsibilities.

**Mr Charles Walker (in the Chair):** Thank you. I will call Ms Gill to make her final remarks at fifteen seconds past four. I call the Minister.

3.49 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Rishi Sunak):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Walker. I congratulate the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Preet Kaur Gill) on securing this incredibly important debate. The range of topics covered by Members' speeches illustrates the breadth and importance of what local government does, and I thank all Members for their very valuable contributions. I pay tribute to the work of local government and local councillors up and down the country.

I join the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Oldham West and Royton (Jim McMahon), in paying tribute to parliamentarians' faith in their communities and their interaction with local government. I gently chide him and say that not just Labour parliamentarians have pride in their communities; Conservative Members have considerable pride. Conservative councillors up and down the country represent communities with great passion and dedication, as we have seen in every local election in recent times.

My vision is for local government and a set of councils that drive economic growth, help the most vulnerable in our society and build strong communities. If Members allow, I will take those areas in turn, and deal with as many of the points raised as possible. I apologise in advance if I cannot cover every single question, but I will be more than happy to follow up in person or by letter to anyone whose point was not answered.

We heard a lot about cuts and funding. I agree with the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston that local government has faced a challenging set of circumstances over the past few years. We do not need to replay all the arguments for why, but the task that this Government faced in bringing public finances back under control was considerable. Local government played a very large part in doing that. It has done a commendable job in those circumstances and I pay tribute to the work of local government, parties and councillors of all stripes in delivering high-quality public services in a difficult financial climate.

As we turn to the future, I believe things are looking up. In the settlement just published for local government for the next financial year, core spending power—the overall metric that looks at all the different income streams and grants available to local government—is forecast to increase almost 3% in cash terms. That represents a real-terms increase for local government and the highest year-on-year cash increase in some time. I know that is welcomed as a step in the right direction.

Beyond cash, local governments play a key role, as we heard, in supporting local economic growth. In the long term, that is the only way to ensure the vibrancy of our local communities and to raise the vital funds we need to fund our public services. The hon. Member for Blackley and Broughton (Graham Stringer) said that local government should have the ability to raise its own funds; business rates retention is one such opportunity.

I am delighted that Birmingham in particular is in the fortunate position of keeping 100% of business rates growth that it generates; many local councils up and down the country want that. The hon. Lady asked whether we would and should pilot new forms of business rates retention; I am pleased to say that is exactly what this Government are doing. In the next year, 15 pilot areas covering 122 local authorities will benefit from being a 75% business rate retention area, generating in aggregate for the country £2.5 billion in incremental funds for local councils, to reward their effort to drive growth.

The hon. Member for Stroud (Dr Drew) asked about the future of the system. I am pleased to say that the whole country should enjoy 75% business rates retention for 2021. That system is being designed—not in secret, as seemed to be alleged, but transparently with the sector—through a system design working group. The consultation is out and I urge anyone with an interest to contribute to the design of that new system.

One of the most undeniably crucial roles that local government continues to play is helping the most vulnerable in our society. Local authorities support the elderly, the disabled and our children in need. We owe councils an enormous debt of gratitude for the incredible work they do in this area. We heard many passionate speeches about their role. This Government are backing local

authorities to carry out those vital duties. As we heard last year, the Budget provided an additional £2 billion for social care and committed a further £1 billion of extra funding for local services.

The integration between social care and the NHS was raised by the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Laura Smith) and my hon. Friend the Member for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich (Dr Poulter). They are absolutely right to do that. I am pleased to say that we are taking very positive steps in that direction. The better care fund, which pulls together funds from the NHS, local government and social care, is working. Ninety three per cent. of local areas believe that the better care fund has improved integrated working between the NHS and social care. We are seeing that in the numbers: social care has freed up more than 1,000 beds a day since the February 2017—a 43% reduction in social care-related delayed transfers of care. I hope hon. Members agree that we are making progress in this vital area.

We heard about the changing demographics in places such as Essex from my right hon. Friend the Member for Witham (Priti Patel) and my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford). It is absolutely right that in the long term, as we look to a new funding mechanism for local government, capturing those kinds of rapidly changing demographics is something we must get right. We heard from many Members about the pressures on social care. I am determined to work with the sector to find a formula that reflects accurately and transparently what local councils face on the ground, so that all local councils of all stripes can ensure they are funded fairly.

On children's social care, I want particularly to point out the incredible work that Essex has done. My hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford put it excellently: we should focus on outcomes, not just the amount of money we pour in. Her council is a shining example of one that does that in children's social care, displaying innovation, as we heard from my right hon. Friend the Member for Witham. I am pleased to have spent time with Essex County Council. Many councils can and do learn a lot from how Essex has brought down the number of children in need, through a focus on early intervention and prevention.

The hon. Members for Birmingham, Edgbaston, for York Central (Rachael Maskell), for Leigh (Jo Platt) and for Brighton, Kemptown (Lloyd Russell-Moyle) and others talked about the importance of prevention. I could not agree more with that sentiment. I am a passionate believer that councils can play a valuable role in ensuring that children do not end up in care, and that we can get to problems before they happen. My focus since getting this job has been on the troubled families programme. I am pleased to tell hon. Members that we have been working very hard to robustly understand the value that that programme brings and delivers on the ground in Members' communities. We will shortly make more announcements about that, and I want to work with all colleagues across the House.

**Dr Poulter:** On delayed discharges from care, the Minister is right to say that progress has been made, but the challenge is that many local authorities can no longer co-operate with the NHS in the way they could before, by having embedded social workers in NHS organisations to prevent hospital admissions in the first

[Dr Poulter]

place. That is a very big challenge, and it is driving up hospital admissions. Although the money may go to the acute sector, it will not prevent people from getting there in the first place. The Minister needs to look at that.

**Rishi Sunak:** Obviously, I defer to my hon. Friend's knowledge of the NHS, but I thank him for raising the point and I will make sure we discuss that with colleagues in the Department of Health and Social Care as we design the iterations of the better care fund and related joint working practices.

Prevention is incredibly important. The troubled families programme is back with almost £1 billion of money over this cycle; it works with families facing very difficult circumstances, doing all the work we heard about from hon. Members. I hope they will join me in Parliament to make a strong case for investment in this type of programme for this type of service as we approach the spending review, to demonstrate to everybody what a valuable role those kinds of services and local government can play.

Local authorities build strong communities by being cohesive. They have been backed with a £100 million fund to ease local pressures resulting from migration. They do that by being connected, and they are being backed with a £420 million fund to ensure that the roads that our constituents use will transport them safely and quickly to where they need to go. They also need houses for all their constituents, as we have heard. That is why we have lifted the housing revenue account borrowing cap and are investing almost £1 billion in tackling rough sleeping.

It is a pleasure to champion local government here in Westminster. It is a role that I relish, and I look forward to working with all hon. Members as we approach the spending review, to make a compelling case for why local government deserves funding to making such valuable change on the ground, whether that is driving local growth, caring for the most vulnerable in our society or building strong communities. Local authorities up and down the country do an amazing job and they deserve our support.

3.59 pm

**Preet Kaur Gill:** I thank the Minister for his response and for paying tribute to councils up and down the country. I also thank him for acknowledging the real challenges local government faces. Although I welcome the £1 billion for the troubled families programme, there is still so much more to be done.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham West and Royton (Jim McMahon), who reminded us about the people and communities these cuts impact, and I thank all other hon. Members for their contributions. The right hon. Member for Witham (Priti Patel) touched on social care and the funding settlement. My right hon. Friend the Member for Enfield North (Joan Ryan) spoke about knife crime and youth violence in her constituency, and the decimation of neighbourhood policing up and down the country.

I thank the hon. Member for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich (Dr Poulter), my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington South (Faisal Rashid) and the hon. Member for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford), who talked about the outstanding social work practice in Essex despite the pressures on social workers on the frontline. As an ex-social work manager, I know those pressures only too well, but I commend Essex for its work in that respect.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Jo Platt) co-chairs Labour Friends of Local Government, ensuring that the voice of local government is heard loud and clear in the House. My hon. Friend the Member for Norwich South (Clive Lewis) mentioned the plight of some of his constituents and funding cuts to early years services. My hon. Friend the Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) made the excellent point that local authorities are the game changers, and my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Lloyd Russell-Moyle) talked about his council facing bankruptcy within three years, which is shocking.

My hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood) made the point that cuts to preventive services mean paying more in the long term. We also heard from the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone) and my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Emma Hardy), who made a passionate speech about fairness. I thank all hon. Members and I thank you, Mr Walker.

*Motion lapsed (Standing order No. 10(6)).*



## Coventry City Football Club

4.1 pm

**Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered Coventry City football club and football stadium ownership.

I think this is the first time I have introduced a Westminster Hall debate with you in the Chair, Mr Walker. I may be wrong—if I am, you have my apologies. I thank Mr Speaker for granting the debate, which is very important to the people of Coventry, and to the people of Warwickshire in general. This is the fourth debate in recent years about the future of Coventry City football club. The previous debate took place last February, and the threat to the club's future has only worsened since. Its immediate future is now at risk, and urgent action must be taken.

I thank the Sky Blue Trust, which has worked tirelessly for the sake of the club and the city, and all the other Coventry City supporters both in the city and outside it. I also thank the hon. Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch) for the hard work she put in to help our club when she was Sports Minister. I am very sorry that she had to resign because of Brexit, but that is another matter. That is no reflection on the new Minister, who will be judged on her record.

The background to this issue is the club's 12-year ownership by Sisu, during which time it has faced many difficulties. Under Sisu's stewardship, the club has fallen from the championship to league two, faced administration and received repeated points deductions. Despite its promotion to league one last season, instability off the pitch overshadows any success. The worst moment in the club's recent history was its year-long exile in Northampton in 2013-14. Although an agreement was eventually struck by the English Football League, the club's issues have only deepened since.

Since moving back to the Ricoh arena, the club has become a tenant of Wasps rugby football club. Wasps' decision to buy the Ricoh arena from Coventry City Council was a success for it, and it has become a welcome and growing part of sporting life in the city. However, relations between Wasps and Coventry City have become increasingly sour. Sisu's decision to challenge the sale of the Ricoh arena led to years of legal disputes, which culminated in the rejection of its case by the Court of Appeal last October. However, we must now wait to see whether the Supreme Court will hear a fresh appeal.

**Matt Western** (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for securing a debate about this proud club, which, as he says, is important not just for the people of Coventry but for many people in and around Warwickshire. Although I agree with him and welcome the work of Wasps in the city, does he agree, in looking at all this and at the court case, that there is also a role for the Football League and the Football Association? This is not just about Coventry City, because other clubs face similar situations.

**Mr Cunningham:** My hon. Friend the Member for Coventry North East (Colleen Fletcher) and I have both written to the Football League to ask for a meeting,

and that is pending. Obviously this matter is sub judice, so I do not want to go too far into the court case. Suffice it to say that, in the interest of progress, Sisu perhaps should set aside its application to go to the courts until we have tried to resolve the issue in another way. That would show a lot of good will on both sides.

**Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): The hon. Gentleman is right to highlight the role that Sisu has played over the past five years. The hon. Member for Coventry North East (Colleen Fletcher) and I actually voted for the financial restructuring that stopped it bankrupting the company that then operated the stadium. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the blame for where the club is must fall four-square with Sisu, and that continuing to mess around in the courts is not going to move the club forward in any way, shape or form?

**Mr Cunningham:** I agree with the hon. Gentleman, who has contributed to our debates on this issue since coming to the House—I might disagree with him on other matters, but I give credit where credit is due. Sisu should sit back and reflect. It certainly has to get away from trying to distance itself from the club and saying that the club is a separate entity. We all know that it is not, and that must be made clear. I am certainly doing so in this debate.

While Sisu has spent huge sums on legal action, the real consequences have been felt by the club. There are huge doubts about Coventry City's future at the Ricoh arena. Wasps is refusing to keep the tenancy going, while Sisu continues its legal action. Regardless of the validity of Sisu's claim, it has again left the fans suffering as a result. As I said, the club's short-term future must be the priority. Coventry City must stay at the Ricoh arena next season. No other option is acceptable. To achieve that, all parties need to get back around the negotiating table.

There are currently too many red lines preventing talks. I understand the concerns of Wasps, but I ask it to reconsider for the sake of the city. For its part, Sisu must consider what it might gain from continued legal action. All fans agree that no judicial win would outweigh the risks the club faces. At some point the legal battle will end, either in the Supreme Court or before that stage, but that could still take many months—time the club simply does not have.

I have long argued that a mediator from outside football should adjudicate the dispute. Mediation has been attempted, with an apparent lack of success, but if the parties will not get back around the table, a mediator must bring them back. I want to talk to the Secretary of State about exactly how we take that forward, but that is another matter. I hope that the Minister will indicate whether the Secretary of State will meet us, along with the other local Members, to discuss the matter.

Too many football clubs have faced similar problems. In the Football League, those include Charlton, Portsmouth, Blackpool, Bolton and many others. In Scotland, of course, the famous Glasgow Rangers suffered a massive fall from grace due to liquidation. All those clubs have faced slightly different issues, but the common factor is poor stewardship by owners. Football club owners own something far more important than just a business. They owe it to the local community to run the club carefully and responsibly.

[Mr Jim Cunningham]

The fit and proper persons test is failing. It simply allows too many football clubs to fall into the hands of inappropriate people. I back Labour's pledge to empower fans. A perfect fit and proper persons test is impossible, so we must limit the damage that owners can cause. We could learn from the protection that football stadiums receive through the Localism Act 2011. If grounds can be protected as assets of community value, then clubs should be as well. Owners who mistreat their community clubs cannot be allowed to get away with it. The Government must consider ways to definitely give power back to the fans. Along with other MPs, I will now look to meet the Government and the English Football League as soon as possible. I have already indicated that and the Minister is aware.

Coventry City has enjoyed some notable successes on the pitch in recent seasons. However, with huge questions over the future of the club, the city has been left in the lurch. It is a terrible irony that this is happening in the year in which Coventry is the European City of Sport. A continuation of the tenancy at the Ricoh must now be agreed immediately. Discussions over the club's long-term ownership are needed, but the focus at the moment must be on the club's survival.

4.10 pm

**Colleen Fletcher** (Coventry North East) (Lab): There is a strong sense of déjà vu surrounding these proceedings. Around this time last year we stood in this Chamber and debated exactly the same subject: Coventry City football club's long-term future in its home city. At that time, the club's deal to play its home games at the Ricoh arena had been due to expire at the end of the 2017-18 season. Negotiations to extend the deal had long since stalled, due to Sisu's "batter them in the courts" approach, but ultimately an agreement to extend the deal until May 2019 was reached between the club, its owners and the landlords, Wasps.

That extension ensured that the club remained in its home city for another season. However, as I warned during last year's debate, the club was still likely to face the prospect of homelessness after May 2019, unless Sisu changed the way it did business. Wasps issued a similar warning to Sisu, stating that its pursuit of protracted litigation was a barrier to extending the deal further. With those warnings ringing in its ears, Sisu should have used the next 12 months to rebuild relationships, demonstrate a clear commitment to the club and its supporters, and overcome the barriers that could prevent the team playing at the Ricoh during the 2019-20 season and beyond. Instead, its actions over that period were just as divisive and toxic as they had been throughout the rest of its time in charge of the club. For Sisu, it was business as usual.

Consequently, here we are again, a year on, and the club is once more on the countdown to homelessness. That has left many fans again fearful that the club may leave Coventry or, worse still, cease to exist. Both scenarios would be disastrous for our city and for the club's loyal supporters; neither must be allowed to happen under any circumstances. Time and again, Sisu's actions have called into question its suitability, capability and fitness to own and run a football club. It has repeatedly acted contrary to the best interests of the club and has shown,

at best, indifference and, at worst, disdain for the loyal fans, the wider local community and the city of Coventry as a whole.

Our football club has a proud history and fantastic supporters, and we deserve—no, we demand—better. We want long-term stability, a permanent home in Coventry and owners we can trust. Sisu seems incapable of delivering this, and on that basis it should sell up and go. In the meantime, I would encourage all parties to get around the negotiating table and thrash out a deal that will see Coventry City football club playing in Coventry next season. Achieving such a deal is in everyone's best interests.

4.14 pm

**Mr Marcus Jones** (Nuneaton) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Walker. I congratulate the hon. Member for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham) on securing the debate. It is disappointing, to say the least, that we are here yet again. I say that because thousands and thousands of loyal fans, including myself, are now starting to think the unthinkable, which is that in just a few months, at the end of this season, a football club with 136 years of proud history could cease to exist, if it cannot extend its deal with Wasps at the Ricoh arena.

There are alternatives, but that would require the English Football League. I do not advocate the alternatives. Coventry City should be playing in Coventry. I certainly do not support the rumours I have heard that Coventry City might try to play at the Nuneaton Borough ground. Nuneaton is clearly not Coventry. Coventry City is a big club and Nuneaton does not have the infrastructure to support it, in terms of the roads or the policing, because Warwickshire Police is not set up to deal with such large crowds. We are not set up for it.

I will ask a few simple questions today. The Minister will be able to respond to some of them and other organisations can answer the others. We need clarity on what the English Football League is willing or unwilling to accept, and what pressure it can put on Coventry City. We need the owners to look at their moral obligations to a city, a community and fans who have supported this proud club, with its 136 year history, for decades; they have not done that, as Members have said. We also need to ask questions of Wasps. I do not blame Wasps for its view—I would possibly take the same view myself—but we need to ask if it is willing to allow what has been the biggest sporting club in Coventry to be in a situation where it might cease to exist.

We need to look at the roles of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and my hon. Friend the Minister. We need to be realistic, because they, like organisations such as the Football League, do not have any direct levers in the dispute, but they can play a valuable part in bringing all parties together around a table, to discuss what can be brokered between them. I do not think it will be a utopian situation, where my right hon. and learned Friend will be able to direct anybody, but I think it will focus minds. It will be an opportunity for us, as Members of Parliament representing Coventry and Warwickshire, and for my right hon. and learned Friend, as the Secretary of State responsible for sport in this country, to make it clear to these organisations that Coventry City must stay in Coventry and must stay playing at the Ricoh arena.

4.17 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Mims Davies):** I am grateful to the hon. Member for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham) for securing the debate and for the important, insightful and passionate contributions from Members from Coventry and Warwickshire. I commend the hon. Member for Coventry North East (Colleen Fletcher) for her passionate speech, in which she implored that communication and negotiation on behalf of the fans should be at the heart of the discussion. I am afraid that we are in an ongoing Catch-22 situation and time is running out. It seems to be appropriate on this Brexit negotiation day that nothing seems to be changing and there is something of an impasse.

It is hugely satisfying to hear why football clubs up and down the country rightly mean so much to local communities. I could not agree more with the impassioned pleas about the care that should be taken with our local football clubs by stakeholders and owners, and that that should be focused on their long-term futures. Football clubs do not belong to anybody. They are not pawns to be used in property disputes, across the boardroom table or in legal disputes. Football clubs should be fuelled and supported by their local communities, achieving a special place in towns and cities. Their existence and continual purpose is to bring fans together to support the game that they love, which is vital in good and bad times.

I am afraid that in this situation, we are in a bad time. The sorry saga of Coventry City and the Ricoh arena is familiar to us all, but it remains disappointing that, just as my predecessors have done, I find myself debating this very subject as we see the clock running down. We must look at who is responsible for the club and has the best interests of the community and fans at heart. I am afraid it feels as if nobody can currently put that to the fore.

The hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington (Matt Western), who is no longer in his place, rightly asked about football authorities and the need to look at the broader issue of leadership and the protection of clubs. We await a review finding, but it is fundamentally right that the FA look at this. It is vital that we provide clarity for fans and local communities. The processes must be in place to protect our local clubs and see them as community assets and, as I said, not pawns in a broader scheme.

I am not taking sides in any dispute, but it is a monumental shame that we continue to find ourselves in this situation, especially with a club of this size that means so much across Warwickshire and the city of Coventry. We heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton (Mr Jones) about the proud history of the club, so it is right that we focus on the fact that in nine months' time an important football club could be homeless and sadly might end up out of the league altogether. That is the reality of the situation.

In terms of immediate action for Coventry City, I will work with the Secretary of State to convene an urgent meeting with the various parties to see if a solution can be found to ensure that the club has a stadium to call home for next season. That is an imperative for loyal fans, who want answers. As my hon. Friend said, I can give no guarantees, but I hope that that meeting can

bring about a meeting of minds, press together those interested parties beyond the courtroom, and emphasise the importance that Coventry as a whole places on its football club. No club should be forced to leave its historical home and local fan base. We have seen that in the past in football, and it is wrong that that might be the case.

We heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster), who has a history of fighting for the city of Coventry in his previous incumbency, that we need to stand ready to act as the clock ticks down. I will try not to do any more Brexit notes here, but the long-term plans must be put to the fore. I would be delighted for all hon. Members in this room to come and meet me to ensure that the football club, its future and what should be happening are put forward.

There must be a demonstration that people are ready to set aside their differences and act to ensure that the ongoing legal arguments can be pushed away, so that the football club can get a clear direction for what will happen in the future. I reiterate that it is not the Government's direct responsibility to be the custodians of one particular football club, but it is our responsibility to hold to account those club owners who sign up to be custodians of a club but do not show that to be in their hearts.

It is right that we work with the FA and local community; while there has been no better time to be involved in football club ownership, we must do it right. The administration of the game and what is around it matter. As broadcasters continue to be interested in our wonderful game, there are side issues that we must look at. Attendances throughout the English game are at their highest, but people must not go on losing their local connections. Those revenues are vital and we must keep the link between fans and revenues.

**Mr Jim Cunningham:** I welcome the fact that the Minister and the Secretary of State are going to get together not only the MPs, but all interested parties. We would not expect the Secretary of State, or the Minister for that matter, to resolve this, but they can act as a catalyst to remind the parties of their responsibilities to the broader community in Coventry as well as to the fans.

**Mims Davies:** I absolutely agree; it is a chance to remind the parties of the broader responsibilities that our owners have in football, and to hold them to account. It is also a broader lesson for football as a whole. As we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton, there are particular questions from across the realm here, but it is valuable to have a meeting of minds and show that, as I say, football clubs are not pawns to be bought and used while neglecting local links and forgetting where the fan base, the revenue and the local pride and heart come from.

My Department has a responsibility, which the Secretary of State in particular sees absolutely clearly, to ensure the sustainability of our clubs. We must ensure that our club owners who come in bring the positives and leave the clubs in a better state than they found them, rather than decimating them and disconnecting them from local communities. As I have already said, responsibility also lies with the football authorities. They govern the sport and set the rules and regulations that club owners



[Mims Davies]

should comply with. It is vital that those who are fans of their local club feel that that process is in place and that people cannot ride roughshod over it.

Our football authorities simply must look again at ways to protect their clubs in the long term. It is vital to ensure that owners go beyond merely abiding by the rules and that there are long-term business plans and proper assurances about the protection of the club and, for this football club in particular, a permanent home where it plays its matches. We must provide clarity to the fans and ensure that lessons are learned from the situation we are in. If football's current rules are not good enough, new rules may need to be brought in. If that is not sufficient, we need to look at the case for Government to help football and remind it of this situation. I stand ready to act.

I will meet the Football Association next week to discuss the many challenges in football at present, and I will continue to work closely with it and the professional leagues to drive through changes that are needed in the sport. I will remind them of the crucial responsibility they have to supporters, to the fortunes of football and to their clubs. It is imperative that those clubs continue to engage openly with and listen to their fans on all the important issues. Without question, in Coventry City's case, that should include prioritising an open dialogue and making plans for its future home stadium.

To sum up, it is my belief that the Government should not involve themselves directly in the fortunes of any individual club, but more and more we are being dragged into these types of disputes. This cannot become the norm. It suggests that perhaps football is not able to govern itself—something we need to be ready to tackle. I believe in this case we can take steps to disprove that suggestion, but we are on a precipice in terms of timescales. The Government are prepared to champion the game, but the authorities that govern it must ensure that we all get the outcomes that fans, above all, want and expect. In the case of Coventry, I remain hopeful that interventions locally by Members of Parliament and the Government, with local assistance, can help to find a suitable future for the club. It rests in the hands of the club and the stadium owner, but if I, this Department or the Secretary of State can help them to realise that sooner, all the better. We stand ready.

*Question put and agreed to.*

## Long-term Capital for Business

4.28 pm

**Stephen Kerr** (Stirling) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered provision of long-term capital for business.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Walker, and it is truly a privilege once again to lead a debate in Westminster Hall. Long-term capital for business is critical to the future of our economic wellbeing. Business knows business best, and in many ways the industry panel patient capital review was the genesis of the debate. That review, published in October 2017, was written by experienced and successful business leaders, and I commend it to hon. Members.

I recognise that the debate is somewhat overshadowed by what is happening in the main Chamber and what will transpire later this evening. That said, I cannot think of a better time to hold a debate on this subject. These are critical days for the future of our country, and we will be making critical decisions. It is incumbent on us to put the long-term interests of our country at the heart of the decisions we make. Our country, its people and those who come after us will not thank us if we make decisions based solely on narrow, short-term or selfish interests.

What is true for our country in our current predicament is also true when it pertains to the fortunes of business. Although there are undoubtedly risks in making strategic decisions for the long term, there are greater perils in considering the tactical only here and now, in looking for immediate returns and being unprepared to consider the bigger picture in a way that a long-term view necessitates. I am afraid that one life lesson that we must sadly keep learning is connected to what is often described as the law of the harvest: we can reap only what we are prepared to sow in the first place. The harvest comes in due season, but we must be prepared to be patient. I want us to reflect on the pitfalls of short-termism, and the missed opportunities and failures of a lack of a long-term vision.

As every colleague who ever worked with me in my previous business career would attest to, I am no accountant. However, it is insightful that, in accountancy terminology, a long-term investment is defined as an investment that is to be held for more than a single year, which hardly seems long term to me.

We have quite rightly heard a great deal about the UK productivity gap. Productivity is defined by the Office for National Statistics as the output per worker, output per job and output per hour, and it is ordinarily calculated by dividing the annualised GDP per capita by the average annual hours worked per employee. Countries with a track record of rising productivity tend to benefit from higher rates of growth and low inflation. It is the golden fleece of national economics, if I may describe it as such.

Productivity in the UK over the past few years has not been our best feature, and we rank poorly compared with other developed economies. We are currently at No. 17 in the world rankings, with our average hourly productivity across the economy being £17.37, compared with the Germans, who produce £23.30 per hour, the Americans, who produce £25.74 per hour, and the Danes, who produce £28.87 per hour.

Imagine for a moment that we were as productive as the most productive of the developed economies. It would transform our fortunes. We could pay ourselves more, and as a result of paying more in taxation we could invest many billions more in our NHS and other public services. The increased profitability in the private sector would also yield increased dividends, which in turn would be good news for our pension funds.

**John Howell** (Henley) (Con): Has my hon. Friend looked at how many countries have a means of producing long-term capital, and at what sort of competitive advantage our having one would give us as a result?

**Stephen Kerr:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that timely intervention. That is the very point I will come on to. Let us examine the critical reason for our lack of national productivity, again comparing investment in our economy with that of the world's leading economies. A good indicator is the level of gross fixed capital formation as percentage of GDP, which is the value of the acquisitions of new or existing fixed assets in the economy less the disposal of fixed assets. It is just a single measure.

In 2017—the most up-to-date World Bank figures are for 2017—we invested 16.8p for every £1 of GDP. The Chinese invested 41.8p for every £1 of their wealth. We also lag significantly behind developed western economies. For every £1 of GDP, Italy invests 17.5p, Poland 18p, Germany 20.3p, Denmark 20.4p, Spain 20.5p, France 22.5p, Finland 22.6p, Canada 23p, and Belgium 23.3p. That is but one measurement of investment, but it says something about future business activity and also about our confidence in the future. It is my firm belief that much of our productivity gap in this country is due to that indicative investment gap. We are simply not investing enough, and I contend that that is because there is an insufficiency of quality patient capital in our economy.

It is a much-worn anecdote that, while we come up with great ideas, breakthrough technologies and transformative product concepts, all of that good stuff ends up being commercialised somewhere else by someone else. As a young Scot, my pride in being a Scot was spurred by the great stories of our inventors, scientists and engineers. I believe it is a valid contention—one I am prepared to stand by—that the modern world was largely designed by the Scots. The litany of great Scottish contributors include James Watt, Alexander Graham Bell, John Logie Baird, James Chalmers and John Dunlop. I am delighted to give way at this point to the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon).

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): The world may have been designed by the Scots, but it was built by the Irish, especially the Ulstermen.

**Stephen Kerr:** A timely intervention, as ever, from the hon. Gentleman. These British Isles are a crucible for invention. The genius of the people of these islands, their creative free thinking and their imagining of the unimaginable has created whole new branches of sciences and technology and whole new categories of product. That native, creative, entrepreneurial spirit is alive and kicking.

Entrepreneurs are among us in abundance. The number of start-ups in this country is at an all-time high. Entrepreneurs are launching themselves and their ideas on to the high seas of enterprise in greater numbers

than at any time in our past. Our universities and other research institutes are brimming with exceptional people having very bright ideas. Some of those ideas, if carefully nurtured through the commercialisation process, will not only continue to change the modern world for the better but will be the source of the wealth of this nation for generations to come. However, they must be nurtured, and that nurturing relies, in substantial part, on the availability of long-term patient capital.

All too often at present these small to medium-sized businesses fall prey to predators, who invest in them for the short term and then sell on without having made the necessary long-term commitment to bring the businesses to their full potential. I am not arguing against the importance of short-term investment or venture capitalism, but I argue that it is wrong to surrender our whole economy to that model of capital. Some 650,000 new companies were formed in Britain last year, but the number that scale up is relatively small. Some of those are lifestyle businesses that suit the people running them, but many business owners are driven by a sense of purpose—to build a growing, successful business—and they very often come up against the obstacle of the limited availability of patient capital.

**John Howell:** My hon. Friend is being very generous with his time. He may be about to come on to the digital industry. It is a major industry and such a fundamental part of our economy, and it needs investment, as I know from my own costs when I ran a company involved in that area.

**Stephen Kerr:** Anyone would think that my hon. Friend and I were working in some form of symbiosis, because the very next thing I wanted to say was that the need for investment is never more pertinent than in the technology sector, in which large American corporations invest speculatively and then buy companies when they reach a sufficient level of development. One reason that so many British businesses go that way is that they reach a stage where their access to affordable long-term capital dries up. This is not just about start-ups but about how a business accesses capital to be able to invest in new assets or capabilities.

**Luke Graham** (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): My hon. Friend makes a valid point about access to capital for companies going into their mid-stage development. He makes the point about size, but is it not also about geography? Many companies that are further away from the capital bases in London and Edinburgh, especially across Scotland and in northern England, do not get that same access to capital. It is incumbent on us to make sure that our companies can be connected with capital, so that they can grow in the way we should all want them to.

**Stephen Kerr:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend and constituency neighbour for that very valuable intervention. I will return to that idea shortly.

As I said, this is not just about start-ups; it is about how businesses access capital to be able to invest in new assets or capabilities. There is an abundance of evidence to suggest that our capital investment system is addicted to short-termism and is risk-averse. Risk is built into the capitalist system. Investment, by definition, includes a

[Stephen Kerr]

calculation of exposure to risk. The more risk-averse we become, the less inclined we are to invest in new ideas or ventures, because they might fail; the returns might not materialise. It is implicit in—I would argue essential to—the free enterprise economic system that there is acceptance of the inherent risk of failure. However, anecdotally, we have become less willing to accept that risk.

The banks obviously were badly burnt because of their recklessness in respect of risk. They then set about recapitalising their businesses, at the expense of small and medium-sized businesses. That led to some of the gross abuses and alleged criminality that is still the subject of ongoing inquiry. That is an outstanding injustice; it has still to be remedied. I do not want to spend too long on the past misdemeanours of the banks—we have had many debates on that subject in Westminster Hall and the main Chamber, and I am sure that we will have plenty more—but restoring confidence to the small and medium-sized businesses of this country necessitates that something be done about the scandals of the past decade. Banks will not take a long-term view, and if we entrust our productivity to them we will have no long-term economic future.

That said, I certainly do not want to be guilty of using this debate as a platform to spread doom and gloom—that is not in my nature—because there are very many good examples of private sector long-term investment. CityFibre is a good example. It is investing £10 million in Stirling. That will make fibre-to-the-premises ultrafast broadband available to every household and business in the city. Stirling will soon become one of the top digital cities in the United Kingdom—something that I am proud of. When we look at the bigger picture, we see that CityFibre is investing £2.5 billion across the UK. The investment will take many years to recoup, but the investors have faith in the product and are willing to be patient while the company makes the money back. Their planning horizon is measured in decades. Now, that is something akin to my definition of long-term investment.

Around the world, many countries, although they do not have this particular set of problems and although they have not cracked things entirely, have a different system of capital deployment. I would like to pause on the German example—I have used this before in Westminster Hall. I have already explained the successful indicators of productivity and capital investment in the German economy. KfW is the German national development bank. It came about as a result of the Marshall plan; it was set up for the purposes of post-war reconstruction. It supports infrastructure investment, lending some €47 billion, it acts as a lender to local authorities and, most importantly, it supports small and medium-sized enterprises. In 2017 it lent some €8.2 billion to small and medium-sized enterprises for start-ups and scale-ups. It lends money, provides equity funding and provides mezzanine financing to cover all aspects of capital investment. Some 90% of the bank's funding is from the private sector, in the form of debt that is backed by bonds. It is owned in partnership between the federal Government and the individual states. It does not appear on the national balance sheet of the Federal Republic of Germany.

As the United Kingdom leaves the European Union, we will no longer have access to the European Investment Bank. That bank invested more than £2.5 billion in the UK in 2018. That was our money that was invested—it was gleaned from borrowing on the back of the British taxpayer—but we will need to find a way to replace that level of financing, because there will be a hole in the capital provision landscape. We need to look at the investment bank model in detail. It would fulfil the need for a patient capital investment vehicle, as outlined in the industry panel review. The case for a major intervention in this way is, in my opinion, justified. The lagging productivity in our economy is a major risk to our economic prosperity, and we need action now. This cannot wait any longer. It especially cannot wait until after we have resolved the issue of Brexit. Our thinking in this area is a vital part of our preparations for our economic wellbeing after we have left the European Union.

We have the British Business Bank, which has some of the functionality of a national investment bank, so there is tacit acceptance by Government of the problem that I have been attempting to describe. The big issue with the British Business Bank, as I understand it, is that it does not seem to have equal coverage across all parts of the United Kingdom.

**Luke Graham:** As my hon. Friend is talking about the British Business Bank, will he join me in welcoming the expansion of the bank announced in the Budget, which places people on the ground in Scotland? He and I have been asking for that since we came to this place.

**Stephen Kerr:** Yes. I am grateful for that very important point of information. It is important that the British Business Bank has representation in all parts of the United Kingdom, but currently it is still limited in its mission because of its limited scope of operation and it does not really behave like a bank, even though that word is in the title. Its model of supplying finance via existing investment funds means that its base of operations is quite limited and seems to favour, if you will forgive me, Mr Walker, the south-east. I am happy to be corrected, but the British Business Bank does not seem to have the kind of extensive operation on the ground that it needs in Scotland, even with the announcement in the Budget.

I would like to see the British Business Bank operating across the breadth of the United Kingdom, interacting with the economy on the basis of a clearly defined mission, including small and medium-sized businesses, operating at arm's length from the UK Government, and raising its own capital rather than simply being a channel through which public funds are disbursed.

I am not being critical of the British Business Bank as it stands, because I am a fan, but I am advocating that it evolve into something more. That something more is what the industry panel patient capital review advocated—namely, an investment vehicle to support the scaling up of British businesses and capital-intensive start-ups. By investing in equity directly through such a vehicle, we can harness the wealth of our nation to deliver on the promise of the industrial strategy and to make our economy fit for the future.

The UK economy is dominated by the service sector, and there is nothing amiss about services, but we need to rebalance our economy and we need the availability



of long-term capital in order to become the best country in the world in which to build a business. In the post-war era, too few British businesses have grown to become multibillion-pound global corporations.

There is more that we can do. We should look at other ways of releasing under-productive cash for equity funding. We need to take a healthier approach to our risk appetite as a country. Changing the culture is essential. We need to harness our savings and pensions. With some innovative mechanisms, we can unlock that money and put it to use in our economy. Using the tax system and the savings guarantee system in innovative ways, we could revolutionise the way companies get finance and the ultimate source of that finance. Helping people to acquire equity stakes through shareholder co-operatives, saving schemes and direct micro investment could all work towards a new culture of investment.

To that end, we need the Treasury to be as innovative as the entrepreneurs who fuel our economy. We need to see ideas being tried and tested and the apparatus of Government swinging behind the idea of long-term investment and rewarding those who make such investments. A starting point would be to increase the thresholds for the tax on dividends and seek to band it to allow smaller-scale investors to pay no tax whatsoever on dividends, especially if they can be incentivised to maintain their investment over a longer period.

The industry panel review on patient capital made a number of recommendations that need to be addressed. It identified the need to provide patient capital to help entrepreneurs to be successful; I have already mentioned its idea for a patient capital investment vehicle. It also proposes a licensed scheme to allow patient capital investment companies to be founded that would be venture capital funds licensed to raise money from the markets, guaranteed by Government. Although I agree with that recommendation, it needs to be a truly national venture, with specific guidance about the development of capital funds outside London and the south-east.

The review also proposes a change in the way taxation hits investors when they seek to invest in developing a company past its start-up phase. Ensuring that tax incentives for equity and venture capital funding are there when companies are seeking capital to expand, rather than simply during the start-up phase, will allow investment to flow more freely into medium-size companies.

I have a few straightforward asks of the Government. First, I would like to see a formal response to the industry panel review, alongside an action plan for the implementation of its recommendations. If I have missed it, I am happy to be corrected. Secondly, we need a full analysis of the possibility of a national investment bank or development bank, as I outlined earlier. Thirdly, we need a statement about the replacement vehicle for the investments made by the European Investment Bank, which we will no longer have access to.

Finally, I would like some reassurance from the Minister that the Treasury is ready to innovate to improve the availability and quality of long-term capital. We need to encourage a positive investment culture and we need a creative response from the Treasury to unlock and harness the wealth of this nation in the delivery of a modern industrial economy that is fit for the future.

My hope, in bringing this debate to Westminster Hall, was to focus the House on the substance of how we can improve the environment for entrepreneurial

success and wealth creation. It is perfectly understandable that we have become distracted by the politics of Brexit. One day soon, I hope and pray, we will turn the page on Brexit, and this House will fully turn its attention to the vitally important agenda of ensuring the long-term productivity of our economy. It is timely, because it is about our future.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Charles Walker (in the Chair):** We have 18 minutes before the wind-ups. I call Jim Shannon. Jim, please do not be more than six minutes.

4.51 pm

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): Thank you, Mr Walker, for calling me. I congratulate the hon. Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) on securing the debate. In the short time in which he has been a Member of Parliament, he has made a name for himself on the issues that he brings to this Chamber. Well done to him. It is also good to see him back to health after the illness he had just before Christmas.

This issue is very important to me. The banking and financial conduct industry is increasingly interesting to me. Many of the debates today reflect that. What began with constituents highlighting cases that concern the individual have, after many hours, left me increasingly concerned about the entire sector. I believe it is entirely right and proper that we bring this to the Minister's attention, so that he can act. I look forward to the Minister's response at the end of the debate.

I read the "Patient Capital Review: Industry Response". I completely agree that there is an urgent need for a mechanism to realise three aims: first, unlocking institutional and retail investors' capital; secondly, increasing the number of venture capital funds that can deploy patient capital at scale; and, thirdly, increasing returns to scale up investments.

I wholeheartedly agree that the United Kingdom is, in many respects, a great place to start and grow a business. In recent years, successful Government policy interventions such as the enterprise investment scheme and the venture capital trusts have helped to develop a thriving start-up community. Northern Ireland has become the world capital for cyber-security, due to investment in skill provision and adjustments for businesses to invest in the Province. We welcome that, and we are pleased and proud to say that.

Only in December, US cyber-security firm Imperva announced that it would create 220 jobs within its new Belfast base—job improvements and opportunities are coming all the time—which is expected to bring the total number of cyber-security jobs to over 1,500 for the first time. That is a 15-fold increase in the past 10 years, so it is really good news, which I am pleased to report to the House.

That investment is due to the concerted effort to find space in the market and to provide all that is needed. We have businesses that seek to make the most of that, but are prevented from doing so by the lack of affordable capital investment. I believe Government must invest in the long game and make provision. We all know the phrase, "speculate to accumulate"—how real and true that is.

[*Jim Shannon*]

Mr Walker, I am no man's fool, as you and other hon. Members know. I well understand that funding capital should ideally come through the private sector, but to build in a post-Brexit age, it is imperative that we put our money where our mouths are and invest in ourselves, in order to establish and encourage international confidence in the United Kingdom outside Europe.

I support the panel's suggestions for addressing those issues, such as the creation of the patient capital investment vehicle, to enable the aggregation and deployment of both retail and institutional capital for investment in UK scale-up businesses and capital-intensive research and development-based businesses. We have to invest, so that those sectors do better. The vehicle would invest £1 billion annually, primarily in UK venture capital funds and other investors in high-growth businesses, and catalyse an additional £2 billion of private investment by providing up to only 30% of the equity capital. Perhaps that is a bit technical. None the less, it explains how the system works.

The vehicle would be a new entity, independent of the UK Government, but with a Government-defined mandate, including some Government investment to signal strategic intent to build this. I ask the Minister, what are the Government's intentions on that? If they can help—I think if they can, they will—it will be a step in the right direction. We will all benefit across the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. In order to attract institutional capital, investments in the PCIV might receive favourable capital treatment, similar to the Prudential Regulation Authority's treatment of bank investments in the Business Growth Fund—the BGF. The phrase “go big or go home” seems to be in operation here, but the gains are as necessary as oxygen. The message is clear: this nation believes in its worth and ability, and this nation backs itself as a global leader.

I use the phrase again: we must speculate to accumulate. Businesses are ready and waiting. We have proved in Belfast and Northern Ireland that if we plan ahead and fill the skills pool, investment, jobs and a boost to the economy will most certainly follow. I believe in this wonderful United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. We are better together. That is a fact. I ask the Minister, do the Government believe that, too? If they do, show it and sow it, so we can all reap the harvest.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Charles Walker (in the Chair):** I am going to call Luke Graham, who will speak for five and a half minutes, because he is a really good guy.

4.56 pm

**Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Walker. I will try to be even briefer than that, if possible. I want to make some quick points on, first, the regional nature and importance of capital spreading out around the United Kingdom, and, secondly, innovation. Finally, I will ask the Minister always to think about the British interest and not to let devolution become a barrier to investment across the United Kingdom.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) made some fantastic points about the importance of long-term patient capital across the United Kingdom.

We always talk about the regions of England and Scotland as a whole, but it is the regions of Scotland, and beyond that, the counties and towns in Scotland, that we should consider.

My constituency is particularly rural, and my county of Clackmannanshire is post-industrial. We have been starved of investment for a very long time. It is important that both public and private investment is connected, and funnelled here as easily and simply as it is to many of the incubators in London, and around the universities of Edinburgh, Oxford and Cambridge. There are some great models out there—we just need to expand them to other parts of our countries.

Innovation is really important. We have a fantastic opportunity ahead of us to capitalise on the financial centres we have in Edinburgh, Belfast and London, and to look at innovative solutions, not only in company models or ways and types of financing, but in the infrastructure that can be used across the country. I have written about reintroducing regional stock exchanges as a way to try to raise more local capital. That was used a lot in the 19th century to help pay for some of the railways that now connect our country and it could be used again to help fund infrastructure, from broadband to additional road infrastructure and company infrastructure. Especially when trying to encourage more rural investment, it could help some of the communities raise funds locally as well.

It is important that the Government play a full part in creating a real ecosystem. They are not there to make every decision. It is not for our constituents and companies to live on the Government's shilling. The Government should put their money into infrastructure, to ensure that they are developing the framework that enables private enterprise to flourish, and ensuring that any public investment is there to stimulate research and innovation, and to back the entrepreneurs who do so much for our country and individual communities. As I say, the Government can be more innovative. Brexit need not apply. They can look at things such as regional stock exchanges, rural enterprise zones and expanding the powers of the British Business Bank, as my hon. Friend said, to make it a true investment bank.

To reiterate my point and the frustration that I have felt since I have been in this place, sometimes—I know it does not come from my hon. Friend the Minister—it appears that the Treasury is not so much a British Treasury but an English Treasury, which becomes incredibly frustrating for people trying to fight for projects in Scottish constituencies. That holds for hon. Members in other parts of England and in Wales too, although Northern Irish Members seem to make quite a good job of it. I encourage the Minister to remember that we are still one country and that we need British investment decisions from British Ministers.

Even where areas are devolved, there is no law—we have checked in the Library—to stop Westminster investing in devolved areas. That artificial barrier has been set up through a cultural shift in the civil service, and it has not been helped by the current Administration in Edinburgh, but it does not need to be there.

In future, we as British parliamentarians should not see devolution as a barrier, but should work across every level of Government to make sure that investment comes from the centre and reaches our frontline communities, so when we increase the block grant to

Scotland, as the Minister has, that money will go to our local council services, which it does not at the moment. That will also make sure that when we as individual MPs lobby for projects in our constituencies, the money will come to our constituencies directly from Westminster.

Infrastructure needs more, and our governmental frameworks need more. The Government have it within their power to create an ecosystem that takes all the innovation and energy of the United Kingdom and really increases the prosperity of all our constituents. I hope the Minister will outline some of his vision for that today.

5.1 pm

**Drew Hendry** (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Walker. I congratulate the hon. Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) on securing this important debate. I was not aware that he was unwell over Christmas, but I am delighted to see him in the pink of health.

It is a rare treat to be in a debate with two Tories and a Democratic Unionist party Member where I have to pick my differences in their speeches; they made many points that I agree with. In particular, the hon. Member for Stirling discussed productivity. It has long been an issue that I have talked about. It has been holding back business and people for far too long, and I agree with his sentiment. As a result of paying more in taxation, we can invest more in our services—that is the consequence of getting that kind of result in productivity.

I also agree about the lack of focus across the nations of the UK. It does feel like an English Treasury; we make that point regularly. It is also a fact that the south-east gains far more traction than any other part of the UK, including the regions of England, Northern Ireland and Wales. There was a lot to agree with in that regard as well.

It is particularly poignant to have this debate today, as the biggest threat to business access to finance comes from Brexit. Government Members, particularly those in favour of Brexit, would like that to be ignored in this debate, but I do not think it can be. Brexit is already reducing the number of customers, the size of workforces, and the level of confidence. Instead of building our economy, investors are voting with their wallets by pulling nearly £20.6 billion from UK equity funds since the vote in 2016, according to EPFR.

**Luke Graham:** The hon. Gentleman makes a point about Brexit being a threat. Does he agree with a developer in Alloa in my constituency that the biggest threat to raising finances is not Brexit but the threat of a second independence referendum?

**Drew Hendry:** It will come as no surprise to the hon. Gentleman that I do not agree with that. He has gone from making a sterling point about the English Treasury to saying that independence is somehow a threat. I do not think so; I think it is a marvellous opportunity. As he has raised the issue, I will say that it has been brought into sharp focus in this place over recent months.

As Marian Bell of Alpha Economics pointed out, businesses that were told to prepare for a no-deal Brexit have relocated their operations and those decisions may not be reversed, even in the event of the best possible economic outcome—even if that is remaining in the EU. As Brexit inches closer, the UK services sector has

recorded the slowest sales growth in two years, according to the British Chambers of Commerce, whose survey of 6,000 British firms shows that labour shortages and price pressures persist.

Scotland is a world leader in patient long-term capital, but Brexit risks lenders following the example of a well-known hon. Member, the hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg), in moving business to Dublin or the continent. We are being Mogged over Brexit.

In the face of austerity, we have to make different decisions to support business. The Scottish Government are introducing the Scottish national investment bank, which will provide patient long-term capital to support Scotland's firms. In contrast, as we have heard, the UK Green Investment Bank, which was privatised by the Government, is now bereft of its UK focus.

The aim is for the Scottish national investment bank to invest in businesses and communities by 2020, subject to regulatory approval. It is backed by our commitment of at least £2 billion of investment in the first 10 years, which paves the way for a step change in innovative and inclusive growth.

We also welcome the plan for a Scottish stock exchange in the second quarter of 2019, with a focus firmly on social and environmental companies that are worth between £50 million and £100 million. The plan has now secured a partnership agreement with the major European stock market operator Euronext, meaning that the first Scottish stock exchange will operate since the closure of the trading floor in Glasgow in 1973.

That is all being done in the shadow of Brexit, which was a vehicle aroused solely to calm Tory infighting. As chaos reigns on the Conservative Benches, there is as much chance of success for business as for the economy of our people, who will ultimately pay the price in the long term.

**Mr Charles Walker (in the Chair):** I call Marion Fellows to speak for the Scottish National party for up to five minutes.

5.6 pm

**Marion Fellows** (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship yet again, Mr Walker. I congratulate the hon. Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) on securing this important, and sometimes quite consensual, debate. The hon. Gentleman spoke fully and passionately, and with a great deal of knowledge and expertise, about how we can best provide businesses across the UK with ongoing patient long-term funding. When I learned accountancy, however, long-term funding was generally for between seven and 10 years, and even longer, rather than just over a year—that is a blast from the past; it is many years since I did accountancy.

I was interested to hear the hon. Gentleman talk about productivity and refer to Denmark, which is a small, independent nation leading the charge on productivity. Long may Scotland follow. He also talked briefly about the reasons for national productivity being linked to levels of investment and how, especially in Scotland, companies have been innovative but they start to slow down and fail because they cannot get the correct long-term investment. That is a real ongoing issue.



[*Marion Fellows*]

My hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry) talked about the Scottish national investment bank, which we hope to see become fully functional in the early 2020s. That will be a huge boost to small industries in Scotland.

The hon. Member for Stirling also talked about the lack of money that will now come from Europe, and he looked quite favourably on small German companies. For many years, this country has looked enviously at Germany and we need to take on board what it does to help businesses. He also called for tax incentives and talked about needing a full analysis of a national development bank to look at what it could do post Brexit.

The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) gave us his usual full and frank views on where things are going in Northern Ireland. He talked about the cybersecurity industry and how it is helping, and how the United Kingdom, of which he is a great proponent, should invest in itself post Brexit. He wants the Government to help with that. In fact, I think the Minister has a lot of explaining to do as to how he will move things forward.

The hon. Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Luke Graham) said that devolution should not be a barrier to development, and I totally agree with that. On many occasions, colleagues of mine have stood in the main Chamber here and asked about city deals, whereas the Scottish Government have invested increasing amounts in various city deals without getting the same amount of money from the Treasury.

**Luke Graham:** I have been in negotiations about two city deals that impact on my constituency. Does the hon. Lady recognise that the obstacles do not just come from central Government for the devolved Administrations, but from the devolved Administrations for the central Government as well? So if there is to be a little bit of give, does she appreciate that it has to come from both sides of the argument?

**Marion Fellows:** I agree that in any negotiations there has to be give on both sides but the Scottish Government are giving more in a practical sense, and that is really what the people involved in the city deals on Tayside, in Stirling and in other areas of Scotland are really concerned about.

It is also very important that, when we talk about innovation and moving small businesses forward, we consider regional stock exchanges, which the hon. Gentleman mentioned. I was very interested that my hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey talked about the Scottish stock exchange in Glasgow closing in 1973. The square that it was in has been renamed Nelson Mandela Square, but I remember it being Stock Exchange Square for many years.

We will all be very interested to hear how the Minister responds to this debate, because none of us in this place disagrees that there is a need for long-term and patient funding for businesses to thrive and grow, to increase prosperity for all our citizens, and to increase the economy in Scotland and the rest of the UK.

5.11 pm

**Peter Dowd (Bootle) (Lab):** It is a delight to see you in the Chair, Mr Walker.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr), who I am glad to see is back in his rightful place after his illness before Christmas, on securing this debate, and I thank the hon. Members for Ochil and South Perthshire (Luke Graham), for Strangford (Jim Shannon), for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry), which are all beautiful places, and for Motherwell and Wishaw (Marion Fellows), who has just spoken, for their contributions to the debate.

Patient capital must be set in the context of a wider economic perspective and not just seen on its own. The structure of our economy has fundamentally changed over the past four decades. In the early 1980s, 26% of UK jobs were in manufacturing compared with only 8.1% now; in 1948, 46% of GDP came from the service sector and now it is 80%. That is largely due to the decisions of successive Governments, which effectively said that as long as headline growth was strong and the welfare state redistributed resources sufficiently, it did not matter where growth came from.

However, the financial crash and its aftermath have clearly demonstrated that that theory was wrong, and that reliance on an unfettered and highly volatile financial sector has not worked for the vast majority of people and businesses. Headline growth may have recovered, but it is still pretty sluggish, and nothing exemplifies that better than the way that banks have actually shifted their activities away from lending to businesses.

The Institute for Public Policy Research's Commission on Economic Justice said:

"Across a whole range of economic indicators, the UK economy exhibits serious underlying weaknesses. On investment, research and development, trade and productivity, we perform worse than most of our European neighbours—and have done so not merely over the last ten years, but for much of the last 40."

As the hon. Member for Stirling has said, productivity and investment are stagnant. That seems to be the way of the economy at the moment and it has got to change. A 2017 report by the ScaleUp Institute highlighted significant capital barriers to the growth of business, beyond the start-up phase, in the UK. And of course there is Brexit, but I will leave that to other people to talk about; I will not do so now.

Other countries use state direction of innovation and investment to carve out vital areas of expertise in robotics, electronic cars, clean-tech and the smart city. Labour has a plan for a national transformation fund and £250 billion of lending by our new national investment bank and a network of regional development banks, which will enable us to transform our economy over the first two terms of a Labour Government. Reconnecting the financial sector to the economy of research and development and production will transform our financial system.

We will establish a strategic investment bank, which is the sort of bank that the hon. Member for Stirling thinks is good, and he is absolutely right in that regard. It will comprise people from various agencies and organisations, and of course Members of this House. We will use the power of Government to unlock the lending power of the private sector, and we will deliver lending to small and medium-sized enterprises across the UK through new regional development banks. Our

investment strategy will no longer accept the disparities across the regions that have been identified here today. It is a crucial element of any Government policy to make sure there is equity right across our nations.

Labour wants to invest in people and show that businesses can access a highly skilled workforce, which is why we will set up our national education service, allowing everyone to upskill and retrain at any point in life. That comes back to the point that it is not just a case of having patient capital investment; the ecosystem and infrastructure around that investment also matter. We want patient capital investment and we hope that we will be able to set the scene and the environment for that to develop. We will ensure that all our regions, nations, cities and towns are able to get access to that patient capital investment over the next few decades.

5.16 pm

**The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (Robert Jenrick):** I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) for raising this important issue and for exhorting the United Kingdom Treasury to look to all parts of our Union. If my history of the Treasury serves me correctly, I think the last Treasurer of Scotland was in 1708; he was sent to the Tower and then to the House of Lords, as happened in those days. But since then, the Treasury has firmly been an institution of the whole of the United Kingdom and long may it continue to be.

My hon. Friend made some very important points this afternoon, encouraging us above all to look to the long term and to ensure that both Government and the private sector are constantly trying to ensure the free flow of long-term capital, which will grow the economy and drive the country forward.

Since we came to power in 2010, we have made it easier for people in this country to found a business and grow it, scaling up British businesses so that the UK is one of the best places in the world to be an entrepreneur. A new business is created in this country every 75 seconds and there are now 1.2 million more businesses in the UK than in 2010, creating jobs and prosperity.

However, we are not complacent. We understand the need to increase access to long-term capital, to address the structural challenges facing the British economy, including our productivity gap, and to make the UK more globally competitive. So I thank my hon. Friend for his comments today, particularly his thoughts on a national investment bank, to which I will return shortly.

It is important to remember that in the UK we already have a strong equity finance market. It is one of the engines of the economy, and a national and indeed international asset for the UK. We continue to be the top destination for venture capital investment in Europe, attracting around a third of total European VC investment in 2018.

There was the patient capital review of 2017, which my hon. Friend referenced and which we commissioned and reported back on in 2017, and the Budget in 2017. We updated it again in the most recent Budget with a one-year-on update. They provided the response that he has referred to, with the panel and the experts at the Treasury who we commissioned to investigate this issue. That review concluded that there is more for the UK to do to close the funding gap and help our most innovative firms to reach their true potential.

At the Budget in 2017, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor unveiled a plan to unlock over £20 billion of additional finance for those innovative firms over the next 10 years. Since then, we have launched British Patient Capital, the vehicle that my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling referred to, and seeded it with £2.5 billion of public money. We have expanded the investment limits for venture capital trusts and for the Enterprise Investment Scheme, doubling the amount of money that the UK's most innovative businesses can raise. And we have announced the creation of a knowledge-intensive EIS fund structure, to help stimulate further investment in research and development-intensive firms, and to concentrate our incentives on those firms that we think will be of the greatest benefit to the British economy.

We have worked with representatives across the industry to unlock pensions investment in patient capital, through our pensions investment taskforce. With total assets under management in the UK expected to exceed £1 trillion by 2025, we know that defined contribution, DC, pension schemes are set to be one of our most important institutional investors, which is why, in this year's Budget, the Chancellor announced a pensions investment package to enable DC pension providers to invest in long-term innovative UK companies, as part, of course, of a balanced portfolio. We do not believe that it is the Government's role to instruct independent pension trustees on how to invest on behalf of the pension holder, but we do believe that encouraging them and breaking down barriers will ensure a greater flow of capital for venture capital and for long-term and somewhat higher-risk investments that will drive the economy forward.

We have done a number of things to take forward that agenda. First, we announced that the Financial Conduct Authority would carry out a consultation on small tweaks to its permitted links rules, which was published in December 2018. We also announced that the Department for Work and Pensions would consult this year on making the pension charge cap flexible enough to accommodate the performance fees that are often associated with patient capital investment. Finally, we announced that some of the largest DC pension providers in the UK would now work with the British Business Bank to develop a blueprint for pooled investment in patient capital. That will enable those who are perhaps too small, or do not yet have the appetite required, to take part in this important form of illiquid investment. We believe that those measures will have a great impact in the years ahead.

We are not limiting our efforts to equity funding, however. We are also committed to ensuring that businesses can seek the right finance for their growth needs, which is exactly why the British Business Bank, which we have heard about today, was launched some time ago. The bank is rolling out a UK network, including in Scotland, to resolve regional issues and increase its cut-through with businesspeople and entrepreneurs throughout the Union. It operates through partners, such as high street banks, business angels and venture capital, and it will be doing that, as it should, in all parts of the UK. To give hon. Members some of the most recent statistics, as of November 2018, in Scotland the bank had provided almost £900 million of finance to more than 9,000 small and medium-sized enterprises, in Northern Ireland the figure was £114 million to more than 2,200 SMEs, and

[Robert Jenrick]

in Wales almost £500 million was provided to more than 6,000 such businesses. We hope that that will continue and that the bank will take its responsibility to operate in all parts of the UK seriously. I encourage hon. Members to engage with the British Business Bank, if they have not done so already.

On infrastructure, which we have heard about today, as a Government we have made an important decision—one of the Chancellor's first decisions on taking up his position two and a half years ago—to significantly increase public investment in our economic infrastructure. Over this Parliament, such investment, including in digital and transport, will reach levels not seen in this country since the early 1970s. We want to ensure that that feeds through into the private sector, and if we want to deliver on those plans—we now have a £600 billion pipeline of infrastructure investment—there will need to be a partnership with the private sector, financed and delivered privately. So a thriving private sector is extremely important, and we need to consider that when taking into account some of the comments we heard earlier about political risk in this country, due to both a break-up of the Union and also the Opposition's policies of nationalising utilities.

The Government support investment using a range of tools, including stable, independent regulation, of which we have some of the best and most admired in the world—there are, of course, ways in which we can improve it. In the Budget, we commissioned the National Infrastructure Commission to consider how we can make our independent regulators more innovative, and improve the regulatory model without throwing it aside. We use contracts for difference in renewable energy, and the £40 billion Treasury UK guarantee scheme plays an important role. As we announced in the Budget, we are now reviewing our existing support for infrastructure finance, to ensure that as we leave the European Union we continue to guarantee that good projects in the UK receive the finance they deserve. We are also making a number of interventions to support new technologies, in which we believe the public and private sectors can work together, with the public investing to crowd in private sector investments. Two notable examples are a recent intervention on digital infrastructure, and also one on electric car charge points, in which the Government have invested £200 million. We believe that there is more scope for that in the future.

On the European Investment Bank, the EIB, it is important to remember that a significant funding gap has not emerged since the referendum. We have very mature markets in the UK for infrastructure investment, for privatised utilities for example, but the Chancellor has made it clear, and we noted this again in the political declaration, that we are actively exploring options for a future relationship with the EIB, just as the bank does with other third countries. One cannot be a member of the bank if one is not a member state. We are interested in the proposal to create a UK infrastructure investment bank, for which my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling laid out some of the arguments. We think that there are important arguments there, and we will consider the proposal as part of the review of infrastructure finance announced in the Budget, about which we will give more details shortly. We think that that can play an important role and, although I would not overstate the

EIB's impact on the British economy or our infrastructure finance, there are reasons to believe that it played an important role. We believe that we can find our own way forward as we leave the European Union.

On smaller businesses, helping them to scale up is extremely important, as we have heard. The UK has a good record of creating start-up businesses, but not as good a record as we would like of ensuring that they scale up and create jobs and prosperity for all parts of the UK. That is a challenge that we have set the British Business Bank, of working to support investment such as creating regional pools of capital, which we have done with the midlands engine and the northern powerhouse, and there may be further scope for doing that in the future. We are very engaged with such questions. We are engaged also with the question of the geographical spread of venture capital and business angels, as was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Luke Graham), to ensure that individuals and entrepreneurs have access to capital wherever they choose to set up their business and do not feel the need to come to London or the south-east.

Finally, through the tax system, we continue to make the UK the most competitive environment we can for entrepreneurs and investors. We are doing that through entrepreneurs' relief, the seed enterprise investment scheme, the enterprise investment scheme and venture capital trusts, which we are continually trying to improve, to ensure that in the UK we have the most competitive market we can, directly comparing ourselves, and renewing those comparisons, with the US, France and Germany.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling and to other Members who participated in the debate. I hope that they can recognise the Government's commitment to the agenda, and the intense work we have done over the past two years, and will continue to do in the months and years ahead. We will continue to welcome thoughts and contributions to inform those future decisions.

5.28 pm

**Stephen Kerr:** It was perhaps a portent that throughout the Minister's speech I could hear cheering. It was from outside, but it entered the Chamber, and I must confess that there were many points in the speech at which I would have joined in the cheering. I am greatly encouraged by what the Minister has said and by the positive and upbeat way in which he talked about the Government's approach to the concept of spreading this change of culture in relation to long-term capital. I thank all Members for their thoughtful speeches, including those who would normally be political opponents and could not resist banging on, again, about independence. We will overlook that. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), who hits the right note when he talks about confidence in the future. I believe in our United Kingdom and in the genius of our people, and I believe that our future is bright and that we should have faith in it.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered provision of long-term capital for business.

5.29 pm

*Sitting adjourned.*



# Westminster Hall

Wednesday 16 January 2019

[SIR DAVID CRAUSBY *in the Chair*]

## Taxation of Low-income Families

9.30 am

**Jeremy Lefroy** (Stafford) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered taxation of low-income families.

It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. As a Conservative and a Christian, I believe passionately in the importance of caring for those families who find themselves at the bottom of the income distribution. It is vital that there is a proper, decent safety net to enable families where the adults either are not in work or cannot work to have a decent standard of living, to live in proper homes and to have a proper income. At the same time, making work pay has been a priority for the Conservative and Conservative-led Governments since 2010. In this context, the effective marginal tax rate—the proportion of any additional £1 earned that one would lose in the form of tax, national insurance and lost benefits—is the key consideration.

If we look at a one-earner, two-parent family with two children, paying income tax and national insurance and in receipt of tax credits, we see that they face an effective marginal tax rate of 73%. That means that, as they look at the prospect of earning more, they will be confronted by the fact that they will get to keep only 27p from every additional £1 earned. If a 73% higher rate tax was introduced—I recall when it was well into the 80s; indeed, on unearned income it was 98% at one point—there would be an outcry from higher earning people and probably from the whole public. Yet that is the effective marginal rate of tax that we, though the system that we in Parliament are responsible for, expect low-income families to pay.

**Mr Gregory Campbell** (East Londonderry) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate. This is an issue that I and many others have taken an interest in for a long time. Does he agree that, particularly for those who are on full-time low pay, or part-time pay, if we gradually moved toward a position where the first £15,000 per annum was tax-free and there was no requirement to pay national insurance contributions on it, that would be a huge incentive against the black economy, as well as promoting people's getting out of the working tax credits system and into employment, to try to work their way up through the salary chain?

**Jeremy Lefroy:** The hon. Gentleman makes an extremely important point. I shall refer to three reports today, but this one, "Make Work Pay: A New Agenda for Fairer Taxes" by the Centre for Policy Studies, suggests a tax and national insurance-free income of, I think, £12,000 a year, which is similar to what he suggests. I have a lot of sympathy for that. I would counsel against those who say that national insurance is a thing of the past and totally irrelevant; I believe in the importance of a social insurance contribution-based system, provided

that it is progressive and proportionate, and I would not like to lose that, but I entirely agree with the principle of what he says.

Lest anyone wonder whether these high effective marginal tax rates are just an anomaly that, for some curious reason, only impacts one-earner, two-child families on 75% average wage, the point must be made that our high marginal rates are a problem for all family types: single parents, single-earner couples and dual-earner couples. One in three in-work families with dependants are likely to be facing high effective marginal rates. That is 2.5 million families—or 1.6 million couples—of whom 1 million are single earners, 600,000 are dual earners and 900,000 are single parents.

Put simply, any family paying tax and national insurance and receiving tax credits will be looking at an effective marginal tax rate of 73%. Families that, in addition to receiving tax credits, also receive housing benefit and council tax benefit will be looking at a marginal rate of 96%. Under universal credit, the 73% rate will increase slightly to 75%, but the 96% rate will come down to 80%. A 16% drop is significant, but an 80% effective marginal tax rate is still far too high. There is a lot that I would like to say about improvements that I would propose to universal credit, but that is a debate for another day.

Instead of encouraging aspiration, the combined impact of our tax and benefits system suffocates aspiration, trapping families in poverty. That is a burning social injustice that must be addressed. Much of the cause of our high effective marginal tax rates, particularly for single earner couples, is as a result of the introduction of independent taxation in 1990. Since then there has been little or no recognition of family responsibility in the tax system. Not recognising that responsibility in income tax, through a system such as elective joint taxation, has led to a tax arrangement that is anti-aspirational. It is interesting that the former Chancellor, Lord Lawson, wanted to include some kind of joint responsibility in the new system when it was introduced, but it was opposed by the then Prime Minister.

Families in poverty pay thousands of pounds of income tax, but then have to be supported by very inflated benefits, which offset the failure to recognise family responsibility but with the very costly downside of crippling high effective marginal tax rates that suffocate aspiration as the inflated benefits are withdrawn. In 2014 I co-authored a report with my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) and two other colleagues, "Holding the Centre: Social Stability and Social Capital", which touched on many of the issues we are debating today, although not in such detail on this particular subject. As we noted in the report, many of the Government's—all Governments'—most important goals rely on the contribution of families. However, too often that contribution is under-recognised and the impact of policy on these relationships ignored, under all Governments.

The report pointed out the vital role that family relationships play in our economic prosperity, wellbeing and the life of our children, as well as the cohesion and social stability of our nation, where growth and prosperity are underpinned by fairness, responsibility and community. The stability of marriage and supporting aspirational families are integral parts of the social capital of our country that leads to social stability and economic

[Jeremy Lefroy]

prosperity. A Government who draw on and nurture the wealth of our social capital, supporting families and strengthening relationships, can give people confidence about their future prospects and the ability and opportunity to see aspiration fulfilled.

These issues are vital, and therefore I note with pleasure that the Strengthening Families Manifesto group of Conservative MPs, led by my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton and by Mr David Burrowes, the former Member for Enfield, Southgate, has recently held an inquiry into making work pay for low-income families. The report was published this morning to coincide with this debate. My hon. Friend will outline in greater detail some of the report's specific findings and recommendations. I underline the call in the report for the Chancellor to review formally the effective marginal tax rate for families, assessing the reasons why work does not pay for so many families and evaluating the possible solutions, with a particular focus on the tax system and the recognition of family responsibility.

**Michael Tomlinson** (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important debate. Despite all the other things going on, this is hugely important. He mentioned a burning injustice—all our ears will have pricked up at that phrase and he is absolutely right. I and other colleagues signed a new clause to the Finance (No. 3) Bill, which was not selected for debate, but does he agree that this does not need an Act of Parliament for the Chancellor to review it, and that the Chancellor can still review it despite the fact that the new clause was not selected or debated and is not part of a formal Act of Parliament?

**Jeremy Lefroy**: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and that is why both the debate and that report are so important in showing the Chancellor that this issue is vital for many colleagues across the House.

I will finish with the fact that it is surely very telling that in 1990, just as independent taxation was introduced, far from 73%, the effective marginal tax on a one-earner family with two children on 75% of the average wage was just 34%, close to the average 33% effective marginal tax rate on such families today across the OECD as a whole. We are a total outlier in this respect, and in the wrong direction. If we managed without such aspiration-killing tax rates on working, low-income families in the past, we can and must do so again.

I very much hope that the Minister, for whom I have the highest regard, agrees and will tell us that the Chancellor is willing to review our marginal tax rates, as my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Michael Tomlinson) mentioned, and bring forward strategies to gradually bring them in line—I realise this is a huge ask—with the OECD average over the years, so that we can become an aspirational economy once again.

9.40 am

**Fiona Bruce** (Congleton) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) not only on securing the debate but on the excellent way in which he touched on all the key concerns. We need to address what is surely one of the “burning injustices”

that the Prime Minister referred to on the steps of 10 Downing Street. If there are any just-about-managing people, it is surely those striving to take their families off benefits, go into work and improve their families' lives. We are particularly concerned about families with children.

Yet just as those people aspire to improve themselves, the system knocks and disincentivises them, as we have heard—the opposite of Conservatives encouraging aspiration. Effective marginal tax rates of 70%, 80% or even 90% surely cannot be sustained by a Conservative Government. However, this is not a new issue. We have sustained it. It has been known about for years. It has been eight years since the Conservatives entered Government and we have failed to address the matter.

For many of those years, CARE has held annual meetings about this issue and published annual reports on the taxation of families. I pay tribute to CARE for its assistance in the production of “Making Work Pay for Low-Income Families”, which, as my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford says, we are publishing today. It is being published by the Manifesto to Strengthen Families, the executive director of which is our highly respected former colleague, David Burrowes, and can be found on [strengtheningfamiliesmanifesto.com](http://strengtheningfamiliesmanifesto.com).

I will give some examples that detail the complexity and show how low earners can end up paying such high effective marginal tax rates, losing so many of the benefits that they had once they start to earn. We need to change that. This example has been given by the Centre for Policy Studies, so we are not alone in raising this concern.

Imagine Jane, a 28-year-old single mother of one school-aged child. They live in Northampton. She receives benefits of £13,908 a year, comprising three elements: a standard allowance, a child element and a housing element. She starts work, earning £8,143.20 per annum. Her benefits are reduced by 63p for each additional pound she earns, which is the taper relief figure; interestingly, the CPS suggests reducing the universal credit taper rate to 50p as one solution. Jane's effective marginal tax rate at this point is 63%. She then earns a little bit more, becoming liable to pay national insurance, putting her effective marginal tax rate up to 67%. She then earns a little bit more again, earning £12,850 a year—£1,000 over the current personal allowance rate—so is liable to pay income tax. Of that £1,000, she takes home just £251.60. She is being taxed at a 75% effective marginal tax rate. As my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford said, if that was the tax rate paid by multimillionaires on their highest earnings, there would be an outcry.

One aim of universal credit, which was intended to be simpler to understand, was to help ease the transition between welfare and work. It is certainly an improvement, but it has not solved the problem of people entering work and losing an average of 73% of their earnings, or even more. We appreciate that the Chancellor promised in his recent Budget to increase the work allowance by £1,000 a year, at a cost of £1.7 billion, which many of us asked for. However, that still leaves us with the problem that we have identified. Working claimants will lose most of the extra money that they earn when they increase their hours or progress in their jobs. It will just mean that they keep a little bit more of their money before they reach that point.

I remind colleagues that the Manifesto to Strengthen Families is supported by more than 60 Conservative parliamentarians; not a small group in our party. Some 20 of us tabled an amendment to the Finance Bill, which my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Michael Tomlinson) referred to, and it was very much as a result of that amendment not being selected that we called for the debate. However, we had been working on an inquiry into this issue for some time, chaired by David Burrowes. We took evidence from several organisations, including the Child Poverty Action Group, the Resolution Foundation and Tax and the Family, which all indicated in their evidence that they share our concerns on this issue. I will touch on one or two of the reasons why we really need to address it.

As we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford, the British effective marginal tax rate of 73% is the highest anywhere in the developed world, where the average is 33%. However, it is not only the very low-paid who are affected. Our inquiry found that families with earnings that appear high can also be affected. For example, a single-income family with three children earning £21,000 and paying rent of £157 a week could this year have a marginal tax rate of, incredibly, 96%. That does not come down to 32% until income reaches £40,776. Where housing costs are greater, that 96% rate could be even higher. I appreciate that something may be done to look at this, as my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford said, but that is not enough.

**Mr Gregory Campbell:** I commend the hon. Lady for her continuing interest in this issue. Does she agree that its effect on middle or average-income families earning around £22,000 to £26,000 per year causes particular resentment among people in that category? They are the aspiring families who want to earn more and contribute more to society, and they feel that they are being penalised as they do so.

**Fiona Bruce:** That is absolutely right. We outline in our report several reasons why this needs to be addressed. I will touch on four of them.

First, the hon. Gentleman is right that these arrangements are anti-aspirational. Secondly, we believe that they are illogical. While we as Conservatives celebrate the family—my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford said families are the bedrock of a strong, stable and flourishing society—we tax them as if they are individuals while at the same time operating a benefits system that views them as families.

Thirdly, the current arrangement is anti-choice. The best systems of independent taxation give couples the choice as to whether the two people are taxed independently or jointly. Fourthly, it appears judgmental. Any family in which the second earner is either not in work or earning less than their personal allowance will be hit hard and judged for that arrangement. My right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith) gave evidence to our inquiry and commented that we find ourselves in the peculiar situation of saying that we are not very judgmental, but being very judgmental at the same time. We are judgmental about couples who choose for only one spouse to work. The huge impact of that was underlined in evidence to us from the Child Poverty Action Group, which said that it looks like

“having a second earner in the labour market in Britain today is necessary to get oneself out of poverty”.

To some extent, we are telling parents staying at home to look after children or relatives that they are making the wrong choice, yet, as our report says, it is in the long-term interests of Government and society to have stable families in which children are nurtured and cared for to give them the best start in life, and if, in some situations, that means taking time out from work, particularly when children are under five, surely that should be encouraged and accommodated.

**Jeremy Lefroy:** My hon. Friend makes the incredibly important point that this is certainly about children, but is also about carers. The enormous number of unpaid carers in this country do a massive amount for our country and society, but the current system does not help them, either.

**Fiona Bruce:** That is absolutely right: they do indeed.

We talk about crippling high effective marginal tax rates, but actually it costs money to go out to work. Often, it costs money to clothe oneself for work and to travel to work, and it is more expensive if one has to buy lunch out, so some people will effectively earn nothing when they go to work. That cannot be right. As my hon. Friend has said, what is proposed will help different types of family: single parents, married couples and couples in which one person works or one person provides care for other members of the family. Work is good—we know that—but it costs, and it is outrageous that some of the poorest in our society face some of the highest tax rates. One of the highest priorities of the Conservative Government should be to tackle and solve this burning social injustice.

9.52 am

**Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I start by congratulating my hon. Friends the Members for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) and for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) on securing this debate and on the way they have introduced the subject. I very much welcome the report by the Strengthening Families Manifesto group that was published today and which we are here to debate.

There is no doubt that families are right at the heart of social justice. It is clearly understood that helping families to stay together and thrive together is not only good for them as families, which is obviously very important and at the heart of the issue, but good for our society as a whole and for our economy. I think it is understood that the ability of Government to help families to stay together may be limited, but the least that we should expect is that the Government do not place barriers in the way of helping and encouraging families to stay together. That is the issue that we are debating today.

We should, through our tax and benefits system, provide every possible opportunity for families to improve their finances through hard work—through taking a job, increasing their income, increasing their hours or taking a pay rise. Sadly, the situation that we have at the moment negates that and actually acts as a disincentive to couples taking on extra work or extra hours, because of the effective marginal tax rate by which they are then penalised. That issue was well presented by the previous



[*Steve Double*]

speakers, so I will not go into the detail of it—it is a well-established problem—but it is clearly there for all to see.

The introduction of universal credit was very welcome and a huge step in the right direction.

**Gavin Robinson** (Belfast East) (DUP): I was going to intervene earlier, but I was enjoying the flow of the hon. Gentleman's speech, so I decided to rest in my place. He makes an incredibly important point, and I commend the hon. Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) and all his colleagues for their sterling work. I do not think that anyone has said that the disincentive that we have heard about this morning is an intentional outcome of the over-simplification of our tax system, but if it is not intentional, we should resolve to solve it. Does the hon. Gentleman agree?

**Steve Double:** I very much welcome that intervention: the hon. Gentleman makes a powerful point. I do not believe for a minute that the Government set out with the intention of ending up in this position, in which families face effective marginal tax rates of 75% or 80%. No one intended that to be the case, but the hon. Gentleman is right to say that that is the situation and that, if that was not the intention, surely it is time to look at it and see what steps we can take to reverse and undo it.

As I said, the introduction of universal credit was a huge step in the right direction and very welcome. It is not perfect; it is not without its challenges, but I very much welcome the Government's approach to the roll-out of universal credit—to take their time, learn, and adjust and amend as necessary. Fundamentally, universal credit is the right change to make to our benefits system, and I very much welcome the way the Government are rolling it out.

One purpose of universal credit was to ensure that work paid and to reduce the disincentive for people to take on extra work and lose benefits. I saw that myself, before coming to this place, as an employer. I am thinking of the number of times that I approached my staff to offer extra hours of work and they just said to me, "There's no point, Steve, because I will lose tax credits. There is no point in me working longer and harder to be no better off—all I will be doing is giving the extra money to the taxman." Universal credit has been a big positive step, a step in the right direction, to remove that disincentive, and that is hugely welcome, but we need to recognise that there is still a disincentive in the system. It has been highlighted and now is the time to address it.

I also hugely welcome the Government's policy of increasing the personal allowance. That has taken many of the lowest-paid people in our country out of the tax system—out of paying tax—altogether. That has also been the right thing to do and is very welcome, but as we are saying, it does not undo the situation that we now have. Under the current arrangements, there are those who are paying marginal tax rates of 75% if they are homeowners, and 80% if they are renting, and on universal credit. We cannot expect people to be incentivised to take extra work if they will get to keep only 20p or 25p in the pound for the extra work that they take on.

I therefore very much welcome the report that has been published today. I urge the Government to consider it carefully and look at what can be done to review the current situation. I very much welcome the suggestion from my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford that we need to set as a target bringing the UK in line with the OECD average. It seems crazy for the United Kingdom, which is renowned around the world for the effectiveness and competitiveness of its tax system, to be so out of step with the average for the other developed countries. We should set a target that, in an achievable but relatively short space of time, we will seek to reverse the situation and bring ourselves back in step with the OECD average.

We need to change the mindset that the only way to tackle the problem is through the taper rate for universal credit. That will get us so far, and I am sure that any amendments that can be made in that respect would be welcome, but really we need to bring our tax and benefits systems into line with each other.

**Fiona Bruce:** It is interesting to note that if the taper rate is altered to 50p, when universal credit recipients start to pay national insurance or income tax, they will still face a 66% effective marginal tax rate.

**Steve Double:** My hon. Friend makes the point well. Although changes to the taper rate will be welcome, they will go only so far. We need to change this system: in the benefits system, families are treated as families, yet in the tax system, people are treated as individuals. That is where the conflict comes. I would very much support any move to treat families as families in the tax system, by allowing some measure of transferrable tax allowance, which enables families to be seen as a whole rather than as individuals. We have the same situation with child benefit. It seems crazy to me that in the child benefit system taxpayers are treated as individuals rather than as families. That seems to be an anomaly we need to address.

I want to put my weight behind the point that this is not just about children. There are huge benefits that we can gain as a country by helping families to look after their elderly relatives and supporting them in the tax system. If we can do that by making some element of the personal tax allowance transferrable—for example, for a family that chooses that one of the taxpayers will stay at home, rather than work, in order to look after an elderly relative, who otherwise would put pressure on our adult social care system—it would be a huge, positive step. It would be better not only for that elderly person and that family, but for our adult social care system, which, as we all know, is under so much pressure at the moment. One answer to that pressure is to enable families to care for their elderly relatives much more, rather than just handing them over to the state and expecting the state to do it all. The Government would do well to consider that. I think it would make a huge, positive contribution to resolving the challenges we face.

I have huge respect for the Minister. When he entered the Chamber today, I was glad to see that he did not have his notes hanging out the top of his folder. I am sure he has been listening and will take a positive message from this debate back to the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Treasury, and tell them that there is

something we can look at here and take positive steps on, which would bring huge benefits to families across the country and to our economy.

10.2 am

**Chris Green** (Bolton West) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double), who highlighted something of immense importance: the ability of a family member to be able to care, not only for children, but for elderly relatives and other members of the family who need that support. It is so important that the state and society recognise the importance of carers. We have to enable them to care without being under too much pressure, financial or otherwise.

I welcome this debate, introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy), on the taxation of low-income families. I am delighted that the strengthening families manifesto has been published today. I believe that the family is the building block of society—the foundation on which society rests. Family is the source of our health, wealth and happiness. That may be contrary to what many people believe about Conservatives. People often see Conservatives as hyper-individualistic—it is all about the individual. However, I believe that the foundations of much Conservative philosophy and Conservative values rest on the importance of the family.

It is vital that the Government recognise in their policies that work pays. I will not go into the details, which my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) went through so effectively, about the impact that the tax system can have on a low-income family, especially someone earning 75% of the average wage—it can be such a disincentive to work. We ought to be looking at the advantages that having a good job and place of work can give to someone as a role model in the family. If we hinder their ability to take those additional hours and to be at work more, we are effectively denying people the opportunity to gain experience at work. They do not feel there is an incentive to work, so they do not get that experience.

That also sends a message to the employer. Employers want to invest in their workforce, to give more skills to the people in their company or organisation. However, if someone is working relatively few hours, there is less return on that investment. If someone can work more hours, they are more likely to secure training provided by that company. If someone has more experience and training, that individual may be able to get a promotion or a better position at work, or may have the opportunity to change companies and find a different position. That is a huge incentive. It has been mentioned that the current tax system crushes that aspiration. It is so important that we change that for this really important sector of society, to give those people an opportunity to aspire and improve themselves. That attitude and those values will then permeate through the family and the wider community.

The manifesto published today provides a huge opportunity for the Government to change their policy. With their ideas of making work pay and supporting families, the Government are sympathetic to that. I recognise the current economic challenge, with many demands on Government time and money, but given

the return on this investment—the improvement in society—it is worth changing the taper and improving it for those low-income families.

**Jeremy Lefroy:** My hon. Friend makes an important point about the money. These things do not come without a certain loss of revenue. Does he agree that one area to look at—it is interesting that the Centre for Policy Studies suggests that we look at this—is the higher-rate tax relief on pensions. As Members of Parliament we all declare an interest, because we are all taxed at the higher rate and all have pension contributions. That is given to people who already benefit from the 20% allowance and then there is another 20% on top of that. Although some restrictions have been introduced in recent years, that is an enormous cost to the Exchequer, to the benefit of people earning double or triple the national average wage.

**Chris Green:** My hon. Friend makes a superb point. It is a significant problem that apparent inconsistencies in the tax system give people who are already doing pretty well a further advantage, yet poorer people not do not receive that advantage. Looking more broadly at society, a few years ago there were riots in London and other cities around the country, and we are currently concerned about rising crime and the people causing those problems. We also have to look at how we can strengthen families, because I think that a certain societal cohesion comes from a strong family. That has so many other impacts across society. We may not immediately see income return, but in a stronger, healthier society the returns will be immense, not only for society, but for the Exchequer.

**Fiona Bruce:** Before my hon. Friend closes, I want to put on the record my appreciation for what he has done. He was one of the hon. Members who took part in the inquiry, which produced this report. Very modestly, he has not made reference to that, but I thank him for his work.

**Chris Green:** I thank my hon. Friend for raising that. Behind the scenes in Parliament there is so much good work going on, much of which is cross-party, with different colleagues bringing different perspectives. During these difficult times in Parliament, it would be positive for people to reflect on the important work that goes on behind the scenes, influencing decision makers, much of which is on a cross-party basis.

10.9 am

**Andrew Selous** (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate under your chairmanship, Sir David. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) for opening it so well, to my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce), who did so much to launch the report that we are considering today, and to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton West (Chris Green), who was also part of that important work.

I will start by giving credit where credit is due, because it is always important to do that; it is both the polite and the correct thing to do. I therefore say to the Minister, who is a friend in these matters, that we need to put on the record our huge gratitude and appreciation for the 3.4 million jobs created under the Conservative-led Government since 2010. That is 3.4 million people who

[*Andrew Selous*]

have the security of a monthly pay packet, who can look after their family, put food on the table and clothe their children. It is hugely important that that is recognised.

Consider youth unemployment rates around the world. I understand that in Greece youth unemployment is at 57%, and it is far higher in France and many other parts of the world. Our youth unemployment rate is a fantastic achievement. There has been a British jobs miracle since 2010 and we need to be hugely appreciative of it and not take it for granted. It has taken a lot of hard work and focus to create the environment in which businesses can flourish.

Universal credit has also been good, in getting rid of the pernicious effect of the old 16-hour rule. My hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) talked about when he was an employer and he gave us the example of employees who did not want to work more than 16 hours a week, as it was not worth their while because they would be so penalised by the 16-hour rule. Universal credit has swept that away. Now, for every extra hour that people work, at least they get something more. Lastly, the increase in the personal allowance has been enormously welcome to the group of people we are talking about.

Many of us—certainly among Government Members, but I think across Parliament—understand the damage that high marginal rates of tax do in discouraging enterprise. Entrepreneurs do not have to set up businesses. It has to be worth their while to do so and if the odds are stacked against them, with regard to the returns they will make, they will not start up businesses. This Government understand that well, and because they do we have created this fantastic environment for businesses, which has created those 3.4 million jobs that I just mentioned. All credit is due to the Government for understanding that.

However, I say to the Minister that businesses do not just exist for their own right and for their own benefit; they exist to benefit society and to benefit their employees. Humans are not resources; they are the point of it all. Businesses are there to benefit their employees, and if we are trapping people in low-paid work, so that they cannot progress in the way that many of us here in Westminster Hall have been able to progress throughout our careers, that should be of acute concern to our friends in the Treasury. I am sure that point is not lost on the Minister.

I reiterate the point that, sadly, the United Kingdom is an outlier in this respect, because the marginal tax rate for a one-earner couple with two children on 75% of the average wage is 73%, which is more than twice the EU average of 22%. No other OECD country treats low-income working families as badly as the United Kingdom does, with regard to effective marginal tax rates and work incentives.

It is really important to put on the record that, notwithstanding all the good work that has been done since 2010, this area is unfinished business. I want the Minister to go back to the Treasury and impress on the Chancellor and his fellow Ministers, who I think have an appetite for this work and do get it, the need to say to officials that more work has to be done in this area, so that everyone can benefit from the fruits of their hard work throughout their working life.

The problem of high effective marginal tax rates does not just affect single earners. It affects a million of them, but we know that there are also 600,000 dual earners who are similarly affected and—really importantly—900,000 single parents as well. So this is a problem for all types of family structure.

We are not calling for the abolition of independent taxation; I do not think that would be the right thing to do. However, I think it would be right to introduce an element of choice, because Government Members certainly believe that choice is a good thing. It gives flexibility, because families have different priorities and different needs at different stages of their lives. As has also been said before, we are in fact extremely judgmental, because the tax system is very prejudicial when only one member of a couple chooses to work and the other member chooses to care for children or frail elderly relatives.

**Chris Green:** I agree that this sense or understanding of the system being judgmental is a problem. Would it not be far better if the system, rather than judging one way or another way, had a far more neutral position, because that would enable individuals and families to make their own decisions?

**Andrew Selous:** Yes, I completely agree. I think that it comes back to choice and recognising that families face different challenges at different times of their lives, particularly regarding the needs of children, the frailties of elderly parents and so on. I hope that our social care reforms, which are forthcoming, will go some way towards addressing that situation, but the tax system absolutely has a huge role to play in addressing these important issues, which my hon. Friend quite rightly raises.

Effectively, what we are saying through the tax system is that, despite praising with warm words family members who choose to stay at home if they can make the financial choice to do so—not every family has members who can make that choice, but there are families in which one person makes the sacrifice to stay at home, to be with their children or to look after elderly relatives—we think they are making the wrong choice, because we penalise them for doing so; there is no recognition of what they do.

The Centre for Policy Studies, which was referred to earlier, has made a proposal that we should consider, which is to look at the transfer of unused personal allowances. The Child Poverty Action Group—the report that we are considering today looked across the political spectrum; I have great respect for CPAG—made some suggestions about perhaps increasing child benefit for children under five in lower income families. One way that we might be able to fund that—it is a golden rule with me that if anyone calls for an increase in expenditure, my next question is, “Where is the money coming from?”

**The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mel Stride)**  
*indicated assent.*

**Andrew Selous:** I see that the Treasury Minister is nodding; let me give him a suggestion, as I have made a call on the public purse. At the moment, we give child benefit to families that have an income of £100,000, where both members of a couple are earning £50,000, whereas that stops at £62,000 when there is only one earner in a family. So there is £38,000 worth of income in respect of child benefit to play with.



The Minister will have to go back to the Treasury and get all his super-clever officials to run those figures through the Treasury modelling system, but there will be some money there that could perhaps be better targeted at child benefit or the transfer of unused personal allowances. We are not being prescriptive here; we want Ministers to go back and look carefully, and reflect carefully, on these matters.

In respect of the work that parents do within the home—looking after children, or looking after frail or elderly relatives—last October the Office for National Statistics said that unpaid household work had a value to the British economy of £1.24 trillion. That is a big figure, as the Minister will appreciate, and just some recognition of the good that is done to society by that work—the costs that are not accruing to the public purse because of it—would be welcome. I think that on average that work comes down to a value of £18,932 per person, which is a significant amount.

**Fiona Bruce:** Are we therefore saying that some recognition by the Government of family in the tax system would go a long way towards changing the culture in our society, whereby we ought to value much more greatly that kind of work within the home, which is unpaid but provides so much benefit to society, economically as well as socially?

**Andrew Selous:** I agree with my hon. Friend, who makes an entirely reasonable request, and I will tell her why it is so reasonable: all our main economic competitors across the OECD do exactly what she suggests. It needs to be said a lot more often in this House that, as I said at the start of my contribution, we are an outlier in not doing this. We have taken for granted the fact that we have independent taxation that quite often ignores the second person in a family if they are not earning, which has led to some perverse consequences. I ask the Minister to go back to the Treasury and ask his officials to contact the economic councillors in British embassies around the OECD to get good data on how other countries do this, whether Finland, France or Germany. Let us look at what those countries do; let us look at how that increases the net take-home pay of lower income families; and let us look at the choices that it gives to those families, and at the overall satisfaction that is derived.

We have been talking about low-income families, and it is important to get on the record that the effects of high effective marginal tax rates can go quite high up the income scale. For example, a single-income family with three children paying rent of £157 a week has a marginal tax rate in 2018-19 of 96%, but that does not come down to 32% until income reaches £40,776. That might sound like a very high income, and for a lot of people it is, but for a person who lives in a high-cost housing area, that income disappears very fast. We need to remember that across large parts of the country, particularly those regions south of Birmingham in which many millions of our fellow citizens live, housing costs are extremely high, and that leaves a much smaller net take-home income for families to pay for all their needs with.

To repeat a point that was made earlier, in 1990 the effective marginal tax rate for a single-earner family on 75% of the average wage with two children in the UK

was 34%. Today in the OECD it is 33%. Today in the UK it is 73%. We have diverged massively from our friends and competitors in the OECD since 1990, and I do not think that is because of some malicious plot in the Treasury; I think it has happened in spite of good policies.

**Fiona Bruce:** Does my hon. Friend think it is interesting that we also have one of the highest rates of marriage breakdown in the developed world? Is there perhaps some interesting connection to be made there?

**Andrew Selous:** We need to look at everything we can do to strengthen family life, because we know that strong families—healthy, supportive, committed, mutually respectful couple relationships—are the bedrock of our society. As a Government, we used to talk a lot about reducing the couple penalty; certainly when we were in opposition and preparing for Government, that was a significant objective. We have made some progress towards that, given what we have done through universal credit, but it is still a big issue, as all of us see week after week in our constituency surgeries. We sometimes speak to single mums who are on their own, who are not acknowledging their partner because of the loss of income that would entail. That is not a good state of affairs, because there exists a loving, respectful relationship in which mum and dad want to live together, but they are not doing so because they would be penalised. It is all very well for us to talk about people doing the right thing, but for a lot of our constituents that is not possible if they are hit in the pocket. That message needs to hit home.

I will conclude by coming back to the importance of family, which my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton has quite rightly pressed me on. I know that I am pushing at an open door, because I rechecked the excellent speech that the Chancellor made in Birmingham in October. When he listed the principles that inspire him as a politician, strong families and family stability were right up there. I think the Chancellor gets this—I think the whole Treasury team gets this—so I hope that when the Minister responds he will give us a commitment that he will go back to the Treasury, talk to the Chancellor, and do detailed preparatory work and study of other countries to look at how we can make some of these changes. We are not asking the Minister to come up with specific answers today, as we know there is a lot of detailed work to be done, but I hope he will give us an undertaking that he will go back to the Treasury and make sure this work gets underway.

**Sir David Crausby (in the Chair):** I had wanted to call the Front Benchers by 10.25, but I will call Sir John Hayes for a tiny contribution.

10.25 am

**Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con):** I am grateful for your indulgence, Sir David, and apologise for not having been here at the beginning of the debate. I am proud to be associated with this study, and I have only two points to make. First, change is inevitable and constant, as Disraeli said, but not all change is for the better. In my lifetime, many things have changed for the better, but many have deteriorated, and perhaps the sharpest and most obvious deterioration

[*Sir John Hayes*]

has been the change in family life and the consequent alteration in communities. When I was brought up in a working-class community by working-class parents, that community was stable, law abiding and socially cohesive. It embedded in me strong values: to do the right thing, work hard, abide by the law, and care for other people.

If someone were to go to that council estate now, they would see a very different picture. They would see more lawlessness and more vandalism. They would see the parade of shops that was once there, which my mother used, long gone. Fundamentally and most starkly, they would see widespread family breakdown, and the wider effect of family breakdown is something that the Government need to recognise and use every lever at their disposal to do something about. It is no use politicians claiming that things will always and only get better, because they do not: society has changed for both good and ill simultaneously, and no Government of any party have dealt with this issue to the degree that they should have done.

We can use the tax system in exactly the way this report suggests, so my second point—mindful of your advice, Sir David, I will make only two—is that family, and particularly marriage, need to be supported in the tax system. The benefits system does so to some degree: as we have heard from various speakers, it recognises family responsibility. However, that is not matched by the tax system to the degree that it should be. I say to the Minister, who is my close friend and my right hon. Friend—which is quite a different matter—that he would stand proud among Treasury Ministers of this age and of all ages if he used the tax system to recognise family responsibility more effectively. With that brief contribution—some will say all too brief, Sir David, but I know you will not—I conclude my remarks.

10.28 am

**Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Sir David. I must say that as a feminist, I feel as though I have fallen down some kind of vortex to the 1948 film “Every Girl Should Be Married” in this debate. I fundamentally disagree with many of the arguments that hon. Members have put forward so well; I respect their right to do so, but they have ignored the elephant in the room, which is that lots of the stresses and strains on our society are caused by austerity, not by whether people are married or not. That is a personal choice.

Tax is often thought of as a boring, dreaded thing—a duty to be avoided, something best left to stuffy men in suits. However, like all economic tools, tax is a mechanism that opens up opportunities to shape the kind of society we want to live in. It incentivises good behaviour and punishes what some would consider to be bad behaviour. The UK Government’s tax system remains quite a blunt tool with which to tackle income inequality. It is riddled with loopholes that benefit the wealthy, and according to figures from the Institute for Public Policy Research, the UK is the fifth most unequal country in Europe when it comes to income.

The tax system is very gendered. In its analysis of last year’s Budget, the Women’s Budget Group said that raising the income tax threshold is not a policy that

helps women. It argues that 70% of those taken out of the higher rate of tax, and 73% of higher rate taxpayers who will benefit from raising the higher rate threshold, are men. We cannot claim that this will benefit women in any particular way, especially those in low-income jobs. According to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, minimum household budgets have risen by about a third since 2008 for most types of household. Inflation is sky high, wages are being squeezed and a no-deal Brexit would see an additional 6.4% of lower incomes being spent on food. That is a penalty that most families cannot afford.

I mention families, because they are central to what many Members have talked about. The hon. Members for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double), for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) and others have mentioned universal credit and the impact of the 16-hour rule. Figures from the Church of England show that a single mum with three kids, who is working 16 hours, would have to work 45 hours to make up for the cuts that the Conservative Government have made to the benefits system. What impact would a single mum working 45 hours have on family life? When is she actually going to see her kids? Who is going to tuck them into bed at night? That is not going to happen.

I have been working on a campaign for the removal of the two-child limit in the universal credit system, for which I would welcome hon. Members’ support, if they wish to give it. There was some movement from the Secretary of State last week, but it will still be in place for children born after 6 April 2017. The disincentive within the system is rife. Someone with two children who wants to get remarried, into another family, will lose out, because that will cause a change to benefits. If that person, once they have remarried, wants to have a child in that new family, they will not get the child element of universal credit, which is nearly £3,000. If any Government Member wants to speak to their colleagues in the Department for Work and Pensions and get them to get rid of this policy, that would be welcome, because it is a disincentive. If a family has four children, there is actually an incentive under this policy to separate and become two families with two children each, rather than one family with four children, thereby saving a huge amount of money. That needs to be removed from the universal credit system. If hon. Members are serious about it, they need to ask their colleagues in the DWP to do that.

Nobody mentioned the impact of the immigration system on families. I get many people coming to my surgeries who, because of the minimum income threshold in the immigration system, cannot bring a spouse to live here. I met a chap who is working two jobs at the moment, but cannot meet the threshold to bring his wife and his child over from another country. That is separating families. The number of Skype families out there, who are not being well served by this Government, who claim to support families, is an absolute scandal and we should do something about it. The stress of living in poverty probably contributes more to the break-up of families than anything else.

The report by Philip Alston, the United Nations special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, which Conservative Members never want to mention, says:

“Families with two parents working full time at the national minimum wage”—

that is the Chancellor's pretendy living wage, because it is not a living wage that anyone can live on—

“are still 11% short”—

11% short—

“of the income needed to raise a child.”

**Andrew Selous:** There is no disagreement on these Benches that poverty leads to family breakdown, but in the impact assessment for the Child Poverty Act 2010, brought in by the last Labour Government, there was also a recognition that family breakdown leads to poverty. Does the hon. Lady accept that it is circular and that the one leads to the other, both ways?

**Alison Thewliss:** I would accept the hon. Gentleman's arguments far more if he would argue for an end to austerity, for an increase to low wages and for the minimum wage to be equalised. At the moment the thresholds for 16 and 17-year-olds and for 18 to 21-year-olds are very different. The gap between the lowest paid—those on the UK's pretendy living wage—and the people at the top of the age threshold is increasing. It has got wider over the last three Budgets because increases at the top of the scale have not been met with increases at the bottom of the scale. It should be a fair wage for everybody. A 21-year-old parent does not get enough income in to support a family, and that will bring additional pressures to bear on what they can bring in and provide. People who have spoken today have entirely missed the point.

Treating families as a unit within the tax system, as often happens with universal credit, has been widely criticised by women's organisations because it removes women's agency. It also removes women's ability to provide for their families. Under the universal credit system, a woman is disincentivised from leaving a relationship, because all the money goes to the man—the main earner in the household. I appreciate that the Secretary of State has said that she is looking at this issue, but it creates a risk. That also exists within the rape clause of the two-child policy, where the only way a woman can claim this vile clause is to leave the relationship. Women's organisations across the board say that the most dangerous time for a woman is when she leaves a relationship; that is when she is most likely to be murdered. There is serious stuff about women's place in this policy.

I was glad to hear that the hon. Member for South West Bedfordshire is not calling for the abolition of independent taxation. I am relieved about that. Individuals should be able to exist within the system by themselves, for a very serious reason, which leads on from my point about universal credit. Incentivising marriage is disincentivising separation. There may be very reasonable grounds for separation, particularly in cases of domestic abuse. The marriage allowance, which benefits the higher earner in a family—almost always the man, as I have laid out—exacerbates inequality. To take this to its logical conclusion, if a man assaults his partner, so she cannot go to work, or he prevents her from working through coercive control and financial control, which we know a lot more about and which the Government have said they want to tackle in the Domestic Abuse Bill, he effectively gets a tax break for doing so. That is why this should have no place in the taxation system. It is important that women have agency and are able to get

money in. When money is taken away from women, that agency is removed, as well as their ability to look after themselves.

I had many more things I wanted to say about this policy. I had a whole speech written out about other things. We need to recognise that indirect taxation is also a huge issue. VAT disproportionately affects low-income families. According to the latest figures, those at the bottom end of the income distribution now pay nearly one third of their income in indirect taxes. The poorest fifth pay 31% in taxes such as VAT, alcohol and fuel duties, which is much higher than the 13% paid by the richest households. As I have been sitting here, I understand that the European Parliament has finally agreed to abolish the tampon tax. That is something that the UK Government have now delayed for almost four years. I hope that, now that the Minister has the green light that apparently the UK Government were waiting for, that tax on women will go as soon as possible.

While we can talk about taxes and marriage, the real elephant in the room is austerity and the cuts that have been made to women's budgets. Women need to have agency; that is the most important thing for families across the UK.

10.38 am

**Peter Dowd (Bootle) (Lab):** It is a pleasure to see you in the chair, Sir David. I appreciate the opportunity to make some comments and I thank the right hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes), the hon. Members for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy), for Congleton (Fiona Bruce), St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double), Bolton West (Chris Green) and for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous), and the spokesperson for the Scottish National Party, the hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss), for their contributions.

It is a pleasure to have been invited to the launch of a manifesto to strengthen family policies for a Conservative Government. I was not going to make comments about that, because I did not realise it was on the agenda today, but I will do so now, if I may, Sir David, with your indulgence. There were eight asks in the document, and I have time to comment on about four, which are all linked to the debate.

There is a reference to having a Minister for families. We had a Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, which David Cameron got rid of, so that idea of co-ordination went out of the window in 2010. I am pleased that Conservative Members now think that that was a good idea. Perhaps if they had kept that Secretary of State eight years ago, we might not be in the difficult position that we are in in relation to families.

The document refers to family hubs and how wonderful they are, and to children's centres, but hundreds of children's centres have been closed in the past eight years under austerity. It is all right to refer to family hubs and children's centres, but they have gone by the dozen, week in, week out.

**Fiona Bruce:** May I clarify the distinction between family hubs and children's centres? Regarding family hubs, we are saying that we need to give holistic support to families as they bring up their children right through their childhood—not just from nought to five, but from nought to 19 and beyond.



[*Fiona Bruce*]

Family hubs are designed to support not only people bringing up children but, as we have heard, people caring for elderly relatives and couples resolving difficulties in their marriage. It is a one-stop shop where families can go to get help for anything that they have difficulty with, from statutory agencies or from charities working together, much as people go to a citizens advice bureau in a wholly non-judgmental way. I am delighted that family hubs are springing up all over the country. Next month, there will be a major launch here in Westminster where Westminster City Council will promote family hubs.

**Peter Dowd:** The hon. Lady reinforces my point. To set up a family hub via charities or local authorities is fantastic—no one disputes the policy—but that has to be set in the context of austerity, as the hon. Member for Glasgow Central said.

My local authority has had a 50% cut in its funding, resulting in the potential closure of children's centres, some nurseries and day centres. It is okay to talk about having a family hub or a children's centre, but the resource is not there, because the Government have decided they will redirect their resources elsewhere. That is fine, but I am afraid that it is impossible to have both. A political choice has to be made, and has been made. The political choice that the Government have made is, *de facto*, to outsource the closing-down of many of those centres, fantastic community facilities and charities through cuts to local authorities.

The document talks about supporting mental health services, which face major cuts as a result of austerity. The Government have talked about parity of esteem time after time, but they have not done a great deal about it. They have come to that issue as a Johnny-come-lately.

**Fiona Bruce:** Again, our report talks about mental health challenges. Those of us who support strengthening families believe that we need to strengthen families so we can help many children who, at an early stage of their life, could and do suffer mental health challenges because of relational difficulties in the family.

I am the patron of a children's mental health charity in my constituency, and not long ago, I asked the former chief executive, who has now moved on, how many of the children that the charity is counselling, who can be as young as four years old, have mental health difficulties at least in part because of relational difficulties in their home environment. He looked at me and said, "Fiona, virtually all of them." A key purpose of our manifesto is tackling the root cause of many young people's mental health problems.

**Peter Dowd:** I am pleased that the hon. Lady made that intervention; she is reinforcing every point that I make as I go along. Again, the Government have decided to cut early intervention services year in, year out—I can say that because I worked in that area for many years. The hon. Lady is absolutely right that we have to start early, but if services for early intervention are cut and there is a lack of funding, the impact is the £48 billion from family dislocation that the report identifies.

**Fiona Bruce:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Peter Dowd:** No, because I have not got much time and I have given way several times. I have other points to make.

The manifesto is linked to the issue of taxation of families, but it is not just the fiscal issue that we have to identify—that is the problem; it is the wider determinants that go way beyond issues of taxation. The hon. Member for Stafford referred to the Christian background. I think it is in Matthew that Christ says,

"render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's".

Effectively, he was saying, "Pay your taxes." He is a fantastic role model for people who avoid paying their taxes. The bottom line is that a society can be cohesive only if everybody plays their part in it, whether through paying their taxes, charitable interventions or political inventions of the sort we make every day. That is what we have to do.

In the report, the hon. Member for Congleton talks about fathers being registered on birth certificates. That is fine, but an Office for National Statistics report on registration identified the fact that the vast majority of fathers are registered on birth certificates and that of those who are not, something like two thirds or a third are identified as being very much involved with the family. The idea that the registration of a father on a birth certificate will somehow solve some sort of problem is—I will not say laughable—only one element of the totality.

**Andrew Selous:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Peter Dowd:** I will, but the hon. Gentleman will appreciate that I do not have much time.

**Sir David Crausby (in the Chair):** Order. Interventions should be short.

**Andrew Selous:** It will be, Sir David. The point that my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) was making was that if registrations take place in family centres, the fathers become more involved in what the family centre can provide.

Briefly, in the impact assessment of the Child Poverty Act 2010, which was introduced by the hon. Gentleman's party when it was in government, there was a recognition that, although poverty leads to family breakdown, family breakdown also leads to poverty. Is that still the Labour party's position?

**Peter Dowd:** We would reintroduce the targets that we set in relation to child poverty, which the hon. Gentleman's Government got rid of. That is what is frustrating—Conservative Members are coming to us with all these ideas that the Labour party had for many years and which the Conservative party got rid of when it came to power. The Government got rid of all the things that hon. Members have been talking about and introduced austerity. They said, "Austerity is here. We're all going to play our part. We're all in the boat together," but in reality, we are not.

Although I recognise many of the worthy points made by hon. Members, that worthiness has got to be put in place, not by mechanisms, but by everybody playing their part in society and paying their taxes, and by corporations not getting tax breaks or being able to

avoid this, that and the other. The point that the hon. Member for Stafford makes about tax reliefs is fair; I will potentially look at them.

There is a complicated pattern, and on that basis, although I understand some of the points that the hon. Members for Congleton and for Stafford have made, I would say that actions speak louder than words. We need more action and fewer words.

10.49 am

**The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mel Stride):** It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) for securing this debate and my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) for her insightful contribution. I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton West (Chris Green) for his involvement in the important report issued this morning. I can assure all present that it will be carefully digested by Ministers in the Treasury.

At the heart of the matter lies the issue of fairness in the taxation system and the way in which the benefits system operates in our country. Also at the heart lies the central point that many speakers have made this morning as to whether the tax and benefits system appropriately incentivises aspiration—a Conservative ideal—and effectively incentivises employment, including incentivising people to go out and get jobs. And of course there is the impact of all those matters on the crux of the issue, which is the social impact of these measures on the stability of the family unit. I, the Treasury and the Government more broadly certainly recognise that all those points are of critical importance. I am particularly proud that Conservative Members chose to secure this debate and were instrumental in producing such a thoughtful and detailed report. It is the Conservative party that believes most strongly and passionately in the issues that lie at the centre of the matters we are debating today.

Having accepted that the matters are important, I also accept the many examples given in the debate today on the way in which the system does not work effectively. The most important has been the very high level of marginal tax rates. Several examples were chosen of particular circumstances involving individuals and children and the make-up of families to illustrate that we can, under certain circumstances, have marginal tax rates as high as 73% or even beyond. I accept that that is deeply undesirable. That is not the same thing as suggesting that the entire system is broken. If we chose different examples we might get far lower marginal tax rates than those that have been rightly highlighted in the report and in the debate today. Indeed, the OECD has indicated that across the universe of low-income families in this country, we are above average when it comes to making sure that net income is received by those families. However, there will always be more to do, which is why this debate is important.

We should not overlook the fact that we have a very progressive tax system. Some 28% of all income tax is paid by the top 1% of earners. In the previous Budget, we met our manifesto commitment to increase the personal allowance to £12,500 one year early. It will come in next year and take millions of the lowest paid out of tax altogether. In case it is felt that only the lower

paid face very large rates of marginal income tax, we must bear in mind that, under the current system, once someone earns beyond the large amount of £100,000, the personal allowance is tapered away at a rate of £1 for every £2 earned. At that point in the income distribution, wealthy people pay a marginal rate if we include national insurance of 63%. A necessarily complicated tax system, because it tries to do many things at the same time, throws up all sorts of deeply unsatisfactory anomalies. The complexities of the tax system and the interaction with the benefits system means a complicated challenge ahead.

Low tax matters. My hon. Friend the Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) put it eloquently. Low taxes matter for reasons other than fairness. They drive the economy, jobs and entrepreneurship. They make sure that we have, for example, halved the level of youth unemployment since 2010. He cited the very good example of Greece and other countries where they have taken a different way and have paid the consequences. The Government remain committed to lower taxes and to simplifying them to the extent possible and to making sure that the anomalies raised today are addressed.

On the benefits system, much has been said about universal credit. We all recognise that when the Labour party was in government, its benefits system was overly complicated. People had to go to the DWP, to the local housing authority and to HMRC to qualify for a variety of benefits, but we have simplified that to one benefit. When it comes to making work pay, which lies at the heart of many of the arguments, universal credit does exactly that. People no longer have the 16-hours-of-work cliff edge, beyond which they lose all their entitlement.

**Alison Thewliss:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mel Stride:** Extremely briefly.

**Alison Thewliss:** Does the Minister accept the research by the Church of England that a single mum with three kids will have to work 45 hours to make up for his cuts?

**Mel Stride:** The point I was coming on to was the taper. In 2016, we announced a reduction in the taper rate from 65% to 63%. My hon. Friend the Member for Congleton called for it to be reduced further to 50%. That is a deeply desirable move if it can be achieved, but we must recognise the cost of doing so. The cost of having gone from 65% to 63% is £1.8 billion across the scorecard period. I do not have the figure to hand, but it would be absolutely enormous if we went to 50%. With great respect to Members, even the examples of where we could do more, such as tax relief on higher-rate pensions or the changes to child benefit and the way in which that might operate, would be dwarfed by any such move. We have to recognise, as my hon. Friend the Member for South West Bedfordshire explicitly did, the costs of making the changes that have been proposed.

The Conservative party introduced the national living wage. We should be enormously proud of that fact. It goes up by 4.9% in April, so those in full-time employment will take home £2,750 more than they did in 2010<sup>1</sup>. The marriage allowance is an example of exactly what the report calls for. Among the measures are a transferability of allowance to make provision for those who stay at home to look after children or elderly relatives. It transfers

1. [Official Report, 31 January 2019, Vol. 653, c. 6MC.]

[*Mel Stride*]

at a rate of 10%, provided the person is not a higher or additional-rate taxpayer. Once again, it is focused on the lowest paid in our society. We spent time reflecting on child support. We will spend £6 billion more per year by 2020, and we brought in tax-free childcare. If someone is on universal credit, they are able to claim back up to 85% of the cost of childcare.

In the remaining couple of minutes, I will respond directly to the overarching request made of me this morning, which is that I go back to the Treasury with the report and the comments made in this debate and look genuinely and deeply at the issues raised. I can give an unequivocal commitment to do precisely that because, despite what is going on in the House at the moment and the important vote tonight, certain things must continue uninterrupted. Our essential quest for social justice and the Conservative party's commitment to the family and a society that is at ease and at one with itself, must not be diminished. The House has my commitment to do exactly as I have said. I will engage in the form that my hon. and right hon. Friends wish me to make sure that we push forward on the important issues raised today.

10.58 am

**Jeremy Lefroy:** I thank all Members for their contributions today. Extremely important points have been made. I thank the Minister for his commitment to look at this area, and I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) for driving this forward, together with other colleagues here today. I also thank the hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) who made important points. I do not agree with all of them, but two need looking at, including the two-child limit, about which I have concerns. I am really pleased about the announcement made this week, but we need to go further. Secondly, I entirely agree with her on bringing families together. I have experience of that in my own constituency.

I also agree with the hon. Member for Bootle (Peter Dowd), who speaks for the Opposition. The Labour party did some extremely important things. Some were reversed, some maintained, and some I would like to see brought back. We need to go further. He is absolutely right: there is no monopoly of virtue or vice in this area in any party. We all have to work on this for the benefit of our constituents.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered the taxation of low-income families.

*Sitting adjourned.*

## Department for Work and Pensions: Members' Representations

11 am

**Kate Osamor** (Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move,

That this House has considered representations by Members of Parliament to the Department for Work and Pensions on behalf of constituents.

It is a privilege to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I am grateful to have been allocated this debate. I wish to raise the serious and worsening effects that the practices and policies of the Department for Work and Pensions are having on those needing welfare support, and the ability of the advice sector and staff, including those in my office, to support claimants. I could raise numerous points, but I will focus on universal credit. I must praise the work of MPs, third-sector groups and the Work and Pensions Committee in exposing the unfolding catastrophe of universal credit, and repeatedly forcing the Government to rethink their approach. Universal credit's three main objectives are to reduce poverty, to make work pay and to simplify benefits.

Why do I need to raise the serious and worsening effects of DWP practices and policies? Let us be clear: the challenges that our constituents face are immense. Since being elected, I have witnessed at first hand a Government Department that has been increasingly uncompromising and punishing of claimants. That has been ever so evident in the woeful implementation of universal credit and its callous roll-out.

**Janet Daby** (Lewisham East) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for securing this significant debate. Does she agree that the five-week delay in universal credit is supporting people to get into debt rather than out of it, and that the Government should rethink how that is affecting the lives of real people?

**Kate Osamor:** My hon. Friend makes a valuable point, which I will come to later. I thank her for her contribution.

There is considerable anxiety among the 16,630 households in Edmonton accessing at least one kind of social support that will be replaced by universal credit. By August 2018, around 2,750 households in Edmonton had been moved to the new system. Many of my constituents have reported multiple significant problems in dealing with universal credit, from understanding the new system, to the transition to universal credit, the excruciating application process, receiving payments, which are mainly late, and the ongoing support—in short, the entire system.

My constituents are not alone in their assessment of universal credit. The National Audit Office said that the universal credit programme was

“driven by an ambitious timescale”

and had

“suffered from weak management, ineffective control and poor governance.”

According to the Child Poverty Action Group, difficulties with claiming universal credit mean that currently one in five applications fails.



A vulnerable constituent of mine made a claim for universal credit in July 2018. It was initially incorrectly refused, even though he had provided all the necessary documentation. Only after challenging the decision was his application accepted in September 2018. Despite the appeal being upheld, he did not receive any universal credit payments until December 2018—almost five months after his initial claim. Let that sink in: it was five months after the initial claim, and he was an extremely vulnerable person.

**Emma Dent Coad** (Kensington) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that the bureaucracy facing claimants, including appeals, is too much to bear for people going through such difficulties, and that our constituency staff teams are constantly asked for help that they are unable to give?

**Kate Osamor:** My hon. Friend makes a valuable point. I will come on to the demand for the legal representation that vulnerable people need.

As I said, my constituent, who was a very vulnerable person, received his first payment five months after his initial claim, and that was only after the relentless persistence of my office. I cannot convey the hardship that my constituent went through in those five months. He was let down by a shoddy assessment of his application.

In areas such as Edmonton, with such high levels of inequality, the suffering has been more intense and more widespread. My role is to fight for equality for all. Achieving equality is not just the right thing to do; the evidence is clear that more equal societies are better, healthier and safer. Such societies have fewer health issues and social problems, are less internally divided, and are better able to sustain economic growth.

On 11 January this year, three single mums defeated the DWP at the High Court over issues with universal credit. They were missing out on hundreds of pounds a year because of the farcical way the DWP calculates income. Lord Justice Singh and Mr Justice Lewis ruled that the DWP had been wrongly interpreting the universal credit regulations. In their judgment, they described the universal credit income assessment process as “odd in the extreme”. Can the Minister confirm whether the Secretary of State will appeal that High Court judgment?

Universal credit is complicit in the Government's punishing austerity policy, which has increased child poverty to 4 million and rising. The Institute for Fiscal Studies predicts a 7% rise in child poverty between 2015 and 2022. Some sources predict that, if policies remain the same, child poverty rates will reach as high as 40%. In a recent report, the UN special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Professor Philip Alston, expressed his dismay that one fifth of the UK population—14 million people—were living in poverty, 1.5 million of whom are destitute and unable to afford basic essentials. His report described the immense growth in food banks and the queues outside them, people sleeping rough on the streets, and the growth of homelessness. It is utterly unacceptable that in 2019 millions of people live without food security.

By continuing the roll-out of universal credit, the Government are making it clear that the human cost of austerity is not a priority for them. In recent days, DWP Ministers have been talking of extra funding for universal credit—£1.5 billion to help people by allowing advances

of up to 100% on day one, if individuals require it. Let us be clear: that is not extra money in the pocket of those barely getting by; it is debt, pure and simple. The gap between legacy and universal credit payments means that claimants who take up advances start their claims in debt to the DWP. Advances only complicate the process and should not be necessary in the first place.

To make matters worse, the Citizens Advice reported that claimants on universal credit were more likely to have debt problems than those on the legacy system. However, DWP Ministers seem to think that saddling claimants with debt from the start of their claim is a solution to the problem of poor design. The Government pledged an extra £4.5 billion for universal credit across the next five years in the last Budget. However, the benefits freeze is set to continue until April 2020, and there is no guarantee that it will not continue after that, no matter what soundbites emerge from the Secretary of State. The IFS has also made it clear that there are welfare cuts still to come of more than £4 billion per year until 2022-23, which spells more and more insecurity for those who can least withstand it. The Government continue to flatter themselves about ending austerity, but unless they restore humanity into the welfare system, I can only determine that it is a soundbite exercise.

In Edmonton, we are seeing the continued grinding down of local support services and the continuing impoverishment of the constituents who I was sent here as a Member of Parliament to represent and serve. Serving their interests and seeking to aid them is my primary goal, but the scale of issues with accessing universal credit means that Members' offices are overwhelmed with pleas for help. I have seen an increase in the volume of cases, a large proportion of which are complex and need legal and specialist representation that is harder and harder to find. As a consequence of the DWP's policies and approach, and in the context of austerity, I—like other MPs—am approaching the point when it will be untenable to make adequate representations on behalf of my constituents.

A key obstacle that my constituents face in accessing universal credit is the overemphasis that the system places on digitisation. According to Neil Couling of the DWP, the system relies heavily on digitisation to process claims and, as a result, less than 1% of claimants lose out. I find that hard to believe, because the reality of digital skills in the UK paints a very different picture. According to the Office for National Statistics, one UK adult in 10 has never used the internet, one in five lacks basic digital skills and 20% of disabled adults have never used the internet. Even a DWP survey reported that 30% of UC recipients found the online process either “very difficult” or “fairly difficult”, while 43% said that they needed more support with setting up their claim. Ipsos MORI's 2018 UK consumer digital index agreed with DWP findings that an estimated 1.2 million benefit claimants have low digital capability or no digital capability. At times, my staff have had to set up email accounts and give basic IT training to my constituents.

In short, the design of universal credit is fundamentally flawed. It systematically disadvantages or excludes the millions of people in the UK without good digital skills. The over-reliance on digitisation has meant more and more people coming to my office because of issues that they face with universal credit or that originate in problems with universal credit. Given that 30% of universal

[Kate Osamor]

credit recipients found the online process either “very difficult” or “fairly difficult”, and 43% said that they needed more support with setting up their claim, will the Minister accept that it is time to stop and rethink the over-reliance on the digital process?

Without a doubt, the benefits process is complex for anyone. Consequently, the DWP has helplines available under the legacy system to enable claimants and advice staff to uncover problems and find a solution. However, no such comparable arrangement is in place for universal credit. A working single mother in my constituency faced considerable issues when dealing with universal credit. A mother of three dependent children, she was wrongly advised by her work coach to end her claim for tax credit and claim universal credit instead. Unfortunately, the work coach had not grasped that universal credit was not available to claimants in Enfield with three or more children until 2019. As a result, my constituent's claim was terminated. Although she had taken steps to apply separately for tax credit, her claim could not be processed because she was deemed to fall within the reclaim period for universal credit. Having just started a new job, she was reliant on benefit income to tide her and her children over until her wage arrived, but she was left with nothing.

She tried to deal directly with the DWP but had no success. She came to my office, but my caseworkers, too, were frustrated in their efforts to solve the problem. DWP staff incorrectly informed us that all third-party enquiries, including representations from MPs, would need to be made via an online portal, which could take more than a month to process, irrespective of the urgency of the representations. It was only after my office escalated the matter to the Secretary of State and to senior personnel on multiple occasions that matters were eventually resolved.

Universal credit left my constituent and her children in poverty. That could have been avoided if there had been key escalation points in place that she or my office could have used throughout the process. When problems emerge, the structures to remedy them are not fit for purpose. For what has proved to be a difficult system, why not introduce an escalation process such as a well-staffed helpline for claimants, Members' offices and the wider sector? Will the Minister commit to making such changes to the system?

At the moment, the soundbite of the DWP's approach is to “learn and adapt.” That is the height of privileged detachment. Can the Department really be serious? What are spoken of as problems to be solved as they come up are real people's lives. What is perceived as a learning opportunity for Ministers is devastation for my constituents. I ask the Minister not to turn a blind eye to these problems, but to look back at universal credit's three main objectives: to reduce poverty, to make work pay and to simplify benefits. Rather than ploughing ahead, is it not time for the Department to overhaul the system?

Universal credit in its current form simply is not working; it is causing greater poverty, destitution and anxiety wherever it is rolled out. The Government need to commit to a root-and-branch review of universal credit. I look forward to the Minister's reply.

11.17 am

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Justin Tomlinson):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I pay genuine tribute to the hon. Member for Edmonton (Kate Osamor); although obviously I do not agree with all the points she made, it is clear from her time as an MP and formerly as a councillor, and from the issues she raised in her speech, that she is a passionate campaigner on the subject, particularly for vulnerable claimants in her constituency. I am not the Minister ultimately responsible for universal credit, which was the predominant focus of her speech, but part of my portfolio is to represent vulnerable claimants who go through the universal credit process, so I recognise some of the issues that she pointed up.

I will talk about some of the specific asks that have been addressed and on which there is much agreement, but first it is fair to remind hon. Members that there was cross-party support for the principle of universal credit: to offer personalised, tailored support. Stakeholders broadly support that principle. That does not mean that all is right, but we must not forget that legacy benefits were not the panacea of a utopian state in which everything was great. They were incredibly complicated, with six different benefits and three different agencies, and with the involvement of the DWP, Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, and local authorities. Frankly, anyone navigating them had to be a nuclear physicist, whether they were claimants, MPs or MPs' staff members trying to support predominantly vulnerable claimants.

The figures bear out that point. We typically saw 700,000 claimants a year missing out on £2.4 billion of benefit support—about £280 each per month—that we had all voted to give them because we recognised that it was the right thing to do for those predominantly vulnerable claimants. There was a 90% tax rate for some claimants, and there were well-known problems with the cliff edges at 16, 24 and 30 hours. In our casework, we saw people who wanted to do the right thing and were trying to improve their opportunities in life, but the system was working against them. Universal credit was therefore introduced, as I said, broadly with cross-party support. It is right that we have looked at it all the way through as a test-and-learn, and that is why it is important that the hon. Member for Edmonton has raised her direct experiences and those of her office.

We have already made some significant improvements. We, rightly, made the changes to advance payments. Those payments were always there, but people had to know to ask and, unsurprisingly, very few people did. They are now, rightly, automatically part of the initial interview with the work coach and, unsurprisingly, the take-up rates of advance payments have significantly improved.

Initially, those payments were repaid over six months. That was, rightly, changed to 12 months, and then to 16 months. The repayment rate has also been reduced and we have strengthened the discretion to take into account particular hardships, to make sure we are not compounding a problem.

Those who are transferring over from legacy benefits, such as housing benefit, will get an additional two weeks-worth of housing benefit money, with no strings attached. That is additional money. As the regulations

come forward, there will also be an additional two weeks for those on employment and support allowance, jobseeker's allowance or income support, again with no strings attached. That is typically worth £237 on housing benefit and £200 on ESA, JSA or IS. Opposition Members often seek to oppose what the Government do, but this is something they should support.

We have scrapped the seven-day waiting period and strengthened the alternative payment arrangements, on housing costs direct to the landlord, for example. If a legacy claimant already had that provision, there will now be a presumption that we should have the conversation to see if that was the right arrangement. We have also looked at the frequency of payments, for those who have been used to a more frequent payment and might struggle with monthly payments.

There is the extra work allowance. We have made changes to the exemptions for the minimum income floor for self-employed claimants, and there are additional protections for those on severe disability premiums. But there is still more to do.

**Laura Pidcock** (North West Durham) (Lab): The advance payments are still a loan, which is a crucial point that my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Kate Osamor) made. My question is this, however: those people who are being managed through their migration to universal credit will have protections, but those people who have naturally migrated—often, but not always, through change of circumstances—will not have those protections. What is the justification for that? Many of my constituents are worse off.

**Justin Tomlinson:** As the hon. Lady said, that is to do with change of circumstances. The transitional arrangements were put in place for those who were transferring as part of natural migration, and we have, rightly, confirmed that that number will be ring-fenced to just 10,000 this year, so we can have a real deep dive to look at the levels of support that are needed. I will come back to that in a moment.

On the wider point about why transitional arrangements were not put in, that is because it was recognised that there would be a change of circumstances. We are seeing that a lot of people benefit, and some go the other way, but overall we are now spending an additional £2 billion on the current benefits compared with the legacy benefits, before the extra money goes in. That is more money going to the people who need that help.

Let me turn to points where I think there is agreement. We talk about office casework. We all have busy offices and have to prioritise casework and supporting our constituencies. I am very proud to have been rated third out of 650 on theyworkforyou.com on helping constituents. I absolutely understand the importance of casework. One of my staff specialises in this area, has visited the jobcentre with me and talked to the partnership manager. We all have a partnership manager, who is the point of contact for escalating cases.

I know the hon. Member for Edmonton was due to visit the jobcentre in December 2017, and that that visit was cancelled. I encourage her and her staff to take part in such a visit. It is really important, and they are there to help. Where we have specific cases that do not seem

right, there is an ability to escalate; MPs can talk to the senior people in the respective jobcentres and they can help take that forward.

I have a lot of sympathy with the point about digital by default. The principle was to mirror the world of work, because most workplaces now expect staff to have a reasonable level of digital engagement. However, that is not the case for all people. Not all people on universal credit will end up in work—even if that is their ultimate aim, not everybody is going to, and not everybody will do that overnight. We need to improve every communication in order to advise about alternatives; claimants can access support via the telephone, face to face, or through home visits. We need to do better at promoting that and it is certainly something that I will continue to push on.

We also need to look at the issue of consent. One of the complications of the General Data Protection Regulation is that we now need implicit consent. I regularly meet stakeholders, particularly housing associations and local authorities, who say, "We represent many of your vulnerable claimants, and we want to help. We have the resource to help, and we have teams, but unless we know that one of the people that we are working with is about to be migrated or has come on to universal credit or is accessing an advance payment, how can we help?" We have got to find a way, and I think that should be done in the same way as with advance payments—through making asking for implicit consent an automatic part of the initial interview, in order to get those support organisations working with claimants. There is a resource there that wants to support claimants and we should be doing everything we can to match them up.

We made a significant announcement on putting citizens' advice into every single jobcentre throughout the country. It will be an independent organisation, and we will cover the costs. That will start in April, and I welcome it. As part of the test-and-learn with the 10,000, I want to look closely at exactly how much time is available to vulnerable claimants. Is it enough or are there other things that could be done? I think we should look very carefully at that.

**Janet Daby:** Advance payments still take five days. Does the Minister agree that that is just too long? What are people expected to do during that period?

**Justin Tomlinson:** Actually, if somebody is in particular hardship, they can get access to money within a couple of hours, so that is an option. I am not sure how well that has been communicated, but that rule is in place for those who genuinely need it.

We should continue to work with stakeholders. I am very receptive to meeting stakeholders. Throughout the week I meet different groups that will often come and challenge the Government, and hold our feet to the coals. It is right for them to do that, because they are identifying issues. There are a number of cases where a stakeholder with particular expertise has then helped to rewrite and deliver our training. For example, on the very important issue of domestic abuse, I have been working very closely with Women's Aid, Refuge and Mankind. They went over all the training documents and sat through a typical claimant's experience to identify whether things are in place. We are looking to bring further improvements based on their expertise.



**Kate Osamor:** I just wanted to put on the record that I was never a councillor.

**Justin Tomlinson:** Apologies.

**Kate Osamor:** Also, on my visit to the jobcentre, there was a threat of closure and at the time, the visit got dropped, but it was not because I did not want to go there.

Will the Minister answer my question about whether a helpline will be put in place?

**Justin Tomlinson:** I am sorry that the hon. Lady was not a councillor. I was a councillor before, and I enjoyed it very much. I am sorry that she missed out on that opportunity. I did not pass judgment on the visit—I just said that it would be good if she could make that visit. As a Back-Bench Member, I personally benefited from such a visit.

I brought in a national helpline on personal independence payments when I was a disability Minister. The issue here is a little different. There were national, one-size-fits-all rules on PIP. Universal credit is personalised and tailored, and people need to speak, in effect, to the work coach. What is in place is a partnership manager in every single jobcentre who should be the MP's point of contact. By coincidence, we recognised earlier this week that we suspect that not all MPs know who their partnership manager is. The Minister for Employment responsible for UC has committed to share that information and to make sure that we all have the details of those points of contact, because they are there to help.

Finally, to pick up on a few points, income inequality has fallen under this Government, having risen under the last Labour Government. The average income of the poorest fifth in this country is now up by £400 a year in real terms, while that of the richest fifth is down by £800. There are 1 million fewer people in absolute poverty, including 300,000 children. There is still much more to do. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Edmonton and her wealth of experience; she gave a very constructive speech. I hope she can see that many of the points raised are ones that we are actively looking to address, and that is absolutely vital for all claimants and, in particular, for vulnerable claimants. I thank you, Sir David, for the opportunity to set out what the Government are doing.

*Question put and agreed to.*

11.30 am

*Sitting suspended.*

## British Bioethanol Industry

[MIKE GAPES *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

**Nic Dakin** (Scunthorpe) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the future of the British bioethanol industry.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gapes, and it is good to have the opportunity to discuss the future of the British bioethanol industry when other matters today are focusing people's minds. I am pleased to see so many hon. Members of different parties here to contribute to the debate.

The bioethanol industry is, regrettably, in a state of collapse. Should this collapse be complete, the industry is unlikely ever to come back again. We are at a seminal point in its life in the UK. I hope that we can convince the Minister to take, on behalf of the Government, the urgent steps needed to secure the future of this important industry. Should we lose it, there will be significant implications not only for the agricultural and transport sectors, but for the wider economy and the UK's decarbonisation and renewable targets.

I particularly thank the hon. Member for Hereford and South Herefordshire (Jesse Norman), who unfortunately cannot be here to respond on behalf of the Government. He has agreed to meet the British bioethanol industry and me next week. Hopefully this debate will assist in setting out and examining the current issues, including the compelling case why his Department urgently needs to make E10 fuel mandatory at UK petrol stations. Next week's meeting can get straight to how we can make that happen as soon as possible in 2019 in order to reverse the recent collapse in confidence, production and job losses and secure the future of this important industry.

**Sir Oliver Heald** (North East Hertfordshire) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman be willing to let Members who are here today know the outcome of his meeting with Ministers? I remember attending a meeting on the subject of E10 fuel, which I think he organised. I thought that quite a compelling case was made, and it would be interesting to have some feedback.

**Nic Dakin:** The Minister has agreed to meet MPs of different parties who have an interest, particularly a local interest. I would certainly be very keen to update the right hon. and learned Gentleman on the outcome of that meeting. Should he be available and want to join us, I am sure that would be possible.

**Sir Greg Knight** (East Yorkshire) (Con): I declare an interest as the owner of several older vehicles. Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the Government are right to be careful in introducing E10, which is not compatible with vehicles manufactured before 2000, so it is essential that E5 or less remains available?

**Nic Dakin:** Nobody is arguing that E5 should not be available. There was an excellent Radio 4 "File on 4" programme just before Christmas that featured Tony Wood, who runs a garage and owns 3 MGs. The reporter Simon Cox asked him about the impact of E10 fuel on older cars such as Wood's MGBs:

“And if they brought in that E10 fuel, what effect—if any—do you think it could have on it?”

Mr Wood replied:

“Well, of course the jury is still out on that, because nobody really knows, but we’ve been running E5 for a number of years and there were stories when E5 came in of the sorts of effects it would have on your fuel hoses, but in real terms E5 has not proved to be much of a problem because most cars have already had their fuel lines changed at some point or another for more modern materials.”

Mr Cox then asked:

“So if the concern with bringing in E10 was the effect on old cars, it sounds like that doesn’t really stack up.”

Mr Wood replied:

“Well, in my opinion it’s probably less of an issue than it has been made out to be.”

Everybody would hope that that would be the case.

**Sir Greg Knight:** The hon. Gentleman is being very generous, and I hear what he is saying. Will he take it from me that there are cases of E10 dissolving sealants in fuel tanks and blocking fuel lines, which could be very dangerous in some cases?

**Nic Dakin:** I am drawing on the expertise in that “File on 4” programme. Obviously, any serious issues need to be looked at properly. Nobody wants the introduction of a new fuel to have disadvantages for people. It is very important that E5 remains available, as the right hon. Gentleman indicated.

The British bioethanol industry is perhaps not as widely known as it should be, but it is something of a British success story. Over £1 billion has been invested in the past decade, allowing British workers using British-grown produce to produce British bioethanol to help fuel British vehicles and feed British livestock, while reducing the UK’s carbon footprint and putting fewer pollutants into the atmosphere.

Until very recently, the UK had two of Europe’s biggest bioethanol plants: Ensus created a state-of-the-art facility on Teesside with an initial £250 investment in 2010, and Vivergo Fuels created a £400 million plant in Hull in 2013. Both distilled locally grown wheat to produce bioethanol, with protein-rich animal feed created as a by-product. The Ensus plant could produce 400 million litres of ethanol a year, and Vivergo Fuels 420 million litres. Each employed over 100 people directly as well as supporting a further 6,000 supply-chain jobs, including farmers and hauliers. The UK also has a further plant in Norfolk owned by British Sugar, which can produce 70 million litres a year.

As the Minister is well aware, Vivergo announced in September that it was closing its plant in Hull, and Ensus announced that it was pausing production at its plant on Teesside in November. It is not an overstatement to say the industry has collapsed in only a matter of months, and its future is dependent on the Government taking urgent action on the introduction of E10.

**John Howell (Henley) (Con):** I want to know—the hon. Gentleman might be coming on to this—whether he has done a calculation of the effect on the savings on air pollution that these fuels will have. Maybe he could tell us what that is.

**Nic Dakin:** I will come on to that in due course. If the hon. Gentleman can be patient, I will come to it when I come it.

**John Howell:** I am desperately eager to know.

**Nic Dakin:** I know.

**Phil Wilson (Sedgefield) (Lab):** I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate, which is really important for Teesside and the south Durham area. I want to raise an issue about farming. The National Farmers Union has put out a report on the importance of bioethanol. My constituency covers 150 square miles and is an agricultural area of County Durham. Does my hon. Friend understand what the NFU has briefed on the implications of this for climate change? It could lead to 700,000 cars being taken off the road. We require an infrastructure that can secure that, especially in the agriculture industry, where we can grow the appropriate crops for this kind of industry to prosper. We are missing an opportunity should we not invest in it.

**Nic Dakin:** My hon. Friend makes the point very well and begins to answer the question from the hon. Member for Henley (John Howell) about the 700,000 cars that would be taken off the road if E10 were introduced, and on the impact on both air quality and carbon reduction. The bioethanol industry makes an important contribution to farming across the country.

In 2005, the Labour Government gave a very clear message to investors that they would support a substantial growth in demand for renewable fuels, announcing that 5% of petrol sold in the UK would come from renewable sources by 2010. The subsequent coalition and Conservative Governments retained these commitments. On the back of that, large scale investments of over £1 billion were made to ensure that the UK could produce high-quality and sustainable bioethanol to meet forecast demand. During the following decade the Government reduced target levels for renewable biofuels while addressing questions on the sustainability of biofuels. The installed capacity, which was put in place to meet the Government forecast of demand, was substantially higher than demand. Producers have suffered regular and sustained losses, which have led to recent plant closures. Higher demand has not materialised, because at present only E5 petrol with a 5% blend of bioethanol is available at British petrol stations, which is insufficient to support a viable British bioethanol industry as it currently exists.

There have been signals from the Department for Transport that suggested that E10 would be introduced imminently, giving the sector further false hope. The Department’s transport energy taskforce recommended lifting the blend level and reintroducing E10 in 2020. The industry interpreted that as meaning that the Government were fully behind it. Nearly four years on, the Government have still to act on that recommendation.

The Minister’s Department issued a consultation and call for evidence on E10 in June last year. The consultation closed in September, but the Department has yet to publish its response to the submissions. Unfortunately, the consultation did not propose to mandate the introduction of E10. Instead, it proposed the introduction of a protection grade requirement to ensure the continued availability of E5 petrol, representing 95% of all petrol sold today. If implemented, that may be a disincentive to move to E10.

**David Simpson** (Upper Bann) (DUP): Will the hon. Gentleman clarify, if possible, how competitive the fuel is, compared with diesel, petrol and so on? Is the pricing competitive?

**Nic Dakin:** Yes, it is competitive. It is probably slightly more expensive, but it is a very small expense. Most of the increase in expense would be from taxation.

The call for evidence on ideas to encourage the introduction of E10 was included in the consultation, but again that signalled only further discussion and delays. It is therefore not surprising that the industry appears finally to be losing faith. The Vivergo closure and the Ensus announcement demonstrate that jobs and investment in the bioethanol industry and the agricultural sector are hanging in the balance. When the Government announced the consultation, they said:

“This government is ambitiously seeking to reduce the UK’s reliance on imported fossil fuels and cut carbon emissions from transport. But drivers of older vehicles should not be hit hard in the pocket as a result”

of the introduction of E10.

On the cost, which the hon. Member for Upper Bann (David Simpson) mentioned, almost all cars built since 2000, and 95% of all cars on the road, are warranted to run on E10, and every new petrol car sold since 2011 is fully warranted to use E10, so about 5% of cars on the roads may have an issue. That includes classic cars, about which the right hon. Member for East Yorkshire (Sir Greg Knight) raised concerns. Any motorists uncomfortable with using a new fuel can always use the premium brands, which need to remain available.

When the fuel is introduced, the industry would be happy to work with the Department to support a public information campaign about E10, including a website with the compatibility details of all car makes and models. That information would also need to be provided at petrol pumps.

The cost of E10 would depend largely on tax levels. It is predicted that it would cost no more than 1p more per litre at the pump, or about £20 per day. Most of that is made up from taxation, rather than the additional cost. The Government could consider a reduction in vehicle excise duty to compensate for any small increase in running costs resulting from using the more premium fuel, so there is a way through this dilemma. There are straightforward solutions to the possible fuel price issue, but the Minister’s Department might be reluctant to introduce E10 due to concerns from a very small minority of motorists whose vehicles are not fully warranted to use E10. I hope that the Minister will clarify that.

On greenhouse gases, there are broader environmental issues to consider, as has been said. Transport represents 24% of total greenhouse gas emissions—higher than any other sector in the UK economy. It is 1.3% higher than it was in 2013. Bioethanol should be seen as a vital tool in helping to decrease those emissions. The UK is currently failing to reach its statutory targets on the amount of renewables used in transport, in line with the renewable energy directive and the UK’s Climate Change Act 2008. Bioethanol is one of the quickest, easiest and most cost-effective ways of meeting those targets. As has been said, the introduction of E10 would take the equivalent of 700,000 cars off the roads.

Up to its closure, Vivergo Fuels was working on projects with the University of Hull and Bangor University to explore the development of even more advanced biofuels, which would have delivered even greater environmental benefits. Ensus has been working with one of the winners of the Government’s advanced biofuel competition grants, Nova Pangea, to produce ethanol from biomass waste products. Unfortunately, the failure of the UK’s investments in first-generation bioethanol puts at serious risk further investments.

The introduction of E10 would also improve air quality by reducing particulates and carcinogens. In the light of the Environment Secretary’s recent announcements, it would make sense for E10 to be embraced. Benzene and butadiene emissions, both of which are highly carcinogenic, decrease with higher levels of ethanol blending in fuel. Additionally, the oxygen contained within ethanol helps the fuel to burn better and increases the efficiency of the engine, reducing the hydrocarbons that are released. E10 is clearly better for the environment than the current grades of petrol sold in the UK. The concerns over diesel have resulted in motorists moving back to petrol, and the growth in petrol hybrids means that addressing the carbon dioxide emissions from petrol cars is even more urgent.

Although a range of technologies, including electric cars, may play a complementary role in decarbonising transportation and improving air quality, the reality is that electric vehicles represent only a small percentage of overall car sales in the UK—currently around 6% of annual sales—and most are hybrid, so in the short to medium term bioethanol and E10 would make a significant contribution. To have the same environmental impact as the introduction of E10, we would need to replace 2 million petrol cars with electric vehicles immediately.

On foreign imports, the closure of the UK’s domestic production of bioethanol will mean a greater reliance in future on imports of bioethanol and soya bean meal, as a substitute for the high-protein co-product DDGS—distiller’s dried grain with solubles—animal feed, which is a by-product of the bioethanol process. Before its closure, Vivergo was the country’s largest single production site for animal feed. It delivered 500,000 tonnes of high-protein feed to more than 800 farms across the UK—enough for about 20% of the UK’s dairy herd. Incidentally, the fermentation process used at the Vivergo plant also made it the UK’s largest brewery.

Soya bean imports are already at about 1.8 million tonnes a year. The majority comes from non-EU countries, and therefore it is likely that it is from genetically modified crops. There will also be a negative impact on the domestic feed wheat market, as a valuable floor for farmers across the UK, which also enables a premium price in the north-east, will be removed. If Vivergo and Ensus were in full operation with mandatory E10, we would have a comprehensive bioethanol industry underpinning UK environmental progress and agricultural sustainability.

Without a British bioethanol industry, the UK will likely become increasingly reliant on imported bioethanol and bioethanol equivalents, predominantly using cooking oil, which is itself shipped many thousands of miles to the UK from China and the US. By contrast, Vivergo sourced its wheat an average of 34 miles from its plant in Hull, which supported sustainability by minimising transportation. The fact that more and more countries



are starting to use their own wastes locally calls into question the long-term strategy of being very reliant on imported waste materials from across the planet to meet our decarbonising challenge. A greater reliance on imports will not just represent a missed economic opportunity.

Having addressed some of the clear economic and environmental benefits of introducing E10, I would like to reflect on where the UK sits in comparison with the rest of the world. E10 is already widely available across continental Europe, including in France, Germany, Belgium and Finland, and further afield in the USA, Australia, New Zealand and Brazil. In a real sense, the UK is lagging behind the rest of the world when it comes to the use of bioethanol-blended fuel. In some countries, including the USA and Brazil, much higher versions are available, including blends of up to 85%—E85—so the steps we are asking the Department to take are in no way radical or untested.

At a time of increasingly uncertain international trading circumstances, and in the context of leaving the European Union, E10 increases domestic supply for feed and fuel while lessening Britain's reliance on foreign markets for both. The introduction of E10 would bring certainty to British businesses, investors and arable and dairy farmers, while supporting economic growth and securing thousands of existing high-skill, high-STEM jobs, and the creation of many hundreds more. Further research could make Britain a world leader in even cleaner and greener bioethanol.

The sustainability concerns over E10 are now resolved, and the renewable transport fuel obligation has resumed its trajectory and has doubled this year. Bioethanol is the cheapest means of meeting the renewable transport fuel obligation, but its contribution is constrained due to the fact that the UK has not yet introduced E10. Although a transition from E5 to E10 is regarded as inevitable and environmentally desirable, it has not yet happened, and the industry has endured years of delay. The DFT's consultation process late last year did nothing to accelerate it and reassure the industry.

UK-produced bioethanol has excellent environmental credentials and makes an important contribution to the agricultural and food sectors. Without E10 in the British bioethanol industry, the UK will become even more reliant on imports of fuel, proteins and liquefied CO<sub>2</sub>, recent shortages of which, particularly during the World cup, have exposed the UK's precarious supply position.

British motorists should have the freedom to make greener choices at the petrol pump. Any remaining concerns at the Department can be resolved and addressed with relatively simple solutions—getting the most polluting cars off our roads can only be a good thing. Many other major developed countries around the world either have already implemented E10 or plan to, and its introduction in the UK has been widely anticipated since 2013.

I urge the Government to now support the sector and mandate the introduction of E10 as a matter of urgency. If not, there is a real risk that the environmental and economic benefits, along with the significant investment and associated jobs created by the UK's bioethanol industry, will be lost.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mike Gapes (in the Chair):** There is considerable interest in this debate. I hope that hon. Members will confine their remarks to approximately five minutes, so

that everybody can speak. I intend to call the Front-Bench spokespeople at 3.30 pm, to allow them the 10 minutes each that they are allotted. I call Emma Hardy.

2.51 pm

**Emma Hardy** (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): It is a real pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gapes; I hope that this is the first of many such occasions. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin) on securing the debate. Just before I came into the Chamber, I was talking to him and I said how tiring it is to feel constantly angry about things. I had just left the main Chamber, where people feel constantly angry. I do not want to get angry and frustrated, so I will settle for deep disappointment and upset instead.

This is significant. The Government's failure to fulfil their promise on E10 is not just an environmental issue, although that is crucial, and neither is it just an economic issue, although it has sacrificed so many high-quality jobs in my constituency. If the Government do not keep their promises to business, how can businesses ever trust them again? What faith can businesses have that we want them to come to my constituency, to invest there, and to provide those good-quality jobs in future? Businesses need to know that the Government can be trusted when they promise that they are going to do something. My contribution to the debate will focus on the wider significance, which is about more than whether to have E10; it is about whether we need a Government who fulfil their promises to business, especially in the uncertain years ahead.

Vivergo closed—it announced that it was closing on 2 August—because the Government did not introduce E10 as they had promised. Vivergo closed its headquarters, which were in my constituency, and consolidated all its staff in the Saltend Chemicals Park in the east of Hull. The Government passed the RTFO in 2018, but they have continued to drag their heels on the introduction of E10. Mark Chesworth, the managing director of Vivergo, said that the closure was the Government's fault, because the political indecision had a highly damaging impact on the business and its jobs, and left it vulnerable to changeable market conditions.

It is difficult to put across Vivergo's significance in my local area. The day that it announced its multi-million pound operation was one of fantastic good news for the area. We want skilled jobs in the constituency. People celebrated and nearly all the local MPs from across the party went there for the photo call and to congratulate the company on opening the plant—it was seen as a good news day. Vivergo contributed money towards Hull's bid to be city of culture, and to wider projects across the whole of Yorkshire. I am not just having a moan about something that affects my constituency; the Government need to understand that the closure's significance reaches far wider than just my constituency.

We in Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle know that we need jobs perhaps more than other areas of the country. Some 7.9% of our population are claiming jobseeker's allowance, which is more than double the UK average. A report by the Centre for Cities think-tank found that Hull has the lowest average wage in the country, at £376 a week. We want high-skilled and high-paid jobs such as those that Vivergo provided.

[Emma Hardy]

The wider impact hits beyond my constituency. As my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe said, the plant bought 1.1 million tonnes of feed wheat, sourced from around 900 farms across the Yorkshire region. In all the time that I have been active in the Labour party, this is the first time that farmers from the constituencies of Conservative MPs have been so desperate to meet me and tell me their problems, because they do not feel that the party with which they usually associate themselves is listening to them on this issue. Vivergo supported 3,000 jobs—directly and indirectly—and its contribution to the local economy was £600 million.

As a local MP, I want skilled jobs, which is why I have pushed so hard and talked about Vivergo for such a long time. On 30 November 2017 I wrote to the Secretary of State for Transport on the matter, seeking clarification on the renewable transport fuels obligation. On 15 February 2018 I received a reply from the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Hereford and South Herefordshire (Jesse Norman), which committed to introducing the relevant changes in April 2018. I asked four questions about biofuels and the renewable transport fuels obligation on 8 December 2017. I asked two questions about excise duties and the way biofuels are taxed on 5 December 2017. I met Vivergo in Hull and in London on a number of occasions. The issue is not new to the Government; they cannot claim not to be fully aware of it.

**Martin Vickers** (Cleethorpes) (Con): I share the hon. Lady's passion about this issue. She referred to questions she asked back in 2017. I think that the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin) and I have seen three or four successive Ministers about the matter. I say to the Minister that one thing that we want to get from the debate is a positive route to making a decision, rather than keeping farmers, Vivergo workers and others hanging on.

**Emma Hardy:** The hon. Gentleman makes an excellent contribution. I am fully aware of how long the campaign has been going on and of how long people have been talking about the issue.

The incompetence, the lack of commitment, energy and dedication, and the dereliction of duty—hon. Members can add their own adjectives to describe the Government—has not only cost families in my constituency their jobs and incomes; the damage goes much further. The Government's failure to fulfil their promise could damage future investment from other businesses in the area. It is therefore vital, for that reason and no other, that the Government keep their promise on E10 and take immediate action.

2.57 pm

**Dr Paul Williams** (Stockton South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship for the first time, Mr Gapes. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin) on securing this debate on an issue that affects my constituents and those of many hon. Members present.

As we have heard, the industry contributes £600 million to the UK economy every year. In response to targets on renewables announced by the Government over 10 years ago, over £1 billion was invested in the UK to create state-of-the-art bioethanol production facilities. Last year, the industry crumbled, and the UK's two largest

plants announced that they were either closing, in the case of Vivergo, or pausing production, in the case of Ensus, which has its headquarters in my constituency and its plant in Teesside.

I visited the plant shortly after I was elected as the Member of Parliament for Stockton South. Construction of the plant triggered about £60 million-worth of investments. Ensus is a job creator, and it also helps to support this country's goal of reducing greenhouse gases produced by cars and other vehicles. Over 100 skilled workers from Teesside work on the plant, and Ensus supports a further 2,000 north-east jobs in the supply chain, mostly in farming and agriculture. I visited one of the farms in my constituency—where there are not many farms—that supplies the industry. Two thousand jobs are at risk because of the Government's prevarication.

Ensus is a leading producer of bioethanol. We know that bioethanol is better for the environment and will reduce carbon emissions from transport. It is also well documented just how damaging such transport emissions are to air quality. The emissions damage people's health and the environment. Air pollution causes heart and lung disease, and in parts of our towns and cities it is making the air not just toxic but deadly. For anything else found to be a contributing factor to 40,000 early deaths in this country, Parliament would have thrown everything including the kitchen sink at it, to do everything possible to fix it. Bioethanol is not a silver bullet to improve air quality, but if the Government backed E10 now, that would go some way towards reducing emissions, which would improve our environment and air quality.

**Sir Oliver Heald:** Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the national message is important, and the Government should hear it? Environmental improvement requires green jobs to come through and green industry to be successful. The Government should encourage that and, in this particular case, to have E10 available in Britain is a no-brainer.

**Dr Williams:** I thank the right hon. and learned Gentleman for making that point more eloquently than me. It is difficult to understand what the barriers to the introduction of E10 might be. Environmental improvement needs to happen through a series of incremental steps—there is no silver bullet—but this one seems to be a win-win.

The owners of Ensus have pointed the finger for the mothballing of their plant in Teesside squarely at the "sluggish implementation of political objectives for reducing greenhouse gas emissions".

Three years ago, the Department for Transport recommended doubling the amount of ethanol in fuel; three years later, we are still waiting for action. That means that the investment is paused. A huge plant is lying dormant, with workers on stand-by. Without the introduction of E10, bioethanol demand cannot increase above its current level and therefore cannot contribute to further decarbonising petrol. As a result, the future of the Ensus plant remains in question.

I therefore ask the Minister to address in her response how, if there is no demand, the Government plan to replace the jobs that Ensus provides? How long will she let the UK lag behind the likes of Germany, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the USA, which already back E10? Is the Minister willing to do all that she can to improve air quality in this country, with E10 being one step towards that?

My constituents ask me to come down here to Westminster every week to vote for jobs in Teesside. I am also here to make the case for a fair deal for the north-east, to help boost investment in our region, and to support and protect the jobs of people on Teesside.

3.2 pm

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin) for securing the debate. He and I have a long friendship in this House: we both came here in 2010; we are both Leicester City football supporters—the last two matches have not been good for us, but we hope for better days, and we are still seventh in the league, which at the end of the day is not too bad—and, I am pleased to say, he raises many issues on which I fully and wholeheartedly support him, as I do on this occasion.

Over the years, many Members have endeavoured to pursue and promote this issue, including the hon. Gentleman. I thank them for those endeavours. We have a new Minister responsible for the subject in the Chamber, which I hope is a chance for a positive response. As other Members have done in their contributions and interventions, perhaps she will plot a way forward that can deliver what we have discussed.

I declare an interest as a member of the Ulster Farmers Union, a sister body of the National Farmers Union. I will make some short comments from the point of view of the farmers union. I am keen to see how we can all benefit from the promotion of the bioethanol industry sector across the whole of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, because if we all pursue the policy, we should all get the benefit.

E10 is a type of petrol that contains up to 10% bioethanol. At the moment, E5 is commonplace on UK forecourts, and it contains up to 5% renewable bioethanol. E10 and even higher grades of bioethanol blends are commonplace in other countries around the world, such as E25 in Brazil—Members might have seen correspondence on that in the papers recently.

E10 legislation would increase demand for UK-derived feed wheat through the increased production of bioethanol. That would decrease the surplus in exportable feed wheat and, in turn, increase the amount of the co-product DDGS, or distillers' dried grains with solubles, received by the livestock sector as high-protein, high-quality feed. At full capacity, the bioethanol industry in the UK would utilise about 2 million tonnes of feed wheat, with about 50% of that intake returned as DDGS. That provides the opportunity to create 1 million tonnes of UK-derived, high-protein animal feed while offering more protection to arable and livestock farmers from the perils of global commodity markets.

When we look at the intricate detail of the proposition, there is a real possibility of deriving benefit in many sectors, and in many ways, from the development of bioethanol. It seems to me that it needs serious consideration. We therefore look to the Minister for a wholesome and full response.

I was heartened by the work of my local council and its recycling endeavours. As an easy-to-grasp illustration of what it had done, for example, it equated its work on increasing recycling and lessening waste to the number of cars taken off the road—it put it in simple language. The UK-wide introduction of E10 would be the equivalent

of removing 700,000 cars from the roads, or 3 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>. The information provided to me states that the roll-out of E10 would be the fastest and most effective way for the UK to reach its climate change targets, especially as E10 can be used in hybrid electric cars.

Successive Governments have encouraged people to purchase diesel vehicles, and now they tell them not to, so perhaps we have here a method of addressing that. I emphasise to the Minister and other hon. Members taking part in the debate that we need to spread the job opportunities that could come off the back of this industry across the whole of the United Kingdom. We need to encourage the farming sector, too, which has a key role to play. Will the Minister tell us what incentives, strategies or plans are in place to encourage farmers to look more at the bioethanol industry?

Ethanol reduces greenhouse gases emissions by up to 90% compared with conventional fossil fuels. Indeed, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change called for a threefold increase in the use of biofuels in transport by 2030. That briefing went on to note that, at the COP24 summit, renewable ethanol was reported to be the largest contributor to progress in the transport sector, but I believe more can be done.

To conclude, I agree with the hon. Member for Scunthorpe. More needs to be done to understand how best to better use resources to live up to the environmental pledge that we have made, and how to make better use of those resources to benefit us all. It is all about benefiting us all, as well as climate change and addressing those issues. We should be pushing forward with great urgency. I thank the hon. Gentleman again for bringing this issue to the Floor of the House. The debate is much needed and much appreciated, and I look to the Minister to ascertain whether the matter will be acted on in the way that those in the debate wish it to be.

3.8 pm

**Alex Cunningham** (Stockton North) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gapes. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin) on securing the debate, and it is lovely to be in the Chamber to see three Labour Teesside MPs, as well as other Labour colleagues, leading the charge for farmers and of course jobs.

We have already heard that the bioethanol industry is worth about £1.5 billion to the UK economy annually and supports 6,000 jobs, including apprentices and graduate programmes. However, the industry has been hit by job losses. I will highlight briefly that measures can be taken—the Minister has already heard what they are—to protect jobs and to help growth in the industry, creating future jobs and helping my constituency.

I am sure fellow Members are aware of the thousands of jobs that have been lost around the country by the recent closure of Vivergo and the cuts at Ensus. Northern towns have been hit hardest by the closures, including my area. However, bioethanol is used in making E10 petrol, and legislating for the mandatory introduction of E10 would create jobs. It would also put stability into some of our communities where energy companies are based and be hugely beneficial for the environment. Indeed, many of my constituents have contacted me. Bioethanol is the last thing I expected my constituents to contact me about, but many of them did and they asked me to speak on their behalf today.



**Nic Dakin:** It was a nice change.

**Alex Cunningham:** It was indeed—better than Brexit.

As we have already heard, legislating for E10 would bring us into line with other European countries, including Germany, France, Belgium and the Netherlands, and other countries much further afield such as Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Others have talked about the advantages of E10, which are numerous and clear and have been outlined very well by my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe. I will reiterate some of the things he said.

Transport is the biggest offender when it comes to greenhouse gas emissions, contributing 28% of the UK's total, but that figure can easily be reduced. With regards to emissions, in 2013, the use of biofuels was equivalent to taking hundreds of thousands of cars—some say as many as 1.35 million—off the road, and it is predicted that many more could come off the road as well.

E10 produces fewer carcinogens, lower particulate matter and fewer nitrogen oxides, and helps to improve air quality. The public health benefits are massive. All those things have a direct impact on my constituency, where there are seven farms. When people think of my constituency, they see industry and pipes and things, but it is quite rural and seven of my farms—I do not own them personally—sold their wheat to the Vivergo plant, which produced bioethanol, but has closed. The farmers were paid a £10 a tonne premium compared with what they would have got on the export market, so many of my constituents are losing money from the industry's decline. They have to find new markets abroad, which are generally less stable for them because of currency fluctuations—we have had plenty of them of late—demand, and even Brexit.

The Navigator Seal Sands storage facility, where Ensus stores and redelivers its ethanol, is also in Stockton North, as are Intertek Cargo and analytical assessment branches that provide services to Ensus. In the neighbouring constituency of Middlesbrough, Stockton North employees are employed by a logistics organisation, AV Dawson, which provides supply chain services for the industry. So the people I represent have quite a stake in any decision by the Government to move to E10 and allow that industry to be redeveloped, with a tremendously positive impact on jobs and farmers' income.

Mandating the use of E10, as we have already been told, would help us fulfil our commitment to the Climate Change Act 2008, in which the UK led the way in a legally binding 2050 target to reduce emissions by at least 80%. Furthermore, the EU renewable energy directive set a target for the UK to produce 15% of its energy from renewable sources by 2020.

The Government launched a consultation on E10 last summer and evidence was submitted on whether and how to best introduce E10 petrol. However, the consultation ended four months ago and still the Government have not stated whether they will support it. The perception is that the Government have been dragging their feet on this issue. For me, implementation of E10 is a no-brainer, as it is for others. Support for fuel with a higher bioethanol content is widespread, from farmers and car manufacturers to environmental campaigners and motorists. It is a puzzle to me why the Government have not made it mandatory at UK pumps before now.

The National Farmers Union also supports the call for E10 as it provides vital opportunities for thousands of farmers, including the seven in my constituency. Without the bioethanol industry, farmers who sell crops for bioethanol production would be forced to export their crops and they would lose, as I said earlier, £10 a tonne if they did that. There are plenty of reasons for the Government to stop dragging their feet and make a positive decision to benefit people in my constituency and further afield, and hundreds of jobs could be created in my constituency.

3.14 pm

**Anna Turley (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op):** It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gapes. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin) not only for securing this important debate, but for all his work over many years in championing the bioethanol industry in a cross-party manner.

My constituency of Redcar is home to the Ensus bioethanol refinery, which produces fuel-grade alcohol, animal feed, and carbon dioxide for the beer and fizzy drinks industry. In November, production was paused at the facility for the fourth time since 2011 owing to difficult market conditions. I stand here today to speak up for the employees of Ensus whose jobs now hang in the balance, unsure whether the pause is another temporary blip or a death knell for their industry. One hundred Ensus workers are waiting to hear whether they have a future in an industry that has a huge role to play in this country's transition to a greener, more sustainable economy. The plant also supports around 2,000 jobs in the supply chain across the north of England, so many people are worried about what the future holds. I sincerely hope the Minister will be able to give them some reassurance.

The Government play an important role in shaping the direction of travel for growth industries as part of the industrial strategies that we hear so much about, but it is clear that the present difficulties that the sites face have come about because Whitehall has said one thing, but done another. It has been especially equivocal in supporting the greater use of bioethanol in fuels, which is the cause of many of the industry's problems today. The dithering must stop and this next-generation industry must be supported to be the British—indeed, the Teesside—success story that it has the potential to be.

More than 10 years ago, the Government introduced targets to increase renewables, sending a signal to the bioethanol industry that it was time to invest in the capacity needed to deliver on those targets. Since then, more than £1 billion has been invested in state-of-the-art facilities by bioethanol companies. In 2015, when the Department for Transport's taskforce recommended increasing fuel blend levels to 10%, a further signal was sent to the industry that the Government were fully behind the industry and many in the sector prepared for the future. However, more than three years later, the consultation has only just concluded and we are no further forward. Now the UK's two largest plants, Ensus in my constituency and Vivergo in Hull—I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Emma Hardy), whose excellent speech was full of passion and a commitment to fight for her constituents' jobs—have announced they will either close or pause production, demonstrating how fragile the situation is. Jobs in the bioethanol industry and the closely connected agricultural sector

hang in the balance. Under this Government, my constituency has already been forced to handle many industrial job losses—more than 3,000 when our steelworks closed—and I do not want to see another industry close its doors for good.

Some of the questions that we need to hear the Minister answer today—I remind her that employees are watching and listening closely—include how she plans to reverse the industry's decline in 2019 and give it the support it needs. Will she commit to giving British bioethanol a future, or will the UK source it from abroad when domestic capacity is lost? As we have already heard today, there are wider implications for other renewable energy producers. Why would investors trust the Government's word and put hundreds of millions of pounds into projects that we desperately need in this country, when, given the experience of the bioethanol project, they might later prove out of fashion with this Government? Certainty and stability is vital for business, and the sector is clear that that has to mean making E10 mandatory for fuel suppliers. Anything less will not provide sufficient confidence that the demand for E10 is there, and the facilities will close for good.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Phil Wilson) mentioned, there is a concern for the agricultural sector, too, which produces the feed wheat for the industry and consumes the high protein animal feed co-produced by it. The two industries work hand in hand, serving as a stable and reliable co-dependent supply chain. We are not talking about backing E10 for the sake of the producers. We know there is a strong environmental case for introducing E10, reducing carbon emissions equivalent to the removal of 700,000 cars from Britain's roads, and improving air quality by lowering carcinogens, particulate matter, hydrocarbons, and oxides of nitrogen. Given that transport is now the UK's most polluting sector, accounting for 28% of the UK's greenhouse gas emissions, we will not meet our climate change targets without getting to grips with the problem.

Since 2016, E10 has been the optimal reference fuel for all new cars, meaning some 3 million new vehicles are now ready to use it, and more than 95% of cars—those built since 2000—are warrantied for the use of E10, so there can be no concerns that our nation's vehicles cannot cope with this blend.

This debate is extremely important today because we need the Government to recognise how vulnerable this British industry is, and we need urgent action on E10. I wrote to the Transport Secretary in October to ask for greater urgency in supporting E10. I have also asked many questions in Parliament, as have other colleagues here today, yet here we are with another consultation while jobs in the industry look more vulnerable by the day. Ensus employees in my constituency and people working across the industry and in the supply chain are waiting for reassurance that urgent action from the Government will be forthcoming. I hope to hear that from the Minister today.

3.19 pm

**Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gapes. I too congratulate the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin) on bringing forward the debate, as well as on his work as chair of the all-party parliamentary group on British bioethanol. He has campaigned on the issue for a long time, and I commend him for that work.

The debate is clearly important for many hon. Members, given today's turnout and considering everything else that is going on. There is a big debate on the motion of no confidence in the UK Government, yet six Members have intervened and there have been five Back-Bench speeches. That is testament to the importance of the subject and the Minister needs to take heed of that. I note that the six Members who intervened have not hung around to hear the Front-Bench speeches—perhaps I am not a draw in this debate—but they got their points on the record.

The hon. Member for Scunthorpe highlighted the critical state of the industry—the partial collapse that has already happened, the job losses to date, and the fact that it is four years since the Government seemed to be going down the route of making E10 mandatory. Obviously, real frustrations come with that situation. He made an excellent opening speech and raised the key issues. In discussing concerns about the effect on cars, he highlighted the fact that only 5% of cars now on the road are likely to have issues with E10, and confirmed that E5 would not have to be phased out but could remain as a fuel for classic cars. I like the suggestion that tax measures could be used to offset costs for people who might be affected. Considering how we treat classic cars for tax purposes at present, that seems a reasonable suggestion.

As always, we heard from the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon). All the other Members who spoke concentrated on direct jobs, but he focused on farming and the benefits to be gained for all. I do not think anyone could argue with that philosophy. The hon. Members for Stockton South (Dr Williams), for Stockton North (Alex Cunningham) and for Redcar (Anna Turley)—it is not the first time I have seen the Teesside Collective in action—rightly spoke about jobs in their constituencies, how important the financial hit taken by those constituencies is, and what it means for the wider UK economy. The hon. Member for Redcar mentioned that the area has suffered other job losses, and that it cannot afford to continue to suffer such losses. That is something else that the Minister needs to consider.

**Alex Cunningham:** The way we understand the Teesside Collective—besides as my colleagues and myself—is as the organisation that has led the way on carbon capture and storage on Teesside. Of course we are hopeful that there will be an amazing plant there. Will the hon. Gentleman join me in commending the collective for the work it has done to secure the plant for Teesside?

**Alan Brown:** I am more than happy to commend it for that. It is important work on an important environmental issue. When we think about it, that is what we are considering—environmental improvements with E10. Carbon capture and storage would certainly do likewise, and I hope that the work will reach its conclusion.

I am a member of the all-party British bioethanol group and have signed the pledge on E10. I urge any hon. Members who have not yet signed it to do so, and to show cross-party support. The hon. Member for Scunthorpe, talking about the future of the bioethanol industry, highlighted the critical stage that things have reached. We have heard about the job losses to date. Government action is required. It could be argued that there is an issue of vested business interests when the

[Alan Brown]

bioethanol industry campaigns for mandatory E10. However, as other hon. Members have pointed out, there are clear merits in the E10 proposals, so it makes no sense that the UK Government have been dragging their heels. I hope that the Minister will tell us today why they have done that so far, and what they will do to move things forward positively. She has listened to the speeches, but have she or the Government estimated how many jobs are at stake? How many could be created if Ensus were to get back up and running, and what would the long-term future be with respect to developing mandatory E10?

Transport accounts for approximately a quarter of energy demand, but it lags behind other energy sectors in carbon reduction measures. The bioethanol industry estimates that the introduction of E10 would deliver something equivalent to taking 700,000 cars off the roads, although, interestingly, the hon. Member for Stockton North gave an upper estimate of 1.35 million cars. Have the UK Government done any analysis of what introducing E10 would equate to, in relation to carbon reduction measures?

The hon. Member for Stockton North highlighted the fact that bioethanol blended with petrol reduces carcinogens and particulate matter and can reduce nitrogen oxide emissions, and commented on what that means for air quality. As a doctor, the hon. Member for Stockton South highlighted the medical issues associated with air quality, and we now know that 40,000 premature deaths a year arise from air quality issues. The UK Government have lost in the High Court three times in proceedings about their air quality plan, so what consideration have they given to the air quality benefits and the long-term impact on health of the mandatory introduction of E10?

Has the Minister considered the benefits of E10 that other countries have assessed? It accounts for 95% of petrol sales in the US and is the biggest selling petrol fuel in France, Belgium, Australia and Canada, among others, so it is commonplace in all the other developed countries. Why is the UK lagging behind? Cars are now designed to run on E10, so new cars running on E5 are running inefficiently. Why would we want that? It means greater fuel use and greater emissions. Let us get E10 and make today's cars more efficient.

The Government may see electric vehicles as a decarbonisation silver bullet but, given that average sales of those vehicles still hover around the 1% bracket, we are a long way from the critical mass of electrical vehicle use that would make a huge difference to carbon reduction. If the Government will not invest enough to get electric vehicle uptake to that critical mass, they need to consider such transitional decarbonisation measures as mandatory E10 and liquefied petroleum gas.

One welcome UK Government measure is the staged increase in the renewable transport fuel obligation from 4.75% to 8.5%, from this month. It is therefore counterintuitive for them not to introduce E10 as a mandatory measure. I would like the Minister to comment on what seems to be disjointed thinking, and what the Department for Transport will do to rectify it.

Hon. Members have talked about the importance of E10 for jobs, air quality and the environment. Why would we want to rely on imports of biofuels in the

future, when we could have a fantastic industry in the UK? I make the same plea that everyone else has made, to bring forward E10 as a mandatory measure.

3.28 pm

**Matt Rodda** (Reading East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gapes. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin) for securing this important debate on an issue that he is committed to. He is a great champion of the biofuel industry.

As we have heard, the bioethanol industry contributes £600 million to the UK economy every year. Over the past 10 years there has been an investment of over £1 billion in bioethanol production facilities. When it comes to greenhouse gas emissions, transport is clearly the biggest offender, contributing 28% of the UK total, as well as contributing to air pollution, as we have heard. I am sure that we all agree that is a serious public health issue. Under the Government's current plans we are not on course to meet our existing climate change targets under the Climate Change Act 2008. Indeed, last January the Committee on Climate Change warned the Government that their clean growth strategy does not go far enough and that urgent action is needed to meet our legally binding carbon reduction goals in the 2020s and by 2030. In June last year the CCC again warned the Government that we will not meet our targets unless they bring forward new policies such as the introduction of E10.

We know that bioethanol fuel is good for the environment, and that introducing E10 would be equivalent to taking 700,000 cars off the road. E10 petrol is already available in many western countries, such as France, Germany and Finland, and colleagues have also mentioned New Zealand, Australia and the United States. According to the Renewable Energy Association, the introduction of E10 in the UK would be equivalent to replacing 2 million petrol cars with fully electric vehicles. Does the Minister agree that the failure to mandate E10 will make achieving Government targets to source more of the UK's energy needs from renewable sources more challenging?

Labour supports the growth and development of our renewables industry in order to support high-skill and high-wage jobs across the UK, particularly in the north of England, where colleagues have eloquently highlighted two major areas. The Government's failure to support the UK bioethanol industry has led to the loss of around 1,000 skilled jobs. In September, Vivergo Fuels, which is the largest bioethanol producer in the UK, announced that it was ceasing production and mothballing the plant based in east Yorkshire, which employed 150 people directly and indirectly supported 3,000 jobs. Here I will make a local plug because I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull East (Karl Turner)—he wanted to attend this debate but could not due to another commitment—raised that point with the Minister at the time. Vivergo was an official northern powerhouse partner, which perhaps tells us something about the Government's commitment, or lack of it, to the north of England.

One factor leading to the closure of that plant was the Government dithering and delaying their decisions. Does the Minister have a plan for replacing those lost jobs? Does she think that the collapse of the bioethanol industry last year will deter investors from investing in



the renewable energy sector? The industry has been calling on the Government to make E10 mandatory at UK pumps. The Government have said that they would like a market-led solution, but petrol companies have pointed out that without a mandate from the Government such a solution cannot be introduced.

The Government also recently closed a call for evidence, which probably means that we are at least another year away from any introduction of E10. I do not believe that the call for evidence will tell the Government anything they do not already know. Will the Minister say when the response to the DFT consultation that closed in September will finally be published? The Government's lack of leadership and action has led to job losses and the collapse of a key industry. How does the Minister plan to reverse that collapse? Will she now listen to the industry and mandate E10? I look forward to hearing her response.

3.32 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Ms Nusrat Ghani):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gapes, and I must get it out into the open that I am not the Minister responsible for roads, and neither have I been promoted to that position. Unfortunately, the Minister of State, Department for Transport, (Jesse Norman) is taking part in a debate on a statutory instrument, and I am doing my best to step in. I know it was a bit of a disappointment to one of our colleagues to find that I am not a he but a she.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin) on securing this debate. Low-carbon fuels such as bioethanol play, and will continue to play, an important role in meeting the UK's carbon budgets. During this debate, and in parliamentary questions, Members with constituencies in and around Hull and Teesside have made clear the wider economic benefits of UK bioethanol production, and the environmental benefits of deploying bioethanol as a transport fuel. Some may consider that to be a niche matter, but the contributions we have heard today show that it is a nationwide issue.

I had not realised that there was a Teesside collective, but now I see how powerful that force is. I thank the hon. Members for Stockton North (Alex Cunningham), for Sedgfield (Phil Wilson), for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Emma Hardy) and for Redcar (Anna Turley), and my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers) for their passionate contributions and representations on behalf of the bioethanol industry and their constituencies. I believe that I will cover many of the issues that they raised, but if I do not address them all, the Minister of State will no doubt respond in writing.

The Government understand the potential benefits of the bioethanol sector, and we stressed the benefits of E10 when advancing draft legislation last year—legislation that doubled targets for the supply of renewable fuel between 2018 and 2020. That provided space for a roll-out of E10 should suppliers choose to deploy it. Concerns about not having a clear legal mandate for E10 are well understood by the Department. In September last year, we concluded a call for evidence on whether and how E10 might be introduced in the UK, and if introduced, how it could be done in a way that addresses the concerns of retailers, fuel suppliers and motorists.

The Department has now analysed the responses to that consultation and hopes to publish the Government's response soon. We are continuing to work with the bioethanol industry. Indeed, I understand that the Minister of State hopes soon to meet the hon. Member for Scunthorpe and representatives from the bioethanol industry, and I believe that a date for that has been set in the diary.

**Dr Paul Williams:** The Minister said that the Government hope to publish a response to the consultation soon, but that is not particularly helpful for people working in the industry who have a mothballed plant and are waiting for a Government decision on the future of their industry. Is there any possibility of the Minister being a little more specific about what "soon" might mean?

**Ms Ghani:** The hon. Gentleman spoke passionately about the Ensus plant in Wilton in his constituency. I cannot make that commitment here and now, but a meeting is due to take place—it is in the diary—and there will be further clarification after that. As has been said, that meeting will be open to all those who wish to attend. I cannot give that confirmation right now, but we are committed to working with the sector to ensure that the plants are open and running as soon as they can be.

Plant closures were discussed throughout the debate. The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle made a very passionate contribution, but I must take her up on one point. I know that she wants this debate to be as respectful as possible, because we do not want to reflect what is happening in the main Chamber on all occasions. She mentioned a Government promise, but I would argue that it was never a promise—we must be clear if something is a Government intention and how that should be perceived, as it is very different from the word "promise". We must ensure that we are honest in our contributions.

**Emma Hardy:** The words I was using were those of the industry, so if the Minister has an issue with a promise being made by the Government, perhaps she should take that up with the industries involved. There is no way that any industry would invest many millions of pounds on a mere suggestion that the Government might be interested in it in future, and if they had not been led to believe that it was indeed a Government promise.

**Ms Ghani:** An interpretation of how a Government may respond and a promise are two very different things. The Department is working closely with the sector and will do what it can to support it. We must ensure that we understand the difference between what is and is not a promise.

We heard passionate contributions about the bioethanol sector and businesses in Members' constituencies, and the halting of bioethanol production at Vivergo Fuels and Ensus plants last year is saddening and regrettable for all those impacted. I understand the frustration of those calling on the Government to act quickly to mandate the introduction of E10.

**Dr Paul Williams:** Does the Minister accept that the sole reason for the closure of the Vivergo plant and the halting of production at Ensus was the Government's procrastination?

**Ms Ghani:** That is an interesting way of responding to how the business environment is dealing with global issues beyond what the Government may or may not have intended to do, so I do not accept that point.

It is clear that UK producers of bioethanol from wheat have faced challenging market conditions, due in part to high wheat prices following a hot summer, and a low bioethanol price—that may in some way answer the hon. Gentleman's question. However, it is by no means clear that an E10 mandate would address all the challenges that the UK bioethanol industry has faced. It is also clear that the introduction of E10 is not without barriers, including the need to take into account the concerns of a significant number of owners of vehicles that are not compatible with E10—that point was raised earlier in the debate. To be successful, it is vital that any introduction of E10 is backed by fuel suppliers and consumers alike.

Since its inception, the policy on biofuels in the UK has been complex and not without controversy. Immediately after the renewable transport fuel obligation scheme—RTFO—was set in law in 2007, the Gallagher review into the indirect effects of biofuel production was published. It became clear that to maintain faith in the emissions reductions achieved and to retain consumer buy-in, we would have to address the negative indirect effects of certain biofuels. To reward fuels that may perform worse than the fossil fuels they replace would have undermined the rationale of a scheme designed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

It was with those challenges in mind that the Department jointly established a transport energy taskforce with the Low Carbon Vehicle Partnership, to consider how biofuels can contribute to meeting our climate change commitments in the context of measures introduced to address the negative indirect impacts of some biofuels.

**Alex Cunningham:** The Minister said a few minutes ago that some cars might not be compatible with E10 or even E5. Of course that is the case, but there are always alternatives at the petrol stations pump: diesel, fuel with bioethanol included or ordinary unleaded petrol. I cannot see that as the barrier that she described.

**Ms Ghani:** I do not think I described it as a barrier but a challenge. We must understand needs and impacts on consumers, which is why we should not rush, but ensure that what we do has a positive impact on all people.

**Sir Greg Knight:** I think the point made by the hon. Member for Stockton North is a good one: a choice of fuels available at the pumps needs to remain, and those fuels need to be properly labelled so that owners of cars not compatible with E10 are made aware.

**Ms Ghani:** My right hon. Friend makes a very valid point about choice; there should be choice also in the cost of refuelling cars and appropriate labelling, too.

**Nic Dakin:** The changes to labelling that must take place would be an ideal opportunity to introduce E10. It would get the public information out at the same time the Government do what they need to do anyway.

**Ms Ghani:** Indeed; that is why the consultation took place. As the hon. Gentleman knows, he can take up those issues further with the Minister of State, which is why we need to ensure that when we respond, we take into account all the issues raised in this debate.

The taskforce report to Government noted not only the potential benefits of E10 in helping the UK to meet our renewable energy targets, but the barriers and risks associated with its introduction, not least in respect of ensuring consumer acceptance. It is clear that UK suppliers, including of bioethanol, have made great progress in ensuring that renewable fuel delivers reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.

Since the RTFO was introduced in 2008, savings in greenhouse gas emissions have increased significantly from 46% to 70% in 2014-15. Latest data suggest that current biofuels provide an average 71% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions even when land use change impacts are included, but it has always been essential to evolve the policy on biofuel. That way, we maintain the integrity of the schemes that promote its use, such as the RTFO.

Following the work of the taskforce and building on the success of the RTFO, in September 2017, the Government set out a 15-year strategy for renewable transport fuels. The strategy established an investment platform to develop sustainable advanced fuels for automotive, aviation and road freight. I am proud to say that, as part of our strategy for renewable fuels, in March 2018, regulations were agreed that make the UK the first to set targets for renewables in transport beyond 2020, all the way to 2032; and the first and only country to set development fuel targets to drive a market for advanced low carbon fuels. For the first time, we have made aviation fuels eligible for reward under the RTFO. Our 15-year strategy for renewable transport fuels is designed to maximise the industrial opportunities to be gained for the UK while maintaining public confidence in the value of renewable fuels.

The hon. Member for Scunthorpe has previously shown support for increased biofuel supply targets in the 2018 regulations. He has also been clear in calling for a mandated introduction of E10. As I said, I am not in a position here and now to update colleagues on when we will publish a response to last year's consultation on whether and how to introduce E10, but E10 is our main focus in the biofuels policy area. We are working hard to publish the Government response as soon as possible.

**Dr Paul Williams:** I understand that the Minister is not in a position today to tell us when the response will be published, but if I were the owner of a mothballed plant, probably trying to persuade my bank and investors, I would need some kind of certainty. Would the Minister pledge to write to us in the next week to give us a date on which the consultation response will be published, just to help the businesses that need certainty to make future decisions?

**Ms Ghani:** The hon. Gentleman once again champions the employers in his constituency very well. As I said, I do not believe that the time it has taken to ensure we make the right decision on E10 via the consultation is the only reason those businesses are in a challenging position. As I mentioned, a meeting is due to take place; that meeting will be the best time and place for a letter to be forwarded. The hon. Gentleman will be in the best place to challenge the Minister of State and get the responses he needs.

**Nic Dakin:** Do the Government see the British bioethanol industry as an important industry to the UK? If time continues to disappear, the industry will disappear and we will have to rely on imports.

**Ms Ghani:** Indeed, and I apologise if I have given any other interpretation. Without wanting to give a promise, we see this sector as very important to what we are trying to achieve.

**Anna Turley:** I am deeply frustrated that the consultation closed such a substantially long time ago. Can the Minister identify the barriers in the civil service and the ministerial process to getting a decision? In the light of today's debate, was there not some kind of briefing, impetus or a rocket put under this urgent issue? Will the Minister confirm that, following this debate, a rocket is under it?

**Ms Ghani:** The Teesside massive, as I will call them, have no doubt put this issue back firmly on the Minister's agenda, although no doubt it was already there. We always want to ensure that any consultation we undertake provides a good response to all involved—not just the sector providing the fuel but those putting the infrastructure in place and owners of classic or older cars.

There was mention of the impact on international roll-out. I was reflecting that the roll-outs in Europe have been quite mixed: in some places, they have done well and in others they have not fared as well as one might have assumed. We have to ensure that we get this right. I am hearing, and no doubt the Department is too, frustration at getting a response. That is why a meeting was agreed.

**Emma Hardy:** I am sure the Minister understands how frustrated everyone feels, including businesses. To go back to the central point of my speech, does the Minister not acknowledge that trust in the Government will be undermined, potentially undermining investment in areas such as ours, where it is desperately needed?

**Ms Ghani:** When Government make rash decisions that are not fully thought through, when a sector is involved, that further undermines trust in Government. That is why it is our responsibility to ensure that we get the right decision. Unfortunately, on occasion, that can take time. The hon. Lady's frustration has no doubt been noted. It is absolutely right that if and when we roll out E10, we do so in a successful way, not least for EU bioethanol suppliers.

Given the barriers to introduction, it is right that we have taken time to learn from the experiences, good and bad, of the roll-out of E10 in other countries. If a decision were taken to mandate E10 further to last year's call for evidence, we would also need to test the costs and benefits against firm proposals, ensuring that all those with an interest, including fuel retailers and motorists in particular, have an opportunity to submit evidence. If E10 is rolled out in future, the Government remain committed to ensuring that E5 remains available and that any introduction of E10 is well managed, with information on compatibility made available to vehicle owners.

**Anna Turley:** I appreciate the Minister giving way—she is being extremely generous with her time. I want to pick up the point about costs. We know that the cost of

ethanol is lower than oil; unfortunately, bioethanol is currently more highly taxed than petrol, which makes E10 fuels about 1p more expensive—about £20 per year for the average motorist. Tax incentives are extremely important to incentivise behaviour. Are the Government looking at tax incentives to encourage the roll-out?

**Ms Ghani:** The Government will be looking at all issues to ensure that, if a roll-out is suggested, it is an option favourable to those pulling into petrol stations. That is why it is interesting to learn what has happened in Europe. In France, I believe, the roll-out was more underwhelming than had been expected and in Germany it did not deliver the impacts that had been hoped, so it is important that we look at this closely.

**Dr Paul Williams:** Is the Government's view that they need to mandate the roll-out or that the industry should lead the roll-out itself, without a Government mandate?

**Ms Ghani:** The hon. Gentleman is trying to tease out a statement from me, when he knows that he has to wait for the consultation to get the response that he wants. I thank him for his tricky intervention, but he will have to wait for the consultation response to get the answer.

The Government agree that the aim must be to reduce emissions and that low carbon fuels must play a part. The regulations made last year introduced a greenhouse gas reduction obligation on suppliers and incentives for the development of fuels capable of delivering higher greenhouse gas emissions reductions. These allow us to reward low carbon fuels because of the emissions reductions they deliver. We have also made £20 million of match capital funding available under the future fuels for freight and flight competition. In the wider context, the Government have recently published two major strategies focused on combating climate change and improving the UK's air quality. Our Road to Zero strategy sets out a clear pathway to zero emissions vehicles by 2050, and this week we have published our clean air strategy. The pathway is not just about driver behaviour and electrification. Low-carbon fuels will continue to play a vital role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions from the vehicle fleet.

The renewable transport fuel obligation, as amended last year, is expected to save nearly 85 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> over the 15-year period from 2018, which represents around a third of transport's projected contribution to UK carbon budget savings during the 2020s. In achieving those savings there is an opportunity to increase the amount of bioethanol in petrol, from 5% today up to 10%.

**Alex Cunningham:** The Under-Secretary is doing a grand job stonewalling on behalf of the Minister of State. If there is one message that we would ask to be taken back, it is that we desperately need a date and we need that certainty. Will she commit to go to the Minister and say, "Look, these guys are going to bash your door down if you do not actually make a decision and make it soon"?

**Ms Ghani:** I believe that the door has already been bashed down, because a meeting is set in the diary.

**Anna Turley:** With the Teesside massive?



**Ms Ghani:** That meeting is in place with the Teesside massive, as I am referencing them now. I completely understand the frustration about not having a date, but we need to make sure that we get this absolutely right. A meeting is a place and that can be raised directly with the Minister.

It is not agreed that there is conclusive evidence to show that switching from E5 to E10 will have a significant impact on air quality but I would like to assure Members that, as with all policy on low-carbon fuels, we will continue to assess our policies and support against the ambitious targets we have set to improve air quality and reduce carbon emissions.

If we were to mandate E10, it could give suppliers an opportunity to meet those carbon budget targets in a more cost-effective way. That is why the Department has consistently made clear its desire to work with industry in considering an E10 roll-out. The Government are mindful that rolling out E10 is a huge change to the UK petrol market. If such a roll-out were not managed well, it could impact on motorists across the UK. It is important that we prioritise consumer acceptance and ensure the vehicle fleet, consumers and retailers are ready. As was raised throughout the debate, that is a big responsibility for Government to undertake. We need to make sure that everybody is ready and any decision we make is not rushed.

I would like to thank everyone who contributed to the debate for taking the time to further inform our thinking on E10. I must not forget the intervention made by the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon).

**Jim Shannon:** It was a speech, actually.

**Ms Ghani:** Forgive me. I know that the hon. Gentleman has spoken very positively about the bioponics of E10. The bioponics will be accounted for in our response to the consultation when it is published.

I thank everyone for contributing to the debate. The use of biofuels is and will remain a challenging policy area. However, this must never stop us from finding the right balance between maximising the contribution that low-carbon fuels can make to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and taking into account the interests of consumers.

3.54 pm

**Nic Dakin:** I thank all hon. Members who contributed to the debate. As the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown) pointed out, 11 Members contributed in speeches and interventions. I have underlined the importance of the industry for high-quality jobs, green jobs, farming, air quality and carbon reduction targets. It is a very important issue, which has been properly underlined.

I welcome the fact that in her conclusion the Minister said that she and the Government want to work with the industry to deliver an E10 roll-out, if that is what comes out of the consultation. I hope she heard my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Anna Turley), who asked her to take a rocket from the debate, so we can get a date and know what is happening. I look forward to meeting the Minister of State next week, with colleagues across the House and representatives of the British bioethanol industry. We will further the argument and hopefully get good responses from him, on behalf of the Government, so we can go forward effectively and make sure that the British bioethanol industry is one not only for now, but for the future, and will contribute significantly to what is happening.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered the future of the British bioethanol industry.

3.56 pm

*Sitting suspended.*

## Guildford Borough Council

[MR CLIVE BETTS *in the Chair*]

4 pm

**Sir Paul Beresford** (Mole Valley) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered Guildford Borough Council and its local plan.

I am delighted to have you here, Mr Betts—an expert in the very field we are discussing—and also the Minister. Some years back, I had the same sort of role that she has now, although I did not have the entourage behind me. I used to do debates such as this on my own; I think they were too embarrassed. I am very aware that the Minister cannot comment on the specific details of a local plan in her position, which is quasi-judicial. She must be broad and not specific in her replies. Given the time constraint, I intend to try to set the scene, but I will write to the Minister in the next few days with considerably more detail.

The Mole Valley constituency is not coterminous with Mole Valley District Council; the eastern wards of Guildford Borough Council are within my constituency. They are therefore covered by the Guildford council as regards planning, including the draft local plan. Local residents were consulted, as is standard for local authorities in developing their plan. The plan relating to some of the eastern wards involves massive—and I mean massive—loss of green-belt land. For many residents, the green belt was the basis of their desire to live in Mole Valley; it is what makes it attractive. Protests from individuals and groups, especially parish councils, was particularly vigorous, but it was also careful, constructive and thoughtful. In my opinion, the disregard for the views of those dissenters to the plan, and the manner of that disregard, during the progressive consultations by the council leadership was not good.

Of the land that makes up those wards, a significant majority is green belt or similar. Thanks to our robust planning rules, any development that takes place on that land cannot be of high density or particularly high rise. It is therefore only logical that, when Guildford Borough Council looks around for locations on which to develop, it should look first at brown-field sites, as it has done. It should look to offset increasing height and density with innovative design; the Minister and I know from our local government days that that is possible in some particularly difficult areas of inner London.

This Government, including, if I may say so, my hon. Friend the Minister, has made it clear that that should be the default approach to planning home development in local authority plans. Indeed, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, who incidentally is a resident in one of the wards in question, recently highlighted the importance of this approach to English local authorities more broadly, not just this one. With that in mind, I am here to highlight the fact that Guildford Borough Council has produced a draft local plan that puts a full 59% of the proposed new development on green-belt land. On top of that, the council has also brought forward deeply concerning proposals for placing a large quantity of industrial land in the little village of Send, on top of a large increase in homes on green-belt land.

The main town for the borough of Guildford is, unsurprisingly, Guildford town. It is an ancient town; the archaeological footprint goes back to Roman days. Clearly, it is a place that must be protected, and it is, but around Guildford town and beyond there are brown-field sites, places of little ecological or historical worth, that could be utilised to meet the borough's housing need. It is true that many of these sites appear in the local plan, but they are not being utilised in an innovative way that would best unlock their potential. I believe the council should look further at building higher and denser buildings, particularly around prime sites such as the railway stations, which would provide well-positioned, affordable homes to the younger generation of busy commuters in a busy commuter town.

**John Howell** (Henley) (Con): My hon. Friend may be aware that Guildford has run into difficulties with many villages over the production of neighbourhood plans. My intervention is just to tell him that I too am aware of that, in my role as Government champion for neighbourhood planning, and I am dealing with the problem.

**Sir Paul Beresford:** I thank my hon. Friend; I think Guildford council, with its behaviour and reputation, will keep him rather busy.

By definition, the surroundings of those villages cannot have a building of any significant height or density. The number of homes per acre of footprint must be low. I wish to concentrate on just two specific areas, the village of Send and the Wisley site, as examples of what this draft local plan would mean if implemented. Both feed on to the A3, which feeds to Guildford to the south, London to the north and the M25 via junction 10. The A3 is overloaded at peak times, and junction 10 is the worst junction on the M25 for delays, heavy traffic and accidents. In recognition of that, Highways England is proceeding through the rigmarole of extending and developing the junction. However, its work will merely enable the better management of the current traffic flow. I believe that Highways England has not factored in, or has not been able to factor in, the increase that would come from the developments proposed for Send and Wisley, and others. Neither Send nor Wisley has a railway station.

Those problems were a major factor in the rejection of the recent appeal to develop the Wisley site along the lines now suggested in the local plan. That rejection followed Guildford council's refusal of an application by the owners and developers of the Wisley site. There was an appeal where, after a lengthy—I think it was five weeks—inquiry by the inspector, who endorsed Guildford council's refusal, the decision was backed by the Secretary of State. The three main reasons for the Secretary of State's refusal were damage to the green belt, lack of infrastructure and traffic overload. It was a sensible decision all round. I even applaud Guildford council for refusing the application. I ask the Minister, then, to imagine the general amazement when Guildford council did an unabashed and blatant volte-face and shamelessly put the Wisley plan back into its local plan, in spite of everything it has done and in spite of what the inspector and the Secretary of State had said.

There has been a long history of refusals on the site, predominantly on the grounds that the site is green belt and that development would cause considerable difficulties

[*Sir Paul Beresford*]

on local roads as well as the A3. The majority of those local roads are winding and narrow and there is no realistic hope that they could ever sensibly be expanded. They generally have no lighting and mostly no pavements, and the nature of the roads is not conducive to cycling—although that does not deter the packs of cyclists who go up and down the roads, particularly at the weekends. The Wisley site, if developed, would result in an isolated island of properties, which would need a full range of infrastructure purpose-built at great cost to make the site even remotely viable. In other words, it would end up as an urban island damaging a rural area.

The promoters behind the Wisley adventure are numerous and the links that bind them together are nothing if not convoluted. There appears to be a Russian influence behind the proposers. We know that, for example, the leader of Guildford Borough Council took a trip, or trips, to Russia with a councillor from the Vale of the White Horse, who was working with the Wisley owners. I understand that the reason for the visit was to encourage Russian development in the UK and presumably in Guildford, with an emphasis on Wisley. I understand the interest, because if Wisley is developed the investors stand to benefit considerably—given the sums of money involved, it may be more accurate to say enormously—but, of course, that is not a planning issue.

I will now briefly turn to the village of Send, which, like Wisley, has no railway station and thus also feeds traffic on to the A3. The village has a single two-way central road, with a number of minor roads branching off. The village is surrounded by green-belt land, with development limited to infill opportunities. The village has about 1,660 properties and a population of about 4,000. It is a village, although if Guildford council has its way, that will change.

The local plan proposes to increase housing in Send by 40% as a starter, with four new slip roads on to the overloaded A3. Additionally, Guildford Borough Council will dump 40% of the borough's new industrial development on this little village. The overload is obvious.

I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for listening patiently as I outlined the threat these villages face. I hope she will now indulge me a little further as I gently remind her why the decision to build on green-belt land is so objectionable. Most obviously, it directly contradicts the Government's policy. The national planning policy framework makes it absolutely clear that permanence is the central feature of the green belt, and that development on it can be sanctioned only in genuinely exceptional circumstances. My hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Nick Boles), when he was Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, wrote to me confirming that local housing need does not meet the threshold to be considered exceptional.

For all the problems that the development of these sites will create, I am perhaps most concerned about what would be lost. It is widely accepted that only the presence of the green belt has prevented runaway urban sprawl from London and preserved the unique, rural nature of areas such as my constituency. Remember, both sites are right on the edge of the M25 and right on the edge of what we consider to be the spread of London. I therefore resist in the strongest terms any action that undermines the integrity of the green belt,

and I remind my hon. Friend the Minister that when that land is gone, it is gone forever, as she will know from our time working together in inner London.

In this context, the willingness of the Guildford Borough Council leadership to demolish so much green belt in these wards is deeply distressing to me and my constituents. It has been noted by some that both wards under threat are not currently represented by Conservative councillors, and have not been for some time. However, knowing the council leader as I do, I am quite sure that that was never a factor in his thinking. It is certainly not a planning issue.

At this stage of the inquiry into the local plan, my hon. Friend the Minister could make a number of moves, if she agrees with my concerns. She could call in all or parts of the plan, or she could direct modifications to it. At the very least, she could put the plan on hold while she and other experts look at the points that have been made.

In complex cases in my professional field it is routine to seek a second independent opinion. Perhaps the Minister could ask the inspector who sat for the five-week Wisley appeal and rejected the application if he could look at both these cases—particularly the Wisley application, because it is identical to that which he advised the Secretary of State to refuse.

4.12 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Mrs Heather Wheeler):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Betts. I draw Members' attention to my entry in the Register of Ministers' Financial Interests. Mr Betts, do you mind if I shuffle around a bit? Of course I should not have my back to the Chair, but I want to address my hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Sir Paul Beresford) directly.

I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate on local plans—particularly the draft Guildford local plan—and more specifically on the use and development of land within the green belt. I am grateful for the opportunity to speak on the subject and thank my hon. Friend for the interest he takes in housing, planning and green belt matters, and for bringing these important matters to the Government's attention. I am also grateful for the opportunity to debate with my predecessor, as a Minister in a former incarnation of my Department, and former leader on Wandsworth Council.

It may come as a disappointment to my hon. Friend that I cannot comment on the specific details of the emerging Guildford local plan, although he mentioned that he already knows that. The Secretary of State has appointed an independent planning inspector to examine the plan, and at some point the Secretary of State may be called upon to act formally in relation to the plan. It is therefore important that he is seen to be acting impartially and allowing due process to run its course in the interests of all parties and the integrity of the planning system as a whole. However, I hope that my hon. Friend will find my contribution at least helpful.

I will start by talking about the importance of local plans in the round. The planning system should be genuinely plan-led, with up-to-date plans providing a framework for addressing the social, economic and environmental priorities for an area, which of course



include housing need. Local plans are prepared in consultation with communities and play a key role in delivering needed development and infrastructure in the right places. Community participation is a vital part of accepting the development required to meet our housing needs.

Effectively engaging with communities throughout the process creates the best plans. Having an up-to-date plan in place is essential to planning for our housing requirements, providing clarity to communities and developers about where homes and supporting development should be built and where not, so that development is planned for, rather than the result of speculative planning applications. The Government are determined to build the homes our country needs and help more people get on the housing ladder. We are committed to delivering 300,000 homes a year by the mid-2020s through policies that aim to make better use of land and vacant buildings in order to provide the homes that communities need.

My hon. Friend raised a very good point about where it is appropriate to have higher density use—around railway stations or wherever. I am sure that point has been forcibly made to the planning inspector at those public meetings, and I am sure that, where appropriate, the planning inspector will take that on board.

**Sir Paul Beresford:** I understand that, during the presentation of the local plan, the inspector inquired as to why there was not enough of that sort of development.

**Mrs Wheeler:** I am always interested when planning inspectors ask nuanced, leading questions of local plans and answer them themselves at the same time. We await the planning inspector's comments with interest.

As my hon. Friend correctly stated, the Guildford local plan is currently under examination, with further hearings due to be held on 12 and 13 February. That will give two more opportunities for people already involved in existing issues to make further comments and for the public to attend and listen. The resumed hearings will focus specifically on the implications of the 2016 household projections for objectively assessed need and the plan's housing requirement. They will not be an opportunity to discuss matters already considered. Following the hearings, we expect the inspector's report and recommendations to be published later this year. I encourage my hon. Friend and his constituents to study the findings of the examination at that point.

I reassure my hon. Friend of the robustness of local plan examinations. During an examination, an independent inspector appointed by the Secretary of State will robustly examine whether the plan has been prepared in line with relevant legal requirements. That includes the duty to co-operate with neighbouring authorities and whether it meets the tests of soundness contained within the national planning policy framework, including the extensive consultation requirements for involving local communities.

The inspector, in examining the plan against the tests of soundness, will consider, among other things, whether the plan is based on a sound strategy. In examining these matters, the inspector will take account of the

evidence underpinning the plan, national planning policy and the views of all persons who made representations on the plan. I trust that reassures my hon. Friend that the examination of a plan is a thorough and robust process.

As the Guildford plan was submitted for examination before 24 January 2019, it will be examined against national planning policy set out in the 2012 national planning policy framework, including the rules on green belt development, which I will say a little bit more about later. The 2012 national planning policy framework maintains strong protections for the green belt and sets a very high bar for alterations to green-belt boundaries. It allows a local authority to use its local plan to secure necessary alterations to its green belt in "exceptional circumstances". The Government do not list the exceptional circumstances, as they could vary greatly across the country. Instead, it is for plan makers, and the planning inspector at examination, to check that any change is fully justified. Each local authority is expected to plan to meet local housing need, in full if possible, over the plan period. The local authority then has to consider where to find land to fulfil that need. Only if it does not have enough suitable land because of other constraints and circumstances can a local authority consider a green-belt boundary change. That is the national policy position relevant to Guildford's draft plan.

The revised national planning policy framework, published in July 2018, will apply to any plan submitted after 24 January 2019. In that framework, following consultation, we clarified the steps that a local authority needs to take to ensure that green-belt release is being proposed only in exceptional circumstances and is fully evidenced and justified. The new framework makes it clear that, in order for exceptional circumstances to exist, the local authority should be able to show that it has examined all other reasonable options for meeting its identified need for development. As I hope my hon. Friend will appreciate, there will therefore be more specific tests to demonstrate that exceptional circumstances exist. That will help examining inspectors to pick up on inadequate efforts to find land. It will still be up to inspectors to decide whether the level of evidence provided meets the exceptional circumstances test.

I again thank my hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley for raising these important issues. He is aware that the Secretary of State has powers to intervene formally in a plan until it is adopted by an authority. However, we consider it important that the plan is allowed to run its full course and be tested properly first, before such action is considered. I strongly encourage my hon. Friend and his constituents to study the findings of the examination carefully when the inspector issues the final report later this year. I genuinely do thank my hon. Friend for his great interest in this matter. The green belt is precious to us all, as is housing for our children.

*Question put and agreed to.*

4.22 pm

*Sitting suspended.*

## UN Climate Change Conference: Government Response

4.29 pm

**Anna McMorrin** (Cardiff North) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the UK Government response to the UN climate change conference 2018.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Betts. I thank all colleagues who are here for this important debate, particularly on a day such as this. I was disappointed that the Government felt it was not necessary to give an oral statement following their attendance at COP24. I am pleased that we have the opportunity today to debate and ask the Government the important questions about the action they are taking on climate change.

World leaders arrived at the UN climate talks in Katowice last month with a mandate to uphold the 2015 Paris agreement and respond with urgency to the climate crisis the world is facing. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report warned of the urgency of this crisis when it recently stated that we must act now to cut emissions in half and limit global warming to 1.5° within the next 12 years, or face catastrophic impacts of climate change.

Global temperatures have been rising for over a century, notably speeding up over the last few years, and are now the highest on record. We know that this causes negative impacts, such as melting of Arctic sea ice, rising sea levels, prolonged heatwaves and chaotic weather conditions. We know why. We release carbon dioxide into the atmosphere by burning fossil fuels for energy, farming, industry and transport, to name a few. These carbon emissions are causing the earth to warm faster.

**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi** (Slough) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for securing this important debate. According to the latest UN report, there will need to be a tripling of ambition globally to avoid more than 2° of warming, and a fivefold increase in ambition to avoid 1.5° of warming. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Minister should highlight what additional measures she is planning to ensure that the UK cuts its own emissions and, at the same time, what additional support the Government will give to developing countries around the world, so that they will meet their targets, too?

**Anna McMorrin**: Absolutely. I thank my hon. Friend for that important intervention. I am coming to his exact point. It is now more urgent than ever that we take action to cut greenhouse gas emissions.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Lady on bringing this debate to Westminster Hall. Hopefully, the Minister will respond to all the important issues that we are bringing forward. Does the hon. Lady agree that, with the UK on course to miss its carbon reduction targets and its legally binding target of 15% renewable energy by 2020, it is essential that the Government step up to the plate and ensure that we address this issue urgently? As the hon. Lady rightly says, all of us across the world will suffer.

**Anna McMorrin**: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that we are set to miss our crucial international targets.

**Jim Shannon**: Legally binding targets.

**Anna McMorrin**: Absolutely. During those two critical weeks of discussions in Katowice, we saw a distinct lack of political will to tackle climate change with anything like the urgency required. Predictably, countries such as the United States and Saudi Arabia sought to deny the science, and routinely disrupted proceedings. However, far too many countries came unprepared to strengthen the international climate process and to agree to finance all targets, leaving us with gaping holes in the rulebook for meeting those targets. Unfortunately, the UK was one such country.

**Ellie Reeves** (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for securing this important debate. She talked about targets. Does she agree that if we are to meet our obligations under the Paris agreement, we have to aim for net-zero greenhouse emissions before 2050, and if we are serious about meeting that target, the Government must stop dragging their feet and legislate for that net-zero emissions target?

**Anna McMorrin**: I completely agree with my hon. Friend on that important point, which I will address in my remarks. I hope the Government will respond adequately.

We saw that too many countries came unprepared to agree to those targets, leaving gaping holes in the rulebook. COP24 was a perfect opportunity to achieve two crucial objectives. First, it was a chance for nations to come together and take the deeply troubling recommendations of the IPCC special report on climate change seriously. Secondly, COP24 should have been used to strengthen the pledges in the 2015 Paris agreement, which experts agree is failing to deliver the action needed to meet its ambitious goals. The Paris agreement has us on course to live in a world of between 2.7° and 3.5° of global warming. Yet we are currently set to reach 3° and more.

**Chris Law** (Dundee West) (SNP): The hon. Lady is giving a really powerful and eloquent speech, I am only disappointed that the debate has been given so little time. There are two nations that are already at 2°: Mongolia and Tibet. Mongolia is the size of Europe; Tibet is the size of western Europe. It is also where 49% of the world's population get their water from. We are already seeing temperatures in excess of 2°. Does the hon. Lady agree that we have had enough time for talking and counting the clock down? We are talking about Brexit right now, but this should be the biggest issue and much more time should be given in the House for debate on this matter.

**Anna McMorrin**: I completely agree with the hon. Gentleman. This is the biggest issue the world is facing right now. We have been given only a one-hour debate in Westminster Hall—we had to push for that; I am very disappointed that the Government did not make an oral statement in the Chamber.

**Darren Jones** (Bristol North West) (Lab): Given the advice from the Energy and Climate Change Committee to the Minister on how to reach net-zero emissions, does my hon. Friend agree that we should have Government time on the Floor of the House to debate this issue more fully?

**Anna McMorrin:** I completely agree with my hon. Friend. I hope that the Government will consider that very seriously. The lack of leadership from those with responsibility to prevent suffering from climate change, I believe, is shameful. This Tory Government have done little to show that they are serious. We have sat back and allowed other nations to water down our multilateral commitments, and Governments to kick the can down the road and push any concrete decisions on countries cutting emissions to 2020.

**Alex Chalk** (Cheltenham) (Con): I entirely agree with the hon. Lady, but of course all nations, including this one, must do their bit to meet climate change. It is also important, however, not to run this country down. Is it not right to say that coal production and use is rising in India, Russia and Vietnam, but this country will phase it out by 2024? Is that not something to celebrate?

**Anna McMorrin:** Yes, we are doing a lot on climate change, but not enough, and we are not showing adequate leadership internationally.

**Caroline Lucas** (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): I echo what others have said about the importance of this debate. I am grateful that the hon. Lady secured it; a number of us tried to, but she was the one who succeeded and I am glad. On the point about the UK doing enough, is it not the case that it is easy to say, “We’re getting rid of coal, so we’re the good ones”, when in fact we are outsourcing our emissions to poorer countries? We benefit from our own consumption, but the emissions caused by that consumption are on the account of the exporting country—we should have consumption emissions, not just production emissions.

**Anna McMorrin:** I absolutely agree with the hon. Lady: we should have those consumption emissions at home in the UK and we should examine what we do, and how we count and account for the emissions that we create.

We have allowed the wealthy Governments internationally to dodge their responsibility towards the poorer countries. At Katowice, climate finance was defined in such a loose way that there is no certainty that adequate finance will be provided to help smaller countries meet their climate obligations. We have allowed loopholes to continue, which the wealthier Governments will continue to exploit.

I have secured this debate to focus attention on the action that this Government must take if we are to prevent runaway climate change—not what sounds good, but what will actually lead to hard outcomes. It is striking that it took a teenager speaking at COP24 to bring some attention to what needs to happen.

In the Minister’s written statement following the conference, she claimed that the UK Government were championing the latest climate science, but where is the evidence? The UK Government’s ambition for a net-zero carbon cluster by 2040 sounds good, but how will we deliver it? The Government have stated that they will be on track to meet the net-zero target only after the fifth carbon budget in 2032, which means that without speedier action over a much shorter timeframe, between 2032 and 2045, achieving net zero by 2045 is not feasible.

Why should we be surprised? We are still on course to miss those international carbon reduction targets. What are the Tory Government doing about that? They have

sold off the green investment bank. They have scrapped the Department of Energy and Climate Change. Levels of new low-carbon investment are lower than when they took office. Subsidies and support for tried-and-tested forms of renewable energy sources, such as onshore wind and solar, have been cut, which has put jobs and new low-carbon projects at risk.

**Jo Stevens** (Cardiff Central) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. On solar, she knows that the Government are slashing funding for solar energy, ending the feed-in tariffs for solar producers and proposing to end the exporting tariff. Does she agree that that approach has cost 12,000 jobs to date—including in Cardiff, her city and mine—and shows that the Government’s climate plan is not worth the paper it is written on?

**Anna McMorrin:** My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. Those are the tried and tested technologies that we should absolutely be supporting if we are going to move our economy to a low or zero-carbon economy, which we need to do to prevent runaway climate change.

New projects such as the Swansea bay tidal lagoon are given short shrift and ignored, but fracking is still going ahead, even under our national parks—apart from in Wales and Scotland, of course. There was not a single mention of climate change in the 2018 autumn Budget. It seems that the Government simply do not see climate change as a priority.

**Rosie Duffield** (Canterbury) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that the 25% cuts to the number of Foreign and Commonwealth Office staff dedicated to dealing with climate change further strengthen her argument that the Government are not taking tackling fossil fuels seriously?

**Anna McMorrin:** My hon. Friend makes an important point. If we are to take the threat seriously, we need to resource it properly, and not just in the Minister’s Department but across Government, and to make it an absolutely priority.

**Mr Dhesi:** My hon. Friend is making a powerful speech. Does she agree that climate change is an interlinked issue? We are asking our Government to make representations to the Trump Administration and others who tried to block proceedings at COP24, but we need to make sure that we emphasise to them that climate change is connected to issues such as immigration, which are at the fore in the Brexit debate here and in the US, where they are trying to build walls. If we do not help developing nations, such as the Maldives, Bangladesh and others, which will be partially or fully submerged, we will have even more immigration and desperation from the residents of those nations.

**Anna McMorrin:** My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. Climate change affects everyone, everywhere. We in this country have a duty to protect those suffering and most at threat, including those on the frontline where those changes are taking place. That is climate justice and it is why adequate finance needed to be agreed at COP24.



**Chris Law:** To develop that point, I am the climate justice spokesperson for the Scottish National party and a member of the International Development Committee. The Committee recently visited Kenya and Ethiopia to see at first hand why migrants end up in refugee centres, some of them for 10 or 20 years. It is directly related to the climate.

I have two things to say to the Minister. First, a lot of funding that is distributed through the Department for International Development is short term, so the projects that are happening that aim to embrace renewables are small-scale and are for only one or two years, so things are not being developed systematically. Secondly, the World Bank cancelled all upstream oil and gas projects from 2019 so that there will be long-term sustainable renewable projects throughout the world. Unfortunately, the UK Government still fund upstream oil and gas projects throughout the developing world, which will be left with that legacy long into the future. Does the hon. Lady agree that steps need to be taken now?

**Anna McMorris:** That is a really important point. We need to make sure that adequate steps are taken in all areas of Government and that action is taken to reach out to communities that are suffering on the frontline where climate change is most urgent.

Climate change needs to be a priority. The Government do not see it as a priority, but that must change. We need climate policies and targets that will lead to urgent reductions in carbon emissions. First, we must get working on achieving net-zero emissions by 2045 immediately, not push it down the road. The technology and the infrastructure are there. The Government just need the political will to get moving on the fourth and fifth carbon budgets, and make climate change a priority. The UK was once a global leader on climate change. Let it be that again. The Climate Change Act 2008 was the world's first legal framework to set binding carbon and emissions targets. It needs to continue to live up to that precedent.

The Minister needs to think more like the Welsh. A commitment to sustainable development has long been a distinctive feature of Welsh devolution. Before becoming a Member of Parliament, I was the specialist adviser for environment and climate change in the Welsh Labour Government, and I am proud of my work helping the Welsh Government to lead the way with a green growth agenda that provides an alternative model for business. Climate policies are entrenched in the Welsh legislative framework through the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Environment (Wales) Act 2016. A future generations commissioner has been appointed in Wales to ensure that that commitment is being delivered, which puts Wales above and beyond many Governments around the world, especially the UK Government. In Wales, a focus on low-carbon communities encourages communities to come forward with small-scale renewable energy schemes and changes to infrastructure and transport. That brings about change from the bottom up and hardwires the ability for our communities to be sustainable, which extends to the way that our housing is built and managed in Wales.

Across the UK, I want to see changes to our building regulations to ensure that we are building sustainable housing, which will make it cheaper and easier for everyone, and that there are energy efficiency targets.

Action on fuel poverty in Wales has brought together outcomes on tackling climate change and on local skills training and jobs, and has helped to lift people out of fuel poverty. We need to see such policies across the whole UK, not just in Wales. That change to our economy will ensure that green growth is rooted in our businesses, our services and our communities.

**Jo Stevens:** Given the importance of European Union grants to green energy projects in Wales, does my hon. Friend agree that it would be good to have confirmation from the Minister today that those sorts of projects will be able to apply for funding from the new UK shared prosperity fund? We were hoping—we were told—that the public consultation would be open by last year, but it has not happened yet.

**Anna McMorris:** I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention. It would be good to hear from the Minister on that exact point.

In the light of yesterday's Brexit vote, we need to keep in mind our role within the European Union and the importance of our being a full EU member. The EU has become the global environmental standard and regulation setter, and it has used its significant influence in trade to tackle climate change. Last year the EU announced that it would refuse to sign deals with countries that did not ratify the Paris climate agreement. That meant a huge shift in how the EU was perceived and in the action it is taking. Brexit also threatens to have hugely negative consequences for our climate action here in the UK. The loss of EU funding and leaving the EU emissions trading scheme would all mean a significant weakening of our ability to take action.

**The Minister for Energy and Clean Growth (Claire Perry):** Will the hon. Lady accept an intervention on a factual point?

**Anna McMorris:** I will.

**Claire Perry:** I know that the hon. Lady is extremely knowledgeable, so I am sure that she will be aware that since 2000 the UK's reduction in carbon intensity is 60% higher than the EU's. That is enshrined in domestic legislation. Therefore, I am sure that we will continue to overachieve relative to our EU partners. I would hate for this exceptionally important global debate to be narrowly focused on Brexit.

**Anna McMorris:** I thank the Minister for her intervention. I think that it is a wider point, and a very important one, to talk about the impact that Brexit will have on our domestic legislation here in the UK. For example, the loss of EU environmental legislation, which covers roughly half of the UK's emissions reductions up to 2030, and losing our place as a key advocate of bold action within the EU, will demolish, at a single stroke, Britain's role as a key player on climate change. We cannot solve this climate crisis as a single nation; climate change recognises no borders.

As I saw with my own eyes in the Arctic recently, climate change is already wreaking havoc on our world, our communities and those who need us most, and it is only set to get worse. It is time for the UK Government to face up to the imminent risks and show leadership.

Our response to climate change will define us for years to come. It must be a bold part of the work of every single Government Department, leading the way from the top down to the bottom up. We are rapidly reaching crisis point, and we need to start acting like it.

**Mr Clive Betts (in the Chair):** I think I have three hon. Members who want to catch my eye, which means basically five minutes each, if they could keep to that. I call Mary Creagh.

4.53 pm

**Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab):** Thank you very much indeed for that guidance, Mr Betts, and for your courtesy in calling me to speak. I am aware that I arrived a little late, but I was doing some media on the report on sustainable seas by the Environmental Audit Committee. I was over the road to do that, before running here through the rain.

May I begin, Mr Betts, by saying what a pleasure it is to serve under your chairmanship today, and to have such a brilliant and committed member of the Environmental Audit Committee as we have in my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff North (Anna McMorrin)?

Safeguarding the future for the planet and for our children is one of the defining challenges of our generation. The climate change conference—COP24—was a real opportunity to take decisive action in this area. I will very quickly focus on the scale of the challenge, the solutions that are already available and, of course, the finance that we need to put behind any action.

I will start with the Arctic, which I and the rest of the Environmental Audit Committee visited last year. We saw for ourselves the unprecedented extreme weather that the Arctic faces. The climate is a closed system, so when we warm the ocean, the climate redistributes that heat through the winds, the currents and our weather. We are performing a giant experiment on ourselves, our planet and our oceans, and it really is a very dangerous experiment.

In 2018, the Arctic experienced its third winter heatwave in a row. During winter polar nights—so no sunshine—there were temperatures of 28°C in the Arctic this year. We know that the average temperature rise of 2°C disguises the extremes in temperature that we see at the North Pole. For example, a 1°C rise at the Equator means a 7°C rise at the North Pole, and the temperature in the Arctic has already risen by 5°C, which has huge impacts on the mammals that live there, and of course on the humans who live there, even down to the way that they build their houses.

In this country, we had the “Beast from the East” in March 2018. We were proud to launch our inquiry into UK heatwaves with the snow lying thick on the ground. The Committee Clerk turned to me and said, “Chair, nobody wants to give evidence about heatwaves when there’s snow lying on the ground”, and he was right. But we struggled through that and launched our heatwaves report in 35 °C of searing heat, and we had the hottest ever summer in England. These are extraordinary times. I was walking in the Peak District above Sheffield, Mr Betts, up Lost Lad hill, and I looked at the Derwent reservoir, which was only 75% full, and the village of Derwent and its church spire were now visible.

The world’s leading scientists have warned us that we have just 12 years to avoid devastating climate change. They gave us a report that spelled out the difference between a 2°C rise and a 1.5°C rise. Under a 2°C rise, we lose all the world’s coral reefs; under a 1.5°C rise, we lose “just” 90% of them. That shows the damage that is already baked into the best-case scenario. Of course, in the UK heatwaves raise the spectre of heat-related deaths, such as those in 2003, when there were 2,000 excess deaths in just 10 days. We have never known so much and we have never realised before just how much we have to do.

Our Committee produced a report on greening the finance system and we heard that the carbon bubble presents a huge systemic risk to our investments and our pensions. It presents liability risks, as oil and gas companies are potentially sued; some of them are being sued by the state of New York for some of the damaging issues that came with Storm Sandy. It presents physical risks to us, including the risk of tidal and coastal surge, and of course the transitional risk. If someone’s pension is invested in an oil and gas company and that company cannot get its reserves out of the ground without reaching 4°C, 5°C, or 6°C of warming, their pension is essentially valueless.

We need to move very quickly to green the financial system to avoid a carbon bubble bursting in an unmanaged way. We also need to move much more quickly to mobilise green finance into our economy: into solar, wind, and the new technology that we need.

The two tried and tested examples of carbon capture and storage come from nature: soils and forests. We conducted an inquiry into soils and globally the top foot of soils—the 30 cm of soil around the Earth—holds double the amount of carbon that is in the atmosphere, and more than all the carbon held by all the forests and the oceans combined.

Soils are absolutely critical and I am really glad that the Government signed up to the 4 parts per 1,000 initiative last year. What concerns me is that we do not have a route map to achieve that goal. We have got some great scientists in the UK; they know what the soil content has been over the last 50 years. We need to start paying farmers, through the common agricultural policy, or whatever succeeds it if we leave the European Union, to make sure that we measure, monitor and increase our soils’ carbon content.

I agree wholeheartedly with my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff North about withdrawing the finance for feed-in tariffs and the difficulties that the green deal has had, including the problems that people have had with it, and the scrapping of the energy efficiency measures in our homes. If we want climate solutions, we must also have climate justice, which means keeping people warm and safe in their homes.

The climate conference was held in Katowice, a coalmining region of Poland. Can I make a bid that, if the UK holds the climate conference in 2020, we hold it in the coalmining region of Yorkshire, which is an example of how we can swiftly move to the new green economy and create jobs in the process? I am sure that Sheffield, Mr Betts, Wakefield and Leeds would be happy to argue the toss over who should win that bid.

**Mr Clive Betts (in the Chair):** I call Alex Sobel to speak, but only for four minutes now, I am afraid.

5 pm

**Alex Sobel** (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): Thank you, Mr Betts. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff North (Anna McMorrin) for securing this debate. She is not just an excellent constituency MP; she is a leading voice on this issue, here and for the people of Wales, so it is great that she was able to secure this debate and make her speech. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mary Creagh) said, the IPCC has told us that we have 12 years to restrict global warming to 1.5°. It has already risen by 1° from pre-industrial levels. This nation was the first to industrialise, which we should be proud of; it was also the first nation to de-industrialise. Many of the comments the Minister made in her intervention relate to our early de-industrialisation and, obviously, our early industrialisation.

The Centre for Industrial Energy, Materials and Products—which includes researchers from the great University of Leeds—has shown that the UK will miss the fourth and fifth carbon budget targets, which are binding on us under law and are part of our agreements under the conference of the parties process. Those carbon budgets take us to 2032, and CIE-MAP has found that one of the five sectors of most concern was construction. What has happened in housing? When the Government came in in 2010, they scrapped the code for sustainable homes—something that would have kept us on track to meet our carbon budgets for housing. As my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff Central (Jo Stevens) said, the feed-in tariff proposals take us further away from that target. We need to build low-carbon modular housing, and we need to take control of that process and not listen to the siren voices of the volume housing developers.

We need to look at vehicles—an area in which we are way behind. The Norwegians are talking about phasing out petrol and diesel by 2025, just six years from now. We are talking about a target of 2040, and we cannot even give a clear answer on whether we are going to ban hybrids; we can imagine lots of gaming of the rules if we allow hybrids to continue. On food and drink, the Germans have a plan for resource efficiency. We have no such plan; we are way behind. On clothing and textiles, the Government need to look at the Environmental Audit Committee's report—its Chair, my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield, is here, as are several other members of our Committee. That report arose from our sustainable fashion inquiry, and we found so much that could be done within the UK fashion industry and its main production facilities, which are abroad, to make fashion more sustainable. In electronics and appliances, we are not doing enough to drive down electricity use. There is no catching up here; there are no second chances. The Government have said that we will be net carbon zero by 2050, but if we do not do the right thing over the 12 or 13 years to 2032, we will not be able to catch up in the 18 years between 2032 and 2050. It will be game over for our global climate. Who wants that legacy hung around their neck?

Lastly, we are on track in energy production because coal-fired power stations are being scrapped. The industry itself has seen the future, and has already decommissioned or moved into biomass and other forms of energy production. However, if we think the solution is continued gas production—undertaking shale gas extraction in

the United Kingdom—we will again fall behind our targets when we move into the fifth carbon budget. We cannot allow that to happen. We need to look at alternatives, including domestic solar, onshore and offshore wind, hydrogen, hydro, and obviously tidal lagoons, for which my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff North is a great champion. If we do not do that, we will again be behind, and will not meet the legally binding targets that we must meet as a nation. The Government must do better. In the main Chamber, Members are debating confidence in the Government, and part of the reason for my lack of confidence in this Government is their failure to tackle the catastrophic climate change that we will face if we do not meet this challenge.

5.4 pm

**Caroline Lucas** (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Betts, and I again congratulate the hon. Member for Cardiff North (Anna McMorrin) on securing the debate. The UK has historically played a leading role in global climate negotiations; for example, it pressed for the 1.5° ambition in the 2015 Paris agreement. However, in the words of the former UK climate envoy, John Ashton,

“Rule one of diplomacy is, walk your talk: otherwise people stop listening”.

The tragedy is that in recent years, the global leadership role that the UK played on the international stage has been undermined by the systematic dismantling of climate policy at home. We have heard some of this already, but since 2010, Ministers have scrapped zero carbon homes; sold off the Green Investment Bank; made it almost impossible to build onshore wind farms; cut off support for solar power; made no progress on phasing out fossil fuel subsidies; gone all out for fracking, which is quite extraordinary given that that is a whole new fossil fuel industry; and in the area of energy efficiency, which is all too often a poor cousin in these debates, we are woefully behind on some targets—for example, retrofitting some of our most energy-inefficient homes. According to the Institute for Public Policy Research, we could be over 50 years late in getting that target sorted.

The impact of those failures is incredibly real, and we have heard from the Committee on Climate Change that once again, the UK is way off meeting its fourth and fifth carbon budgets. “With each delay,” it says, “we stray further from the cost-effective path to the 2050 target.” Beyond that, the sad truth is that even if all those policies were still active, it would not be enough. The problem is that our economy is built on the assumption that precious minerals, fresh air, clean water and rare species can magically regenerate themselves in an instant, and that somehow the Earth will expand to meet our ever-expanding use of resources. The reality is that we have stretched the planet beyond its limits and, without a bold reimagining of how our economy works, it will simply not be able to spring back into shape. The UN 1.5° report made clear that we need to cut emissions to net zero by the middle of this century, but the global economy is set to nearly triple in size during that same period. That makes the job of decarbonisation massively greater.

Greta Thunberg, a 15-year-old climate activist, told world leaders at COP24 in December that “if solutions within the system are so impossible to find, maybe we should change the system itself.”



She was right. Of course, we need massive investment in renewable energy and energy efficiency and a new, clean public transport system, but we also need to think far more boldly about the way we integrate concerns about our natural world in the way we run our economy. Crucially, we need to limit the resources that we all use. Those in the global north who can radically reduce how much they consume and throw away must do so. We must find new and innovative ways to recycle and reuse materials; there is much talk of dematerialisation and decoupling from energy and consumption, but the truth is that there is no example anywhere in the world of absolute decoupling in anything like the timeframes that we will need if we are serious about getting off the collision course that we are currently on with the climate crisis. We have a huge job of work in front of us.

I am really grateful for this debate, and I want to add one last thing: my quick scan of *Hansard* suggests that over the past year, there has been only one debate in the main Chamber on climate change. That is not good enough. I hope that we can reinvigorate the all-party parliamentary climate change group, and I invite everyone at this debate to join that APPG so that we can be a bigger force in this place for better climate policy.

**Mr Clive Betts (in the Chair):** We will now hear from the Front Benchers. The Scottish National party and the Labour party spokespeople each have five minutes, and the Minister has 10 minutes.

5.8 pm

**John Mc Nally (Falkirk) (SNP):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Betts. I congratulate the hon. Member for Cardiff North (Anna McMorrin) on securing this highly topical debate. She is an unswerving member of the Environmental Audit Committee, and I am always impressed by her knowledge, her astuteness and the way she expresses herself in that Committee, which is ably chaired by the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mary Creagh), who is also here today.

Some relevant points have been made by other speakers, particularly regarding missed targets and the UK Government's lack of political will to face up to their responsibilities. Climate change should lie at the heart of every choice that those in power make, for those decisions affect every individual on our planet. We only have one planet—we cannot make any more—and we should be mindful of that every time we make a decision. In the face of the present climate emergency, the possibility of the UK's 1970s status as the dirty man of Europe returning is becoming more distinct, and I am very fearful of that, as is everyone who attends the Environmental Audit Committee and other committees on climate change.

As has been mentioned, only in October last year the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warned that we have 12 years to make the unprecedented and unparalleled changes needed to prevent global temperatures rising by above 1.5°C. Exceeding that by even half a degree risks global catastrophe, including floods, fires and famine.

Scotland has long been a leader in the fight against climate change, and we will continue to forge the way in tackling the crisis. The UK Government should look to us, and probably to Wales, for a successful holistic approach to what will be terrible blights on our community if we do not act. A decade ago, in 2009, Scotland set

itself the world's most ambitious greenhouse gas reduction target when the Scottish Parliament voted unanimously to cut the country's emissions to 42% by 2020. The latest statistics show that we remain well on track to achieve that.

In 2012, Scotland established the world's first climate justice fund, seeking to mitigate the damage caused by climate change on the world's poorest communities. By 2021, £21 million will have been distributed through the fund, which is now supporting 11 projects in Malawi, Zambia, Tanzania and Rwanda. Before the United Nations climate change conference, the First Minister announced a further £200,000 for action to tackle climate change. That will be provided to the body supporting the implementation of the Paris agreement. As well as that, the decarbonisation of Scotland's electricity sector and reductions in emissions from waste have seen us outperform the UK overall, as emissions continue to fall year on year to nearly half of 1990 levels.

Scotland is committed to achieving a substantial reduction in emissions as soon as possible. We have already reduced emissions by 49% compared with 1990. We have met our annual statutory targets for three years running, and are outperforming all countries in western Europe except Sweden. By 2030 we will have the equivalent of 50% heat, transport and electricity consumption supplied from renewable sources—achievable ambitions to do the right thing. A landmark Scottish energy efficiency programme was rolled out in 2018. We will phase out the need for petrol and diesel cars and vans by 2032 through an expansion of the vehicle charging network in urban and rural Scotland, investment in innovative solutions and, most importantly, leadership on procurement from the public sector.

The Scottish National party remains concerned about how climate change will be tackled after the UK's departure from the EU. The UK Government must give—I hope to hear this from the Minister—clear assurances that there will be no reduction in standards and targets, or that appropriate powers will be devolved to the Scottish Parliament. That is the best solution. I look forward to the Minister's comments on that very point.

It is clear that the consequences of climate change are environmental at first but can quickly become political and military. The long-term security implications of climate change must therefore be considered when forming defence policy. I look forward to encouraging more green business. It was a pleasure to help with the recently announced Scottish stock exchange plans. I was asked to further the awareness of the Bourse business development through my network of friends and companies that I know. The ethics and environmental and social impact objectives of the Euronext ambitions for long-term investment are sound corporate practice. That will open up excellent opportunities for all companies that wish to grow within Scotland.

I thank the Minister and hope that she has listened to what I have said. Mother Teresa always said, "If you want to change the world, you begin in your own little corner." I believe that in Scotland we are doing that.

5.13 pm

**Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab):** Thank you for your guidance during the debate, Mr Betts. I am delighted to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff North (Anna McMorrin), and indeed all my hon. Friends who have spoken so eloquently in the debate.

[Barry Gardiner]

When the Minister responds, I am confident that she will remind the House that the Government was a progressive voice in Poland. That is true. Along with other members of the High Ambition Coalition, the UK pledged to step up our ambition by 2020. It is easy to be a progressive voice when what is needed is progressive action, but progressive action requires political will. Repeating a promise that every nation made in Paris three years ago does not show political will. What was needed in Katowice was a clear commitment to deliver on the ratchet process that Paris put in place.

The Minister and I have many political differences, but I say to her in all sincerity that if in a few minutes she were to rise and use the platform of this debate to pledge that the UK will reach net zero emissions before 2050, as Labour has committed to do, I would not play politics. I would welcome her announcement publicly, because it is the right thing to do. Of course, it is a pledge that must be backed by a coherent plan, but in my view it is necessary if we are to chart a way that is even remotely compatible with keeping below the 1.5°C threshold.

I also suggest to the Minister that she may care to reflect that there is also a very good political reason for her to make such a pledge. Failing to do so would make a mockery of her bid to host next year's conference of the parties. Labour wholeheartedly supports holding COP 26 here in 2020, but as things stand we have serious reservations about whether the Government are up to the task.

We should look at the condition of the UK's climate diplomacy team, which was referred to earlier. In 2009, under Labour, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office had an army of climate staff—277 strong. Seven subsequent years of Tory austerity halved that. Then the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) became the Foreign Secretary, and the number of officials working full time on climate fell to just 55. I ask the Minister what discussions she has had with the current Foreign Secretary about restoring that workforce of climate diplomats.

Climate diplomacy matters now more than ever. At COP24, the US, Russia, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait refused to welcome the IPCC's report. Our climate diplomats should have known that in advance and taken active steps against it. When they finally made their position public, our Government should have offered criticism. They did not, just as they did not when President Trump announced his decision to withdraw from the United Nations framework convention on climate change.

Leadership means speaking out. It also means acknowledging our responsibilities as the nation that ushered in the fossil fuel era. Rich nations like us have evaded calls to support the victims of loss and damage. Can the Minister tell the House what we, the fifth richest country in the world, are doing to address loss and damage in the most climate-vulnerable nations resulting from our addiction to fossil fuels? That would be climate diplomacy that could genuinely bring about change at a UK COP.

This year the Warsaw international mechanism for loss and damage is up for review. It is the perfect moment for the Government to make us the first developed nation to provide additional financial contributions to

address loss and damage. The latest figures show that climate aid reached \$70 billion in 2016—still short of the 2020 target of \$100 billion, which COP24 agreed would rise from 2025.

Will the Minister provide an assurance that the UK will take on its fair share of that increase? Will she confirm that she has had discussions with the Chancellor or the Chief Secretary about how they will increase the UK's contribution towards international climate finance in the next spending review? I am not asking for figures; I am simply asking whether those discussions have taken place in Government. If not, will she accept that they are a necessary precondition to any credible bid by the UK to hold the COP?

Of course, the last thing I want is a trade-off that reduces still further Government finance for tackling climate breakdown here at home. As has been said, investment in our low-carbon economy is at its lowest level in a decade, down 57% in 2017. Will the Minister acknowledge publicly that, according to the independent assessment of the Committee on Climate Change, her clean growth strategy does not get us back on course to meeting the fourth and fifth carbon budgets, and will she explain why, for all her protestation about the effectiveness of energy policy not being simply about how much money the Government spends, she still thinks that the 75% capital allowances for the fracking industry are a sensible use of public money?

I ask the Minister not whether she has read the IPCC report—for all our differences, I acknowledge that she is a diligent Minister and know that she will have done—but whether she will state publicly that she agrees with it. Will she explain to the House why, having read it, she can conclude that the Government's current policies constitute a sensible response to the climate crisis that it outlines?

**Mary Creagh:** Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Barry Gardiner:** I cannot, because of the time.

We need radical, transformative action, and we need it now. The IPCC report demanded

“rapid, far-reaching and unprecedented changes in all aspects of society”—

a far cry from what the Government are offering.

Denial comes in two packages. I do not accuse the Government of denial of the science, but there is another sort: denial of what it will take to stop climate change. Among the many speeches by world leaders at COP24, I was most affected by the words of the 15-year-old Swedish girl, Greta Thunberg:

“We cannot solve a crisis without treating it as a crisis.”

Those are the words of the next generation. I hope that the Minister will heed them and act accordingly.

5.20 pm

**The Minister for Energy and Clean Growth (Claire Perry):** Thank you for your chairmanship this afternoon, Mr Betts. I have been asked an awful lot of questions and I have limited time to respond, but I will be happy to try to answer them further later. I will instruct my officials to write to hon. Members, particularly in answer to the factual questions asked by the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner).

As always when we have this conversation—perhaps this is a little reminiscent of the debate going on in the main Chamber—I feel as if we are looking at two different sets of facts. I accredited the hon. Member for Cardiff North (Anna McMorrin) to attend the Katowice talks and I know that she was disappointed that she could not go, but I am a little saddened by her accusation that my officials were not prepared for those talks. It remains the case that our civil servants—more than 150 people in the international climate finance team and in my excellent negotiating team—go to conferences of the parties extremely well prepared. We are perceived to be one of the most effective negotiating teams in the world. Because the negotiations often happen late at night, I was privileged to sit with that team—

**Anna McMorrin** *rose*—

**Claire Perry:** Let me finish please, because I am concerned about the time.

I was privileged to sit with that team in the room and see the impact of our responses, both on the EU and on the global climate proposals. Although the hon. Lady could not attend, as an expert in the area she will know that we were never going to have a change of individual or collective ambition at this COP. We have set out a very clear pathway for what the COPs are expected to achieve. COP 2020, which I have expressed interest in hosting in the UK, will be the one at which we show our national determined contributions, but we cannot manage what we cannot measure. One of the great points of controversy in the COP process has been whether collectively we can agree an inventory calculation mechanism and a rulebook to assure ourselves that the world is on track. Despite the low expectations, I think we achieved that at COP by levelling the international playing field, which is particularly important for our UK businesses, and by building trust.

The hon. Lady rightly referred to points made early on at COP. There were concerns from some countries, but as is often the case, I saw a coming together at the end, with an enormous amount of collective action and a rulebook that is more than sufficient for its purpose and flexible enough to allow for the differential between ambitions in different parts of the world. I pay tribute on the record to our superb civil servants who led the negotiating team. It was particularly poignant because in Katowice we could taste the coal on the air that we breathed—a reminder of one of the challenges of the whole process.

I know that these debates exist for hon. Members to make political points, but many Opposition Members are far more intelligent than some of the points they tried to make. On the issue of just transition, as the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mary Creagh) will know from her constituency work, persuading the world to create immense job losses in primary industries and tax people more to invest more Government subsidy in areas that will help to drive that transition is a non-trivial challenge. On an issue so vital to the world, I would have hoped that we might one day have a tiny measure of cross-party consensus, but I guess we all live in hope.

**Anna McMorrin:** Will the Minister give way?

**Claire Perry:** I will try to leave the hon. Lady a moment to wind up, as it is her debate.

As hon. Members pointed out, the conference was rooted in the IPCC report, which is very much supported by our superb UK science base—another area in which we have led the world in this space. The report gives a very stark warning on what the risks would be. The hon. Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi), who is no longer in his place, referred to the challenge that small islands face. The subject was discussed at length at the Wilton Park forum, which we are proud to co-host with New Zealand and at which we discuss the issues facing countries looking down the barrel of climate change—an existential threat to small island nations.

Of course, it is entirely right that collectively we need to do more. Again, we seem to live in a world of different facts. We were the first Government of an industrialised country to address how we will get to a zero-carbon future. It is not about setting some kind of target for when we will all be long gone—I am sure none of us will be in government by then, and some of us may even be six feet under. It is about “how”. The difference with this Government is that it is not just about empty targets, uncosted numbers or a promise to bring back the proposal for the Swansea power station, which would have been the most expensive ever built in the country and would have created 30 jobs and taken two months of Port Talbot’s steel supply—I can think of much better ways to spend taxpayers’ money. It is about actually setting out a detailed action plan for “how”. That is important because our policy making has to survive the travails of politics and successive Governments.

We have a Climate Change Act that was strongly supported across the parties, and we have budgets—I am not going to go through the debates again. On our current numbers, we are 3% and 5% off the budgets that will end in eight and 10 years’ time, and I am pretty confident that we will get there. We have a Prime Minister who is committed to it, and we have clean growth as a fundamental part of our industrial strategy.

It was suggested in this debate that we have somehow rowed back on our climate diplomacy. The reason we are so successful is that this is a fundamental part of who we are and what we do. Our offer to the world is premised on clean growth. The almost £6 billion of taxpayers’ money that I spend on their behalf as part of international climate finance is focused 50% on adaptation and 50% on mitigation, but we are also thinking about how we can take brilliant British inventions such as the solar fridge funded by the Department for International Development and change people’s lives in the developing world.

**Chris Law:** Will the Minister give way?

**Claire Perry:** Very briefly, but I want to leave the hon. Member for Cardiff North a moment to wrap up.

**Chris Law:** I thank the Minister for giving up such precious time. She makes valuable points about international investments, which is all well and good. However, I would really like a response to my earlier point that in the countries most directly affected by climate change, we have multi-billion pound investments in oil and gas.



**Claire Perry:** I find it odd to hear an SNP Member, who represents a country that claims that its entire independence policy is based on oil revenues, being dismissive of the same activities in other countries.

Moving on to climate action, I agree that we can only ever be credible when we talk to other countries if we try to lead from the front. We have reduced our emissions more than any other G20 member over the past 20 years. We have published our clean growth strategy—a very detailed set of actions. We had our first ever Green Great Britain week. From listening to some hon. Members, one would think that we were still massive coal emitters, but we are at over 32% renewables—we hit a monthly high of 54% in August. As hon. Members know, I have set a challenge for us to have the world's first net zero industrial cluster by 2040. I have held a conference on carbon capture, usage and storage that was considered to be the most senior and committed gathering in the world. We are driving global action—we should be proud of what we are doing, and we will continue to lead from the front.

It was nice to hear, on a point of consensus, that the Labour party supports our bid to host COP 2020, where the rubber hits the road. I pay personal tribute to the hon. Member for Wakefield for her Committee's work—I know that yours is doing fine work too, Mr Betts. Giving evidence to hon. Lady's Committee and looking

at its reports and recommendations is vital. That is the sort of cross-Government and cross-party consensus that delivers results.

5.28 pm

**Anna McMorrin:** Thank you, Mr Betts, for chairing the debate. I also thank hon. Members for their excellent contributions, particularly my hon. Friends the Members for Wakefield (Mary Creagh) and for Leeds North West (Alex Sobel), and the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas).

I do not doubt that the Minister is very sincere in her intent to change things and the way she wants to do so, but this takes more action—it requires action right across Government. I was at the climate negotiations when they were last held in Poland in 2013, at which 300 members of the UK Government were present, with Scotland and Wales there. There has been a weakening of that priority. It needs to be ramped up, with action right across Government—we are not seeing that at the moment. The issue reaches across the political divide. It goes beyond party politics—

5.30 pm

*Motion lapsed, and sitting adjourned without Question put (Standing Order No. 10(14)).*

# Westminster Hall

Thursday 17 January 2019

[MR NIGEL EVANS *in the Chair*]

## Rail Infrastructure Investment

1.30 pm

**Lilian Greenwood** (Nottingham South) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the Fourth Report of the Transport Committee, Rail infrastructure investment, HC 582, and the Government response, HC 1557.

I am delighted to lead this debate on the Transport Committee's Fourth Report of this Session, on rail infrastructure investment. I will start the debate as we started our report, by underlining the importance of the UK's railways. They are a vital part of our national transport network and make a substantial contribution to the economy. Their importance has been recognised by successive Governments of all parties, with billions of pounds invested in rail every year. The importance of our railways is not in question.

However, there are serious challenges for both rail passengers and the industry. While 1.7 billion journeys were made by rail in 2018, it was not an easy year for passengers, who faced disruption and disappointment. Planned improvements—including electrification in south Wales, the midlands and Cumbria, and the opening of Crossrail—have not been delivered, while May's timetable changes caused unprecedented chaos across the network. This year started with more unwelcome news for rail commuters, with fares increasing by an average of 3.1%.

We must work towards improving services for rail passengers and freight customers. Investment in the network is essential for enabling better services, which in turn provide new opportunities for our constituents and support the development of our towns and cities. That was the focus of our report, and today I will look at three of the main issues it raised.

First, we need to ensure that rail investment and its benefits are shared equally across the country. It is clear that many feel that rail investment is unfairly centralised in a small number of areas, and the Department for Transport has done little to respond to those concerns. Secondly, there are serious questions about what future improvements the Government's new approach to funding rail enhancements will deliver. To date, more than a year after the new system was put in place, there is a total absence of information about what proposals are even being considered. Thirdly, there remain questions about the future role that electrification will play in improving the UK's rail network, following the cancellation of the electrification of the midland main line north of Kettering to Nottingham and Sheffield, the Great Western main line to Swansea and Cardiff and the lakes line between Oxenholme and Windermere.

There is long-standing dissatisfaction about the level of investment in the rail network in different regions, and our report looked in detail at the disparity in investment across the country. We considered the issue in the context of the Government's stated intention to

rebalance the economy away from London, exemplified by the northern powerhouse and the midlands engine. From 2012 to 2017, the north-east, the east midlands, the south-west and Wales all received less than 10% of the level of rail investment that went to London. Only the north-west, the south-east and Scotland received even a fifth of the level of rail investment in our capital.

The capital's size and population mean that it is unsurprising that more is spent in London, in absolute terms, than in other regions. However, there is also a substantial disparity between spending per capita in London, at £773 a head in 2016-17, and other regions, with a low of just £70 per head in my own region, the east midlands. The Institute for Public Policy Research North analysed the Government's planned transport spending, as set out in the Government's 2016 "National Infrastructure and Construction Pipeline", stating that it showed problems not only in the past but in the future and

"a stark gap between London and the rest of the country",

with £1,900 per capita spending planned in London from 2017 onwards, compared with £400 in the north.

The sense of unfairness felt by many regions across the country has been exacerbated by continued investment in major developments that primarily benefit London. It is hardly surprising that there was real anger when, four days after the cancellation of those electrification schemes, the Secretary of State and the Mayor of London jointly announced an agreement in principle to fund Crossrail 2 at an estimated cost of £30 billion.

The Government have tried to rebut the figures about the regional disparity of investment in our railway. Their response to our report said that

"the planned spending per head figure is within 33% of the national average for all nine English regions. Moreover, the overall figure for the three Northern regions (North West, North East, Yorkshire and Humber) is £1,039 per head, compared to £1,076 per head for the Middle regions (East of England, East Midlands and West Midlands) and £1,029 per head for the Southern regions (London, South East and South West)."

However, those figures are based on a selective analysis. By aggregating regions, variations in the midlands, the north and the south are masked. For example, Yorkshire and the Humber received just £729 per head, the north-east £822 per head and the south-west £851 per head.

**Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): As usual, my hon. Friend makes a powerful case for the report that her Committee has produced. She just referenced the funding for Yorkshire and the Humber. The Department for Transport seems to put its head in the sand whenever it is challenged on these regional disparities. Given that the new Rail Minister is a Yorkshire MP, does she think that we might now see a recognition that the north has not had its fair share, and that we will now start to get our fair share?

**Lilian Greenwood:** My hon. Friend has been an outstanding advocate for the north and its need for rail investment. The Minister is a newish Rail Minister, but I know that he previously served in the Department for Transport. We had discussions in the past, when he was the Minister responsible for buses, and I always found him genuinely prepared to listen. I hope that he brings the same approach to his new role.

[Lilian Greenwood]

In January 2018 IPPR North assessed the Government's analysis of regional spending and stated that it excluded spending in the pipeline for after 2020-21, meaning that the analysis omitted some £42.5 billion of planned investment, 40% of which—£19.8 billion—is earmarked for London. The Government have therefore presented, even if accurate, a rather skewed picture of how planned transport spending will be distributed across the country in the coming years.

**Graham Stringer** (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab): My hon. Friend is doing an excellent job of presenting our Committee's report and explaining how the Government tried to fiddle the figures to obscure the fact that London is getting about 80% of the funding. Does she agree that this will not be rectified and made fair until the methodology for deciding on investment schemes is changed? It massively over-weights time saved, which always pushes investment towards densely populated cities such as London, rather than Newcastle, Manchester, Leeds or the other regional cities.

**Lilian Greenwood:** My hon. Friend makes an important point, which I will come to in due course. He is a long-standing, experienced and expert member of the Transport Committee, and I am delighted that he is here this afternoon.

The DFT also argues that it is difficult to break down regional spending accurately, saying that where expenditure on the railway takes place is not always an accurate reflection of where the benefits are felt. The Department also emphasises the difficulty of analysing investment annually, or even five-yearly, given that railway assets typically have a lifespan of 25 to 40 years, pointing out that there was inevitably

“a cyclical nature to replacing them that does not lend itself to an even split of funding across all regions within every 5 year control period.”

Of course, there is merit in those arguments, but I simply ask the Minister, when was there a time when investment in the north exceeded investment in the south?

While the Government's commitment to rebalancing the economy is welcome, it is clear from past experience that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Blackley and Broughton (Graham Stringer) said, current methods for making investment decisions make it much easier for highly populated, economically successful places to prove the case for schemes in their area, because the model has a bias towards schemes that exhibit strong levels of potential demand and/or high potential to relieve existing transport congestion. Witnesses to the inquiry told us that this approach inevitably drew more investment to London and unless the system could be altered to take greater account of wider economic benefits, the process would be inexorable.

Maria Machancoses, the director of Midlands Connect, told us that

“figures on the disparity of investment, no matter which formula you look at—whether by the DFT or the Treasury—they all say that outside London it is just not working.”

Her view was that this should be the starting point from which to “move forward.” However, in their response to our report, the Government did not accept the suggestion that their scheme appraisal methods did not provide a fair share of investment in rail across the UK's regions.

This completely fails to acknowledge the overwhelming feeling across the country that investment in rail is unfairly concentrated in a few small areas.

While there are undeniable complexities in accurately breaking down regional spending and identifying where the benefits of investment are felt, the Government must recognise the concerns that have been raised about the regional disparities of investment in our rail network and take action to address them. It is hard to believe that the Department will do so if it does not accept that there is a problem in the first place.

The DFT has published a rebalancing toolkit, to be used as part of the strategic assessment of future investment programmes. This was welcomed in principle by our witnesses. However, when we asked the then Rail Minister, the hon. Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys (Paul Maynard), for examples of the toolkit's influence on DFT's transport investment decisions, he could not provide a single specific example. He told us that it was “relatively early days” for the approach. Our witnesses said that the Government needed to prove that what the rebalancing toolkit is meant to achieve will actually take place. I ask the Minister, over a year after the toolkit was introduced, how has it influenced the DFT's investment decisions?

In our report, we also called on the Government to be more specific about the economic rebalancing effects they intend to achieve. We call on them to tell the regions in need of regeneration how they can prove their cases and secure investment. We argued that people in the north-east and south-west, regions that have experienced relative under-investment in recent periods, must have a clear sense of what the Government are trying to achieve in order to be able to judge their success.

We also recommended that use of the rebalancing toolkit be mandatory and that the Department worked with Her Majesty's Treasury to explore how economic rebalancing can be made an intrinsic part of appraising transport schemes. That would put rebalancing at the heart of investment decisions, rather than it merely being an add-on. In response, the Government have told us that it would be impractical to make use of the toolkit mandatory. Why has the Department developed a toolkit that is impractical to use?

Let me turn to rail electrification. Under successive Governments since 2009, the Department has made a compelling case for widespread electrification, moving from diesel to electric traction, particularly on heavily used parts of the network, which would reduce journey times and facilitate lighter, more efficient trains, reducing long-term costs, improving environmental sustainability and enhancing capacity. The Government's decision to cancel electrification schemes in south Wales, the midlands and the Lake district were a huge disappointment for people who had been promised improvements to their network. Following the cancellation of these schemes, there are also serious questions about the Government's support for future electrification of the network.

It is clear that the plans for electrification were over-ambitious and suffered from inadequate planning and budgeting. The schemes were hampered by an unclear definition of responsibilities between the DFT, Network Rail and the Office of Rail and Road, and disappointment at their cancellation was compounded by poor communication by the Department for Transport.



Although the decision to cancel the midland main line and the lakes line schemes was taken in March 2017, it was not announced until July, on the day the House rose for its summer recess, limiting opportunities for scrutiny of the decision. The Government also presented the decision not to electrify these lines as a positive story about passenger benefits being delivered in other ways. The announcement, unsurprisingly, was met with scepticism by those who saw it as a pragmatic, cost-based response to overruns. The National Audit Office agreed with those sceptics, and concluded:

“The Department decided to cancel projects in 2017 because Network Rail’s 2014-2019 investment portfolio was no longer affordable.”

Passengers on the midland main line and Great Western main line should eventually see some improvements in capacity and journey time from other enhancements in control period 5, but the way that enhancement to these lines has been handled is far from ideal and has done nothing to create confidence in the Government’s approach to rail improvements.

**Huw Merriman** (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Lady, my friend, the Chair of the Select Committee, on securing the debate. She took us through our Select Committee report and chaired us so well. The Government rightly place great faith in the future in hybrid trains and bi-mode, but does she share my concern that we are in a bit of a hiatus? We either have electrification or technology that is not quite there. Many communities—mine in particular, with the extension of HSI—are faced with uncertainty as to whether they will ever get a better service.

**Lilian Greenwood:** The hon. Gentleman is a very valued member of the Select Committee. While new traction, hydrogen and battery potentially have a place on our railway, it is clear that they are not sufficiently developed to be a proper replacement for electrification. There is some doubt about whether they will ever be a suitable replacement for electric trains, particularly on inter-city journeys operating at higher speeds. He is right to raise concerns about the time that might be taken for parts of the country to see improvements to their services, particularly if there is a continued aspiration to use bi-mode technology. While that can provide some benefits, it undoubtedly also has a significant impact on operating costs. When passengers are very concerned about their fares raising, building in long-term costs seems a wise approach.

While it is now clear that the electrification schemes that had been planned were undeliverable, the Railway Industry Association and others were convinced that, for now, electrification remained the optimal solution to train traction. The case for electrification is particularly strong on heavily used routes, balancing significant benefits to passengers with the wider environmental benefits and long-term cost efficiency. Our report called for electrification to be delivered through a long-term rolling programme in which the Department, Network Rail and the wider industry learn the lessons of earlier schemes and strive to reduce costs. Do not throw the baby out with the bath water.

A key driver of Government investment in the rail network is their commitment to reduce carbon emissions. In February 2018, the Government called on the industry to produce a vision for how it will decarbonise with an

initial response due in September last year. The Government response to our report confirmed that an industry taskforce, led by Malcolm Brown, is taking this forward. Have the Government received this taskforce’s report on how to decarbonise the rail system? If so, what does it say and what are the Government doing with it? David Clarke, technical director of the Railway Industry Association, has said that to achieve the Government’s aim of decarbonising UK railways by 2040,

“electrification must be one of the prime options for intensively used routes”.

The Government accepted our recommendation that it should engage with RIA’s electrification cost challenge initiative. The Department committed to producing a report on cost-effective electrification by this summer, but has said that it will remain agnostic about the best means of securing rail enhancement and that it does not expect proposals for new enhancement to begin with a predefined solution such as electrification. I am afraid it is clear that the Government have no plans for the future electrification of the railways.

I ask the Minister to update us on the Government’s work to produce a report with the industry on cost-effective electrification. When we conducted our inquiry, we heard that there was considerable interest in third-party-funded electrification schemes on the midland main line. We recommended that those proposals should be fully considered as an alternative to the proposed bi-mode solution.

The Government accepted our recommendation and said that they would fully consider

“Any proposals made to government or Network Rail about private sector solutions on the Midland Mainline that could provide benefits in addition to the passenger benefits that are being secured by the Government.”

What discussions have the Government had with third parties about proposals for electrifying the midland main line, and how will the improvements for passengers of the enhancements that will be going ahead compare with the improvements that would be delivered by electrification?

Some hon. Members present represent areas of the north covered by the transpennine route. The upgrade of that route is expected to include some electrification, but those enhancements have been considerably reduced since the then Chancellor announced in 2016 that the Government were

“giving the green light to High Speed 3 between Manchester and Leeds”.—[*Official Report*, 16 March 2016; Vol. 607, c. 961.]

There are serious concerns that the upgrade will not be fit for purpose for freight trains, and that because only part of the line will be electrified, the route will need bi-mode trains, which will build in higher operating costs for years to come. Are the current proposals for the transpennine route upgrade in line with the advice from Transport for the North? If not, why not? I note the letter to the Secretary of State for Transport from the operator of Humber, Mersey and Tees ports on 7 January, which says:

“It is of increasing concern that the Department for Transport and Network Rail are undervaluing our industry in the North and undermining the economic goal and objectives of the Northern Powerhouse; it will only make the productivity gap between the North and South of England even greater and devalues further the role of Transport for the North.”

[Lilian Greenwood]

It is concerning when the industry feels that the transpennine route upgrade, as it is currently considered, will lead “to an utter dependence upon the M62 for Transpennine freight traffic for at least another generation.”

We have talked about some of the problems experienced as a result of planned railway improvements in the past five years, which have triggered successive reviews of the planning and delivery of enhancements and led to a substantial change in the way future investment in the railways will be considered and delivered. The next five-year control period will focus on operations, maintenance and renewals, the volume of which will increase substantially, not least because of the number of renewals that have been postponed from the current control period.

Following those postponements, the greater focus on maintenance and renewals in control period 6, which starts in April, is necessary and welcome, but there are long-standing concerns in the industry that investment in renewals has been lumpy, stop-start and boom and bust. We have heard that the level of uncertainty about upcoming spending could have knock-on effects on the wider industry’s confidence to invest in its workforce, skills and innovation.

In our report, we called on the Government to work with Network Rail, the regulator and the industry to look at the ways in which investment could be smoothed out from the start of control period 6, throughout that period and beyond. The Government accepted that recommendation, so I ask the Minister, how has the Department worked with the industry to smooth out investment for the upcoming control period?

Instead of forming part of the five-year control periods for Network Rail investment, future enhancements of the rail network are now subject to a separate process. The new rail network enhancements pipeline is intended to support a continuous planning approach and move away from the overly rigid five-year cycle that was linked to railway control periods.

The Government have signalled that they expect more railway enhancements to be market-led proposals brought forward by third parties. We heard that there was likely to be interest from third parties in bringing forward such proposals, but it was not clear to us that Network Rail had the structures or culture in place to support such third parties to engage and participate in the planning, delivery, funding or financing of the railway.

**Daniel Zeichner** (Cambridge) (Lab): I echo the earlier comments of my colleague on the Transport Committee, the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman), about my hon. Friend’s skill in presenting her arguments and chairing the Committee. Does she share my concerns about the market-led proposals? In my part of the world, we have had some major proposals for east west rail, which has been promoted by the National Infrastructure Commission, but there is considerable confusion about whether that railway will be privately run, as the Secretary of State has suggested, or whether there is a plan B. I am not convinced that there is and I am interested in my hon. Friend’s views on that.

**Lilian Greenwood**: It is wonderful to see so many members of the Select Committee here. My hon. Friend raises an important point about what will happen if

market-led proposals do not provide the opportunities that the Department hopes. I will touch on that in a moment.

In November, the Government said that they had received 30 responses to their call for ideas for market-led proposals to enhance the railway, but that they could not make an announcement about individual schemes because the proposals had been submitted in confidence. How have those market-led proposals progressed since November, and do the Government expect any of them to be delivered, including the one referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner)?

There was significant support for moving enhancements planning away from the control period process, and we support the intention behind the rail network enhancements pipeline, which should ensure that the planning mistakes made over the past five years are not repeated. However, we also found a substantial risk that the rush to deliver poorly planned and scoped schemes in the current period could be replaced by a different problem—a slowdown or interregnum in new enhancement projects.

That is why we called on the Government to provide a clear set of strategic priorities for rail infrastructure investment in each region, and to outline the specific projects likely to be available for third-party investment. The Government refused to set priorities for each region, so I ask the Minister today to set out the Government’s priorities for rail enhancements over the next five years.

We were also concerned that the process outlined by the Government did not provide the reassurance and certainty on future investment that the rail industry is looking for. We said that more transparency about the enhancements pipeline and decision-making processes in the Department was needed. That is particularly true if the potential for a substantial increase in third-party investment is to be realised. The Government accepted that recommendation and said that they are

“committed to transparent policy making and intend to make clear public statements”

as investment decisions are taken at each stage of the pipeline. So far, however, we have seen no such statements.

The Railway Industry Association has said:

“The visibility of enhancements remains a major concern for rail suppliers. There is now a lack of an obvious enhancements pipeline, with no construction-ready schemes in the Rail Network Enhancements Pipeline...published in 2018.”

Last week, I asked the Department how many rail enhancement schemes were being considered as part of the rail network enhancements pipeline, and what stage each proposal was at. Again, the Minister told me that the Government

“are committed to transparent policy making”,

but failed to answer any points of my question. That means that, almost a year after it was set up, the Department has yet to reveal a single proposal being considered as part of the pipeline. We are none the wiser about what, if any, future enhancements the Department is considering, let alone planning.

In response to my question, the Minister also said:

“Network Rail...will continue to provide public updates on the progress of enhancements in the portfolio”,

but it is not clear at what stage of the pipeline proposals will enter the portfolio. Can the Minister confirm at what stage enhancements will be included in Network

Rail's enhancements delivery plan? It seems to me that it is only those that have reached the delivery section of the pipeline that will be exposed in that way, and we will not know what is in the development and design parts. Will there be any transparency of proposals before the decision to deliver them?

Although the Government have accepted a number of our recommendations, as I have outlined, their response to our report was disappointing in several regards. It seemed to show an unwillingness to engage with some of our key conclusions and recommendations.

The Association for Consultancy and Engineering agreed with our assessment of the Government's response, telling us that the Government had

"failed to meaningfully engage with the expertise provided by industry, and the practical recommendations outlined in the report".

It told us:

"As evidence gives, it was disheartening for ACE to see the DfT and the ORR"—

that is, the Office of Rail and Road—

"pay such little attention to the solutions proposed by the committee, including dismissing some of them outright."

I have asked the Minister to respond today on some of the points where we felt that the Government's response to our report was less than satisfactory. I hope that he will take the opportunity to expand on the Government's response, for the benefit of both this House and those in the rail industry who were as frustrated as we were by the Government's response.

To conclude, although our report welcomed much about the Government's—

**Graham Stringer:** My hon. Friend is being very generous in giving way as she draws to her conclusion. She has already mentioned the fact that it took four months from the decision to cancel the electrification to a written statement to the House on the last day before the summer recess. The previous Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Derbyshire Dales (Sir Patrick McLoughlin), assured the Committee that there would be no change in the investment plans when the Office for National Statistics had changed the designation of Network Rail's public status so that it became part of the public expenditure. However, that has driven many of the cuts in the future investment programme.

Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government have not only failed to respond positively to our recommendations but failed to play a straight bat, in not presenting information to the Committee that would have enabled us to carry through properly our job of scrutinising the Department?

**Lilian Greenwood:** My hon. Friend makes a very important point. I do not know whether the previous Secretary of State was really unaware of the implications of that change, but certainly our experience as a Committee is that we have not always had the candour that we would have wanted from the Department. That is disappointing when we are simply trying to do the job of scrutiny that this Committee was appointed to undertake on behalf of Parliament.

As I have said, we welcome much about the Government's approach to investment in the rail network. There is no argument about the importance of investment or about the fact that the Government are investing significant

sums, but the issue is how they have gone about investing and how they ensure that that investment provides good value for money and strategic thought about the long term.

We agree with the increased focus on renewals and we agree that decisions about railway enhancements should be taken out of the five-yearly control period process. However, there are still outstanding questions that were not addressed in the Government's response to our report. How will the Government meet their commitment to rebalancing the economy when it comes to investment in rail? How do they plan to decarbonise the railway network if they have completely ruled out electrification? What future enhancements to the railway network will emerge from the new rail network enhancements pipeline? I look forward to the Minister's update on all those points.

2.2 pm

**Priti Patel (Witham) (Con):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship this afternoon, Mr Evans. Out of courtesy, I must apologise to hon. Members in advance just in case—I emphasise "in case"—I need to leave before the conclusion of the debate, due to another commitment. I pay tribute to the Chair of the Transport Committee, the hon. Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood), for the case that she has just put, and to all other members of the Committee for their work on "Rail infrastructure investment". I have a copy of the report and have looked at it, and it is fair to say that it covers a wide range of issues, which the hon. Lady spoke about in her very good and detailed speech.

As the Minister will know, rail infrastructure is incredibly important, not only to my constituents in Witham but to the entire east of England region. I will start by paying tribute to him, because he has recently become the Rail Minister. I had the privilege of working with him previously, in his other incarnation in the Department for Transport, so it is great to see him back there. I thank him and his officials for giving me some time recently, to discuss not only some of the issues that I will raise today, but some of my concerns, as well as the developments that are taking place on the Great Eastern main line and some of the big investment opportunities that we would like to see for the region.

The Minister will know from our recent discussions about the work of the Great Eastern main line taskforce, which I currently chair and which is putting forward the case for strategic investment in rail infrastructure. Back in 2014 we submitted to the Government a business case for a package of investments—I have it here: "exhibit A"—which I have no doubt the Minister is fully versed in, because I know he has seen copies of it. This business case from 2014 discussed the potential to deliver over £4 billion of gross value added to the economy, to support thousands of new jobs, and to help meet the transport needs of the population and housing growth in the region.

Of course, this business case was put together in 2014 by all the Members of Parliament from Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk. It received a great deal of Government interest and time, with interest shown by the former Chancellor, the former Prime Minister and various Ministers, including the former Secretary of State for Transport, my right hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire Dales (Sir Patrick McLoughlin).



[Priti Patel]

As we have seen in the east of England, and are still seeing, there is so much opportunity for economic growth in our area, with lower housing costs than in other areas. We are on a commuter line and we are accommodating a greater number of commuters and families who travel to London, and not only in Essex but across the eastern region. We are very proud of that. Families choose to enjoy the enormous benefits of living in the villages of my constituency and elsewhere in the region, while being able to work in London as well. I have to say that that is because of the Government's wider investment in other sectors, including education—we have some amazing schools now—and quality of life is obviously a key feature too.

Of course, Essex and the east of England are fast-growing parts of the country, and they are strategically placed to deliver new jobs and economic growth. Look at what we have going on. We have world-leading businesses and centres of innovation: the Essex knowledge gateway, the University of East Anglia, Essex University and Cambridge University. They are all great hubs of intellect, innovation, jobs, economic growth and entrepreneurship. We have a diverse range of businesses, such as financial services, logistics, manufacturing, construction, modern bio-tech and science. We also have key international transport hubs, as my hon. Friend the Minister is well aware, including the key ports in London Gateway, Tilbury, Harwich and Felixstowe, and our airports at Stansted and Southend.

In Essex we have great business voices, which were instrumental in making the case for investment in our rail back in 2014. They include the Essex chamber of commerce, which made the business case, outlined the GVA of rail investment, combined the numbers and showed the economic growth that we can deliver outside London, and the new opportunities that will come our way. The Essex economy is already touching £40 billion in GVA, and obviously since 2010 the number of entrepreneurs has risen and we see business growth getting stronger and stronger. I see how much our businesses are already doing, and the jobs and prosperity they create. I am incredibly proud to see the enterprising spirit they have shown. Like me, they look forward to a future in which we can continue to build upon their contributions. They have a positive outlook for the future, not only for Essex but for the whole region.

We know that one of the key factors for growth is strategic investment in our roads and, in particular, our rail, so that we continue to grow and secure long-term investment. Of course, such investment means work on key roads and economic corridors, such as the A12 widening scheme and the dualling of the A120, but it also means investing in our rail network. Our rail network across the east of England has suffered from severe under-investment for many years. The Chair of the Transport Committee made some very important points today. She spoke about regional disparity with regard to the north of England, but of course my taskforce in the east of England has demonstrated that even notional calculations of regional finance mask regional disparities. Commuters on the Great Eastern main line, and particularly Greater Anglia commuters, are net contributors to the Treasury through their rail fares. Of course we want to see some of that money coming back out.

The Select Committee's report quite rightly raised the whole issue of rebalancing rail investment to ensure that it is spread across the country, which I have consistently pushed for. I agree that we need to invest more widely and look at ways to support schemes in the regions and economic centres. Of course, our whole economy needs to become much more efficient, and investing in rail infrastructure across the country will help to deliver that.

However, I emphasise to the Minister that although it seems on paper that investment has been skewed towards London, partly because of the high cost of Crossrail, it is also important that we see a rebalancing exercise that does not come at the expense of excluding investment opportunities that would deliver high levels of value for money and help to drive billions of pounds back into the whole of the UK economy. Of course, we are set to benefit from approximately £2.2 billion of investment through the control period 6 process, but I stress that that investment is to cover maintenance, operations and renewal.

Paragraph 80 of the excellent report, on page 28, focuses on the historic lumpiness of renewals investment. Investment that covers maintenance, renewals, and so on goes to patch things up, and the graph on page 28 shows that the lumpiness of expenditure goes across the various control periods. We want to ensure a consistent level of investment that covers maintenance, so that we are not simply patching things up. It is a welcome commitment. From our perspective, the new refurbishment—new trains, funds for renewal, and repairs to bridges, embankments and signalling to deal with level crossings—will of course be beneficial. However, that is no substitute for a clear strategy of strategic investments in new infrastructure so that we can have a high-performing railway to support our region. That is the right thing, and it is what our commuters all want.

**Daniel Zeichner:** The right hon. Lady is making an excellent contribution on behalf of the east of England. I wonder whether she agrees that there are significant possibilities for bringing forward digitalisation of the railways. I am told that a huge amount could be done through digitalisation to better address capacity constraints, and that a relatively modest investment in global terms could be transformational in the east. My concern is that, looking ahead over these very long periods, we may well find that technology has moved much more quickly and we have not taken best advantage of those technological changes. Does the right hon. Lady share that concern?

**Priti Patel:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. I was planning to touch on the significance of digital railway. I mentioned efficiency, and the whole point is how we can use new technology to drive efficiency. Everything is part of a process, and new technology can trump things that have previously gone on. There are also new opportunities for digital signalling. For example, on the Great Eastern main line we are working with the Department for Transport and the Minister to continue to make the case for digital signalling, and part of the case that the GEML taskforce is putting forward is compelling. I know that the Minister is looking forward to receiving the business case that we are currently working on. In previous discussions and meetings he

has heard me speak about the pipeline business case that we are working on, and how we will build on the 2014 business case and enhance the numbers, the financials and the key programmes that we should be putting in place. We will revise that business case based on the latest figures for growth, the economy and business, and we will demonstrate that investing in rail in the east of England will help the Government to reach their ambitious targets, not just for housing but for economic growth and regeneration.

Those projects are going to be vast. They will include the introduction of a passing loop in the vicinity of Witham town, right through the heart of the Witham constituency; the redoubling of Haughley junction; improvements to the Trowse swing bridge; re-signalling south of Chelmsford; and improvements to Liverpool Street station. Combined, those investments will increase capacity on the network and—importantly for rail users in my constituency—reduce delays. Through the new franchise to 2025, we will benefit from a new fleet of rolling stock, and the first of those trains are due to enter service very soon. We want to make sure that when they come in we do not have disruption and can get the benefits of efficiencies. Over £1 billion of new investment has been secured following the recommendations of the GEML taskforce, which were actioned by the Government. Of course, we want that infrastructure to complement new trains and maximise the benefits, as well as include those key infrastructure projects.

As the hon. Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) has said, service improvements on the Great Eastern main line can be delivered through digital railway technology, along with the long-awaited development of Beaulieu Park railway station—Chelmsford parkway, as some call it—with three or four tracks and platforms to facilitate future growth in service opportunities. MPs, councils, businesses and commuters across the region are united behind that vision for rail service across the east of England, and I hope that the Minister and the Department will continue to work with us and back us, working with friends in the Treasury, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to get that vision fully funded. It is about having an integrated approach across Government to delivering improvement in our rail service and our network, which matters when it comes to wider Government funding.

The Transport Committee's report comments on the investment process and the enhancement pipeline, which was announced last year and which the hon. Member for Nottingham South spoke about. When the Minister replies, I hope that he will talk about how those schemes can go through that pipeline so that we can be efficient in getting the right kinds of decisions.

I will touch on a few other points very quickly. One—this will also interest the hon. Member for Cambridge—is investing in rail more widely in the region that covers Stansted. Stansted is the third busiest airport by passenger numbers in the country, and the second largest by freight. It has capacity for more flights, and given the capacity issues at Heathrow, we should be encouraging more travel to other airports. Of course, connectivity through the rail link from Stansted to London and further is a major barrier to growth, and our former colleague, the right hon. Sir Alan Haselhurst—now Lord Haselhurst, following his ascension to the

other place—is working on proposals to improve connectivity through the West Anglia Taskforce. I commend his work on the issue. We often talk about Crossrail 2 presenting an opportunity for connectivity in that part of the eastern region, and I would like the Minister to provide any updates he can in his concluding remarks.

I thank the Chair of the Transport Committee for the opportunity to speak today off the back of the Committee's excellent report. I also praise the Minister for his attention to rail, obviously from an east of England point of view. I ask him to bring together all the levers of Government—not just those in his Department—to catalyse funding across other Government Departments in order to unlock economic growth and opportunity across the regions of our country, so that we can use our rail much more strategically. Rail investments have been a catalyst for economic growth.

2.17 pm

**Ruth Cadbury** (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Evans. I am a new member of the Select Committee on Transport, and did not serve on that Committee while this inquiry was under way; nevertheless, it raises a number of points that I want to speak about. I am also pleased to have been able to join the Transport Committee, particularly under the chairmanship of my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood). I have found her to be supportive, enthusiastic and knowledgeable, and she has made me feel welcome in that Committee in the few weeks that I have been a member, as have the Committee's other members.

Many people in this country are dependent on rail services, and when there are problems, our constituents really tell us about them. Rail travel is essential for those who are unable to drive or do not own a car for whatever reason, and for people such as me who are dependent on rail for their commute to work and for whom there is no alternative, especially when car commuting would take much longer or be too costly. Since the advent of mobile technology, the train journey means more productive working time for those required to travel long distances, or even for me on my half-hour rail commute, than driving does. One can also use the journey as an opportunity to catch up on sleep—another option that is not available when one is driving. Then, there are tourists: UK and overseas residents letting the train take the strain. For all those people and many more, good train services really matter.

It is not just about the quality of services; it is about price. The real cost of rail travel continues to rise year on year. The real cost of driving has flatlined or even fallen, but UK commuters are paying about 17% of their average wage for their season ticket—by far the highest in Europe—and the cost of rail travel continues to rise.

Rail services that are reliable, convenient, fast over long distances, affordable, comfortable and safe benefit not only passengers but the places they link up, providing more business investment, more residents—particularly in areas of declining population—and, in many places, more tourist spend.

More people travelling by rail reduces the number of cars on the roads. That then reduces congestion and associated air pollution. Walking or cycling to a station

[Ruth Cadbury]

improves a person's health, and they may be more likely to spend money during that short journey than if they were driving their own private car. Rail improvement, and investment in rail, benefits people and places.

As a London MP, I concur with colleagues' anger at the disparity between transport infrastructure investment in London and in the other regions of the country. Why does that disparity exist? I accept that the way that the calculations are done exacerbates the inequality, but frankly that is a tool of a lack of policy. The disparity is a reaction to what always happens in mature economies when there is no effective regional economic policy: the inevitable growth of population and jobs in the largest city.

The main justification for investment in Crossrail, and the longer trains and platform extensions in other rail services in and around London, is that it is a reaction to population growth in and around London. Any economist will say that unless a country has an effective, long-term regional policy, there will be an increasing suck of investment and people towards the capital.

Against that, in some outlying areas in further regions—particularly, as a colleague said yesterday in Prime Minister's questions, in the north-east—there are some ex-colliery towns where houses are lying empty. An effective regional policy would address that imbalance, which disadvantages both types of area.

The lack of regional policy, and continuous sucking into London of people and investment without any rebalancing, means that in the capital housing is overcrowded and prices are exorbitant—way beyond our children's ability to rent, let alone buy their own homes. Of course, there is also overcrowding in our transport system.

**Graham Stringer:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend, as a London-based MP, for her support for a sane, sensible and fair regional policy. Does she agree that not only is the unfairness a factor, but that repeated investment in London to solve transport problems is counterproductive? Investment in transport has an economic effect: it creates more jobs, more people and more pressure on housing. Investing in that way is therefore effectively investing in future congestion.

**Ruth Cadbury:** I absolutely agree. That is the other side of the coin, and it can be addressed only by a proper, serious regional policy. Since 2010, the Government have moved far away from the regional policies that we had, completely decimating the regional economic development boards, and so forth.

The only nod to a regional policy that we have had in recent years is the northern powerhouse. I have heard again and again what a token gesture the northern powerhouse has been. Even the original promises have gradually been whittled away. We have nothing more than tokenism on regional policy in this country at the moment. As the Transport Committee Chair said in the report, regional transport authorities say that

"systems of scheme appraisal currently work against regions".

In a sense, the state is exacerbating the natural pressure that always occurs without any sort of state intervention.

Market-led proposals are inadequate to deliver new projects—we see that failure around Heathrow airport. The roads around Heathrow airport, and I do not just mean in west London, but across the Thames valley, Buckinghamshire, from Surrey almost to Hertfordshire, and in the whole sub-region surrounding Heathrow airport, have some of the worst traffic in the world. The roads are dangerously overcrowded, with levels of pollution that are illegal, because we increasingly recognise air pollution as a serious health hazard. It is an economic brake on not only businesses that service Heathrow airport but the wider west London and Thames valley region. Unnecessary congestion helps no one.

In 2001, the planning inspector for the Heathrow terminal 5 inquiry said that additional rail capacity was needed. Subsequently, in the run-up to the investigation into whether there was a justification for runway 3 at Heathrow, the national policy statement said that expansion would require 50% of passengers to use public transport by 2030, rising to 55% by 2040, and 25% fewer staff car trips to work by 2030, rising to 50% fewer by 2040.

The airport policy statement said that the Government expected Heathrow to meet its public pledge to have "no greater" airport-related road traffic. Of course, since then Heathrow airport has said that it wants to double its amount of cargo traffic, yet it has not provided any explanation. If that is not additional pressure on already dangerously overcrowded motorways down to local roads I do not know what is.

Heathrow airport has made it clear that it will not fund additional rail infrastructure, except for possibly a platform or something. Network Rail says:

"Existing connectivity to Heathrow Airport from the south is currently poor, with most people choosing to drive or get a taxi."

When we were dealing with the implications of a fifth terminal when I was on Hounslow Council we looked, with a range of economic organisations around Heathrow and local authorities, at a scheme to bring in rail from the south and south-west called Airtrack. Meanwhile, colleagues to the west of Heathrow, particularly in Reading, Slough and so on, were looking at a new western rail extension, with the support of the Department for Transport.

Certainly the link from the west was going well, and was a stage ahead of the southern rail access, but last year or the year before everything ground to a halt as the Department for Transport announced that it wanted to let the private sector lead. As the Transport Committee has said, that has just not delivered. We have had a six-month or a year's hiatus on the rail infrastructure that is needed in and around Heathrow, yet nothing is happening because the private sector—quite understandably—expects the Government to direct those new roads.

Now, the Government are not going to pay for it, and Heathrow is not going to pay for it. Who is, apart from the businesses and people who depend on a smooth-running road system—and the passengers, of course, who will miss their planes because they are stuck in traffic jams? Before the Minister says, "Oh, stop worrying—we are getting Crossrail and HS2 and so on," let me remind him that Crossrail and the improvements on the Piccadilly line are to deal with existing transport pressures and the existing population increase in west London and the Thames valley. In terms of runway 3, the modal shift of



Heathrow passengers on to existing and imminent transport methods will actually be very small. The Minister will know that if he has looked at the documents that were considered by the Transport Committee in its inquiry on the airports national policy statement. We are in a complete mess with rail investment in and around Heathrow, notwithstanding the fact that expansion at Heathrow—as, again, the Department for Transport's own reports say—actually damages other regions' connectivity with international destinations and their businesses and customers.

I want to move on briefly to my concern about the Department for Transport's interference in transport in London. As anybody knows, and as most other major competitive cities do, a very large conurbation needs to be able to link up public transport, walking and cycling under a single management. I think the Government recognise that. Several Mayors, including the Mayor of the Greater Manchester region and others, have said that there should be greater devolution and control over rail policy, and so has every Mayor of London. But in London, and London alone, the Transport Secretary has openly said that he would block devolution of rail policy purely because he did not want a Labour Mayor to have control over it. He implied that if there were another Conservative Mayor after the first Conservative Mayor of London, he might have considered handing over rail responsibilities, but he was not prepared to do so. That blocking of devolution was so shocking that even the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill) said that the Transport Secretary was not fit to hold office. We have real concerns that where there are opportunities to use imaginative forms of additional investment in rail in London, that option is currently blocked to London and Londoners, and to London's economy and that of the wider area.

I have touched on regional policy and the particular situation in London and at Heathrow. In my view, transport policy, of which rail is a part, should be a servant, not a driver, of other policies. I may be going beyond the remit of the report today, but it strikes me that we cannot discuss regional imbalance in rail infrastructure, or whether the decision making is at a local or national level, or whether the cost falls on the private sector investor or the passenger, without addressing the overarching issue of Government investment in the transport infrastructure, and rail in particular.

Is the funding from Government for such an important driver of the national economy and the environment enough, or even comparable with other equivalent economies? I suspect it is not, and I definitely think it is not enough. Are passengers paying too much of the cost of running rail? I believe they are. An efficient, affordable, reliable rail service drives economic growth and regeneration, cuts carbon and pollution emissions and enhances the international image of a country.

2.34 pm

**Judith Cummins** (Bradford South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Evans. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood) on securing this debate through the Liaison Committee. I also congratulate her and the whole of the Transport Committee on the excellent report that we are considering today. I intend to focus my remarks on section 3 of that report, which concerns

regional disparities in rail investment and their effect on economic rebalancing. I will also touch on the section relating to the next rail investment control period.

It has been a bad year for our railways in many respects. Along with other hon. Members, I recently took part in a debate on rail services in Yorkshire. The unanimous conclusion of those who took part in that debate was that passengers had been badly let down in recent months. Of course, a large part of that disruption was due to the timetable change introduced last May, but I am also convinced that historic and continuing under-investment in our regional railway infrastructure is a major cause of passenger dissatisfaction.

The report makes it clear that regions outside London and the south-east have not received a fair share of rail investment for years. That is especially true across the north of England. There has been persistent, long-standing underfunding of transport infrastructure in our region, which figures from IPPR North repeatedly show. Over the past few years, London has seen a £326 per-person increase in public spending, while the north has seen an increase of less than half the size—of just £146. Transport spending per person remains approximately twice as high in London as in the north, as it has been for the past decade. There are also significant disparities within the north. Last year, the north-west saw an average increase of £158 per person in transport spending, and yet spending in Yorkshire and the Humber fell by £18 per person—more than any other region.

As the report shows, this historic unfairness is set to continue. Analysis of the infrastructure and construction pipeline shows a stark gap between London and the rest of the country. In future spending, £1,900 per person is planned in London from 2017 onwards, compared with £400 per person in the north. The Secretary of State has attempted to brush aside that analysis, but it is clear that significant disparities are set to continue unless decisive Government action is taken.

The report also correctly describes why this regional funding gap persists. The current transport scheme appraisal method used by the Department for Transport and the Treasury will always favour London, as it prioritises congestion reduction and journey-time savings. That approach actively disadvantages less economically buoyant regions, and it must change.

I cautiously welcome the Government's rebalancing toolkit, but it is nowhere near enough. It is also disappointing that the Government have not listened to calls to make the toolkit mandatory. Regional rebalancing must not be an optional extra, but should be at the heart of any transport investment decision making. For that to happen, the Government must commit to wholly revising the way that rail investment decisions are made. I urge the Minister to work with colleagues in the Treasury to revise the investment decision-making process so that places that have had a legacy of under-investment are treated more fairly in the future, which means putting economic regeneration and regional rebalancing front and centre.

As the Committees argue elsewhere in the report, past difficulties in delivering infrastructure projects must not discourage future investment. Areas that have seen a legacy of under-investment urgently need the projects to go ahead, so as we look to the next control period, the Government must make investing in regional rail infrastructure a priority.

[Judith Cummins]

I turn to Northern Powerhouse Rail. Bradford, like other towns and cities across the north, urgently needs that high-speed rail link to meet growing demand and to fulfil our economic potential, and investment in NPR should include a Bradford stop in the city centre, where the benefits will be felt by the greatest number of people. The Minister may recall from our conversation his supportive disposition to a Bradford stop on the NPR line. I must re-emphasise in the strongest possible terms the importance of that being a city centre station. The city of Bradford's rail connections already operate under the disjointed legacy of two stations; adding a third station outside the city centre risks repeating the mistakes of the past. To be plain, a parkway station for the NPR outside the city centre would deliver neither the connectivity nor the economic regeneration that the city needs. It would represent an enormous missed opportunity. Independent research indicates that a Bradford city centre station would cut journey times and increase capacity. More importantly, it would add £15.5 billion to the north's economy and generate an additional 15,000 full-time jobs across the Leeds city region.

NPR is the future we need, but more must be done right now to improve the punctuality and reliability of existing services and to banish outdated rolling stock. In West Yorkshire the public performance measure for rail operators, which combines figures for punctuality and reliability as a single measure, paints a depressing picture of almost universal decline in 2018-19, compared with the previous year. Performance on the Calder Valley line, which has a station stop in my constituency, was significantly worse than the year before. In some months, performance was almost 30% worse.

The train operator Northern recently admitted that it has not yet begun withdrawing the despised Pacer trains, which helps to illustrate the point further. As everybody knows, they are basically a 1980s bus body on rails. The firm blamed last year's delays on electrification work, which contributed to the timetable and service chaos in May 2018. That is simply not good enough for my constituents or for businesses based in my constituency of Bradford South.

The Transport Committee's report must be a wake-up call to the Government. We need action to rebalance our economy, boost our regions and give places such as Bradford the transport infrastructure that is fit for the next century.

2.41 pm

**Jim McMahon** (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Evans. I congratulate the chair of the Transport Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood), on its detailed report and on the hard work that she puts into that brief. She is what we call in Greater Manchester a grafter—where I come from, there is no higher praise than that.

Transport is really important but does not act in isolation. There is an ecosystem that supports the society, community and local economy. It has been well trailed, but we have not seen any meaningful action on even beginning to address the regional imbalances in investment that have been well rehearsed in this place. It would be

good to hear from the Minister about the practical steps being taken to invest outside London and the south-east.

We are told by the Library that overall investment in transport in London over the past five years was £33.4 billion, taking 27.6% of total transport investment. In the north-west it was £11.1 billion, taking 9.2% of the total; in the north-east it was £3.3 billion, or 2.7% of the overall transport spend. Looking specifically at rail, the gap becomes even wider. London gets 42.8% of rail investment, the north-west 9.4% and the north-east just 2%. How can that be justified, even with the difference in population? Given that the regions outside London and the south-east are seriously disadvantaged by Government investment, are we surprised that they are not realising their full potential?

The Library briefing makes it clear that the figures for the north-west and the midlands are temporarily inflated due to some of the early work on HS2. Geographical work tied to a region has been included, but the wider cost of HS2 has been pulled out of the figures, so it appears that the north-west and the midlands receive more through that project than they actually do. London is getting about half of the transport spend. How can that be right or fair, and how can it deliver a balanced UK economy in which every community can thrive?

I know Members here today are aware that there is a world of difference between our big cities and their surrounding towns. There are even bigger differences between the towns and the villages and districts. When we look at the transport ecosystem, it is really important that we are not just discounting. London is a benchmark and we discount for the cities, towns and communities, which means that most people in this country are poorly served by a transport system that does not work in the way it ought to.

We are not calling for any more or less than our fair share. I do not mind if London continues to receive the money that it has received for generations. I am not resentful if the forward view means that that continues, but I demand the same for my community. If the money can be found for London, it ought to be found for the north-west region, too—no more, but certainly no less.

We have heard about the cancellation of the electrification project in July 2017, when it was described as no longer affordable. We have seen timetable cancellations: there were a staggering 470 cancellations every single day in the summer of 2018. The Office of Rail and Road's review concluded that that was partly due to the lack of clarity on who was responsible for what. There was mass confusion in the industry, and the Transport Secretary's response was simply, "Well, I don't run the trains." If we have a Transport Secretary who refuses to acknowledge his own role in running the trains in this country and to have political accountability for that, it is little wonder that the operators get away with what they are doing. There is just no accountability, which for my community means that Northern continues to provide a completely sub-standard service on a daily basis. It not only botched the introduction of the new timetable; but is in constant disputes with staff who are at their wits' end with the management and the way they are being treated.

The latest action is on whether carriages should have guards. People in Greater Manchester might think, "Well, even if there are no guards, we just hope there are

some carriages”, because 11% of train journeys are shorted, which means that they do not have enough carriages to meet the demand from commuters. Some 5,500 journeys did not have the capacity to meet passenger demand. What is the answer? In the north-west, we have been sent trains that even the Iranian Government have decided are not fit for purpose. We have been sent more Pacer trains—from the north-east to the north-west—to make up for the fact that we have passengers who wait on platforms, without enough carriages to service them, in order to get to work and get their children to school. How can that be right? The trains were built in the 1980s and were always intended to have a shelf-life of about 20 years. They were a pragmatic and affordable way to get new stock on the lines, but they were never intended to be on the lines nearly 30 years on. That just cannot be right.

Passengers face a 3.1% increase in fares—the largest increase over the past six years—while shareholders continue to profit from a sub-standard service. We know that the Conservatives do not believe in nationalisation. Well, they do—provided it is another nation that runs our trains. Deutsche Bank, which owns and operates the trains in the north-west of England and serves Greater Manchester, is not providing an adequate service; it is making profit from that contract. Where is the accountability? We have a Transport Secretary who says, “It’s nothing to do with me, gov.” We have an operator that is taking money and creaming off the top while services are not running on time. They do not run at all in some cases—when they do turn up, often it is not possible to get on because there are not enough carriages. If the operator gets its way, pretty soon there will be no guards on carriages, and people will not feel safe. The Mayor of Greater Manchester has made it very clear that that is just not on, and he would not be comfortable with that. The truth is that it is a very raw deal.

I will talk about the wider transport ecosystem. We need to bear in mind that it is not just rail that has been hit by poor service. When the Pacer trains were brought in for their 20-year life—nearly 30 years ago now—bus travel was commonplace. It still is, but there are now 140 million fewer bus journeys in Greater Manchester than there were 30 years ago. That is a 40% decline in bus use in Greater Manchester. Why? Because there are 40 operators in Greater Manchester—we are desperately trying to get franchising off the ground, but the Government are not providing the investment required to get through the legal process and produce the business case—all with different ticketing systems, and all deciding where they are willing to operate.

Oxford Road—the university corridor in Greater Manchester—is one of the busiest bus routes in Europe, and one of the cheapest. One of the most affluent parts of Greater Manchester—the south—is the cheapest place to catch a bus. In the north, which is generally the poorer part, the fares can be 40% higher. Often the poorer a person is—depending on where they live and where the operators choose to operate from—the more they pay just to get to work. That, by the way, is if there is a bus that goes where they need to go at the time when they need to get there. Shift workers in Greater Manchester might as well give up on the buses, because they cannot get to most big employment sites, such as Manchester airport or Trafford Park, to meet shift-work patterns.

The ecosystem has been completely torn apart. Operators pick and choose what they are willing to do, the taxpayer is desperately trying to plug the gap but it is nowhere near enough, and the number of bus journeys is falling. Year after year, we see subsidised routes taken away because the money does not stretch far enough, and the same is happening with rail.

It is a raw deal for taxpayers, passengers and, critically—this is really important when we are talking about a future Britain beyond Brexit—the future of our economy. After Brexit, the country will be hugely vulnerable to the danger of financial services and the insurance market deciding to relocate and basing themselves elsewhere in Europe. That will expose how lazy this country has been in addressing the underperformance in our regions. We have relied on the City of London to keep the UK economy going, and that has allowed us to ignore the hollowing out of the economies in the regions. Transport is a key part of that. We know that investment in transport leads to growth and jobs and creates a more vibrant economy. People live better lives and can access job opportunities that they might not have been able to access previously. We need more action and Government spending.

There are different views on HS2. I am a supporter, partly because it is investment in the north, so why would we not support it? However, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury is already issuing calls for a zero-sum review of capital spend projects such as HS2. I put this down as a marker: the Government may believe that, because it is not in London or the south-east, it is an easy target to be deleted, but we are watching it very carefully. It is critical that we ensure that the UK can perform to its full potential. The routes and investment beyond HS2 to ensure that the north of England is connected are absolutely critical, too.

**Lilian Greenwood:** I wholeheartedly endorse my hon. Friend’s concerns about future investment in HS2. There are good reasons to be concerned. When the transpennine route upgrade was firmly committed to in 2015, the DFT promised that, when the work was finished, the whole route from Liverpool to Newcastle, via Manchester, Leeds and York, would be fully electrified. The recent letter from Transport for the North’s chief executive board members reported that the DFT’s plans leave a crucial part of that route unelectrified—a gap of 18 miles in the 183-mile route. Does my hon. Friend agree that the failure to electrify that 10% will mean worse reliability and higher operating costs in the north for years to come?

**Jim McMahon:** I generally think that, with these types of capital project, once the decision to invest is made, the investment has to be seen through, because the full potential of the investment is only realised when it is done to the quality, standard and specification that was set out originally. When things are chipped away towards the end of a project, it is inevitable that the full advantage and economic return on the investment will not be realised, and the original investment will be compromised.

It is critical that the Government take a long-term view. There is far too much short-termism. They are looking to the next election, the next target seat and where their core vote is, rather than to what the structure



[*Jim McMahon*]

of our economy will be in the next 10, 20 or 30 years. Greater Manchester is trying to look ahead with its 2040 strategy, but it is very difficult to do that if it does not know what funding is coming down the pipeline. We can decide what is important for our regions, but the way the Government invest makes it very difficult for our regions to plan ahead and ensure they have a joined-up transport strategy. It also makes it very difficult for UK manufacturers and engineering companies to bid for that work and plan ahead, because they do not have a forward programme that they can organise and work towards. I speak to many manufacturers in my constituency. In Oldham, they have contracts with Transport for London and the German Government, but they say consistently that it is very difficult to get a contract with the UK Government. Part of the reason why the Elizabeth Tower is shrouded in steel from all over the world, apart from Britain, is that it is easier for other countries to get contracts from our Government.

**Priti Patel:** The hon. Gentleman is making a very strong case for investment and economic growth in the regions. I agree completely that this is about long-termism. The Minister obviously heard my comments earlier. Part of the reason why the Great Eastern main line taskforce has been pretty robust in our representations is that we have been working with businesses and local enterprise partnerships. We are giving businesses the opportunity to put the long-term case to the Government. Does the hon. Gentleman feel that other regions should replicate that?

**Jim McMahon:** I agree with that approach. It is important that we have an economic view and can demonstrate the wider economic advantage and growth. Transport for the North is working to that end, and has built very good partnerships. It generally has a good relationship with the Government, although there are constant demands for the Government to plan further ahead and be more committed to finding resources. That partnership approach is extremely important.

This has been a good debate. I welcome the Select Committee's report, because it is important that we shine a light on these issues. As a north-west MP, I thank the Committee members for this piece of work. MPs outside London will, for a period, continue to ask politely for our fair share. We have been doing that for quite a long time now, but the noise will get louder. If the Government are determined to look beyond Brexit and build a Britain that can thrive, they will have to put their hand in their pocket and ensure that every region in the UK gets its fair share.

2.57 pm

**Ronnie Cowan** (Inverclyde) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Evans, and to sum up the debate on behalf of the Scottish National party. At a momentous political time, such as we have experienced this week, it is easy to forget about the many Government portfolios that require attention and scrutiny. Brexit may be dominating the headlines and the levers of government, but it should not be used as an excuse to sweep all other policy issues under the rug. It has therefore been helpful to hear hon. Members' contributions, which I shall refer to throughout my speech.

A common theme in this debate, the Transport Committee's report and wider political reporting is a clear concern about the Department for Transport's handling of the rail network. The report highlights concerns about the boom and bust investment cycles, and the failure to give the industry sufficient confidence to invest in its workforce, skills and innovation. Other evidence gathered by the Committee cast doubt on the Rail Minister's understanding of how and where emerging technology, such as battery-powered trains, is being developed. Perhaps it is forgivable for a Minister not to have a comprehensive understanding of absolutely everything covered by their Department, but it will not reassure those asking serious questions of the Department for Transport and Network Rail.

[*ANDREW ROSINDELL in the Chair*]

Certainly, the headlines will not comfort the UK Government. With news outlets talking about meltdown, appalling services and chaos, it is clear that the rail network in England is failing at the most fundamental level. Of particular interest to me—this was mentioned throughout the debate—is the disparity in transport expenditure across the UK. Unsurprisingly, the Committee's report noted that there is a massive disparity between rail investment in London and other parts of England. Although we should consider the difficulties in accurately breaking down regional funding, we cannot ignore the problematic London-centric nature of funding in the UK. Figures from the House of Commons Library show that railway spending per capita in England was up to 10 times higher in London than in other English regions. If I were a resident of the east midlands or of Yorkshire, I would ask serious questions about the levels of funding in my area.

Transport bodies in London and the UK Government will attempt to rationalise—or even justify—those disparities, but the Department for Transport's introduction of a rebalancing toolkit is a clear acknowledgment of the problem. Thankfully, in Scotland we have the Scottish Government to act in our interests. It will come as no surprise that SNP MPs support the Scottish Government's call for Network Rail to be fully devolved. Research commissioned by Abellio in 2018 found that just 30% of people support the current arrangement, with a majority supporting the full devolution of Network Rail. I also welcome the proposals from Reform Scotland and the former Labour Transport Minister, Tom Harris, for Network Rail to be fully accountable to the Scottish Government. That is a common-sense approach.

I would argue that it is completely logical to devolve those powers fully, given the Scottish Government's existing transport responsibilities. That case has been repeatedly made to the UK Government and has been repeatedly ignored. Indeed, the Secretary of State for Transport said on record that he does not believe that “the Scottish Government are capable of overseeing it properly.”—[*Official Report*, 16 May 2018; Vol. 641, c. 291.]

That is certainly a bold claim in the light of his Department's well-documented failings.

Passengers can become frustrated when their rail service does not operate as expected. In Scotland, people often become angry at ScotRail and the Scottish Government for problems that arise from Network Rail's infrastructure—a UK Government responsibility—

and given the tangle of responsibilities between devolved and reserved matters, that is an understandable confusion. The devolution of Network Rail's activities in Scotland would therefore improve accountability and allow the Scottish Government to build on the action that has already been taken to improve services.

There has been significant Scottish Government investment in the ScotRail franchise for the benefit of rail users. There will be a 23% increase in seating capacity and more than 200 new services across Scotland by the end of 2019. The Scottish Government will continue to invest £1 billion in public transport every year. According to the latest figures, that support means ScotRail's performance measure has been higher than the UK average. Importantly, the Scottish Government will use powers from the Scotland Act 2016 to allow a public sector bid for all franchises in Scotland. The facilitation of such bids ensures that the Scottish National party will deliver what was promised: a robust public sector bid for the ScotRail franchise.

In closing, I believe that the Transport Committee's report should form part of a wider review of the rail network, and the SNP welcomes the long overdue acceptance by the UK Government that a review is necessary. The Department for Transport must commit to implementing any future recommendations. I hope that the Minister can assure me that the UK Government are serious about their decentralisation agenda. If they are, I would be grateful to him if he outlined what discussions he plans to have with his Scottish Government counterpart, particularly in the light of polling that shows widespread support for the devolution of Network Rail.

3.3 pm

**Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): The debate has been excellent. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood) and to all members of the Select Committee for the excellent work done to pull the report together. We all really value the detail that the report brings to the fore. I certainly concur with all that my hon. Friend and other hon. Members have said about how important it is to get our infrastructure right and for the governance of our rail structure to be in the right place.

Clearly, there are lots of question marks over the current system, and that was really brought to the fore as a result of control period 5, where costs ran away with themselves and we saw the rescheduling of work. In fact, £3 billion-worth of renewals—let alone enhancement programmes—will be pushed into the next control period. We clearly need better governance of our system.

As hon. Members will recall, it was most astounding when the Government cancelled crucial electrification programmes as Parliament rose for the summer recess of 2017. The Oxenholme to Windermere line subsequently had a heritage railway running on it that summer just so trains could travel to the Lake district at the peak of the season—a vital part of the tourism industry. The Kettering to Sheffield stretch—the midland main line—was subject to a de-electrification announcement. Other programmes were cancelled, such as the Cardiff to Swansea line—it is absolutely vital to Swansea's economy that power is put into those lines—and, of course, we have heard

much about the transpennine route, which has been further downgraded since, meaning a downgrade of a downgrade. The crucial part of that line, between Huddersfield and Stalybridge, will not see electrification. The route will therefore not be fit for future freight, which is vital; journey times will be compromised; and reliability will be downgraded. That is crucial, especially in the light of the pain people experienced last summer on those lines. I urge the Minister to complete the whole transpennine upgrade and control period 6 programme, as has been advised by Transport for the North. That will be a game-changer for the northern economy.

The only thing that has been guaranteed is more capacity in the rolling stock, but of course, with dirty diesel bi-mode trains. It is time that we moved to using cleaner forms of transport. The Transport Committee certainly drew out the importance of that, and of the whole electrification programme and the digital rail opportunities that it would bring, which my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) also highlighted.

We have seen the reality of where lumpy, boom-and-bust scheduling leads: additional costs to the rail industry. Skills and jobs have been lost as a result of those peaks and troughs in the way that rail work has been scheduled. The Railway Industry Association highlighted in particular that a 30% saving could be made if costs and the scheduling of work were smooth. That benefits passengers with regard to the price that they pay for travel, as my hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ruth Cadbury) brought to our attention. It is absolutely crucial, therefore, that lessons are learned and that there is a smoothing of scheduling as we move into control period 6. Our proposals for the railway would see a longer-term smoothing of scheduled work, which would fit in with the growth of the economy—as so many hon. Members have highlighted, our transport system interweaves with future economic opportunity.

We have heard about the inequality and the regional disparity across our network. If we are serious about communities outside London—the further north we head, the less spending there seems to be on our railway, which is reflected by the number of people who are able to use it—it is absolutely crucial that we get the rebalancing toolkit right, and that we ensure that it is mandatory and fully utilised, to the advantage of all communities across our country. The northern powerhouse and the links between Leeds, Manchester and Sheffield present a real opportunity to boost the economy of the north, and everything that will swing from that would be such an improvement of people's lives and social mobility, which is why we want proper rebalancing as we move forward. Hon. Members have drawn attention to that, not least my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham West and Royton (Jim McMahon) in his powerful contribution.

As we bring the programmes together, we need to ensure that we bring track and train together and move the silos of discussions into one integrated place, because not doing that and the changing of mind on programmes led to the catastrophic failure in the timetable that so many passengers faced in the summer. We have read the Glaister report on the impact of what happened, but we must learn lessons, and attitudes at the heart of Government must change. There must be greater accountability and the Secretary of State must take full responsibility as we move forward to enhance our railway system.

[*Rachael Maskell*]

I want to draw out one or two other points in the Select Committee report that are crucial as we look to the future of rail. First, we must ensure that we prioritise cleaner technologies in our rail enhancement programmes. We have real opportunities, but we are falling behind other nations. We must ensure that we put the environmental impact of our transport system at the heart of decision making. Transport accounts for 29% of carbon use in our country, so it will be the game-changer as we move towards ensuring a reduction in emissions. It is absolutely imperative that we have carbon budgeting across our transport system. That issue was raised in the report, but the Government response was dismissive, so it is crucial that we continue to press the issue.

Secondly, I am deeply concerned about the skills needed to deliver all that is contained within this excellent report. I ask the Chair of the Select Committee and the Minister to reflect on skills. Not only with Brexit, but with an ageing demographic across the rail industry workforce, we face real issues and challenges: we are on a cliff-edge of skills. I ask the Minister exactly what is being done to ensure that we have the opportunity to expand our railway, as we know we must.

We have heard this afternoon from hon. Members from across the regions. The opportunities for our railways are there to be grasped, whether it is putting in the full Crossrail programme for the north, or investment in the eastern region, as the right hon. Member for Witham (Priti Patel) highlighted, or making greater transport connections into Heathrow, or, although not represented today, implementing the peninsula programme in the south-west. We must ensure good connectivity, which is absolutely vital, and sustained investment work all joined together.

I think these are really exciting times for the future of rail, as we move forward. Certainly I look forward—it may be very soon—to my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough (Andy McDonald) becoming the next Secretary of State for Transport. We have spent so much time with the industry. We have done the work. We do know what is needed. We will radically change the way that our rail system operates, for the benefit of all those who use it.

I thank the Transport Committee once more for its work and its ongoing focus in holding the Government to account over the way that rail is advanced in our country. Governance is absolutely crucial if we are to ensure that we have value for money, deliver for passengers and ultimately have a system that makes our economy strong yet again.

3.13 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport**

**(Andrew Jones):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Rosindell. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood) for her work as Chair of the Transport Committee and for her work in producing this report. I also thank her and other members of the Committee for the broader work that they do. I look forward to working with all of them over the months ahead.

I echo the words the hon. Lady started with on the importance of the rail industry to the UK economy. The Government fully recognise the importance of our nation's infrastructure, and at its heart is our rail network.

That is why we are investing record levels of rail funding—around £48 billion in the next control period between 2019 and 2024—in modernising our railway and giving passengers the reliable and punctual services they deserve. Our investment in vital railway works is aimed at what will improve performance for passengers and ensure safety and reliability. The operation, maintenance and renewal of the railway will help ensure smooth operation of the network. Our investment across the country, such as the £2.9 billion transpennine route upgrade, which I will talk about later; the ambitious works at Derby to modernise and improve the points and track there, completed on schedule in October; and the wider commitments, including dedicated funding for further improvements for freight and accessibility in the next investment period—all demonstrate how we are meeting the needs of passengers and freight users on our network.

The hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ruth Cadbury) mentioned fares. I am happy to point out that we are in the sixth year of capping regulated fare rises in line with inflation, and we are introducing new railcards so that anyone up to the age of 30 will have access to discounted rail fares. Our franchises support the introduction of record levels of private investment in the railway, including brand-new trains across the network.

The Labour party talks regularly about how the benefits of nationalisation will be cost-free, but the benefits of privatisation have brought investment, and nothing is more obvious than the arrival of the new rolling stock. We will see 7,000 new carriages enter service on our network over the next couple of years. The hon. Member for Oldham West and Royton (Jim McMahon) mentioned Pacer trains, and they will go this year as part of the renewal of rolling stock. It is worth pointing out that the rail franchise that dominated the north, including his and my area, was let in 2004 and expired only in 2016, and it was a no-growth franchise.

**Rachael Maskell:** Will the Minister give way?

**Andrew Jones:** Let me make a little more progress and then I will give way.

**Rachael Maskell:** It is important.

**Andrew Jones:** All right. I am always generous in giving way.

**Rachael Maskell:** Yes, I will grant the Minister that. Does he not recognise that the private sector is not investing in rolling stock? It leases the rolling stock off companies and so the amount paid has a massive premium—about a third more, as found out by Merseyrail, which has now purchased its own rolling stock.

**Andrew Jones:** How individual operating companies wish to own and run their rolling stock is up to them, but the point is that private investment and the private sector, whether it pays for a lease or for ownership, is delivering, and the public sector did not, which is why we have the long-standing Pacer trains on our network. The no-growth franchise was a significant feature. I am sure that those who let that now think that that was a mistake, because of course we have had significant growth in the north and we are playing catch-up.

It is fair to say that we had a difficult year on our rail network in 2018, as many colleagues here have said. We all know that performance declined, never more so than



around the introduction of the timetable in May. But it is also fair to say that we have seen a doubling of passengers across our rail network over the past 20 or so years, which shows it is a ringing success, demonstrating the success of the public and private sectors working together to deliver significant and sustained improvement.

**Jim McMahon:** I accept that passenger numbers have increased, but the truth is that the summer delays and the autumn cancellations were not a surprise. The timetabling was agreed by Northern. It designed it, crafted it and failed to implement it properly. The delays in the autumn were down to autumnal weather, which obviously takes everybody by surprise. It is not as though it happens every year when leaves come off the trees and fall on tracks. The basic management is poor, and surely not fit for purpose.

**Andrew Jones:** We have had autumn leaves falling since time began, and whichever rail company has been operating—including nationalised ones—they have found them quite difficult to manage. To suggest that it is suddenly a bigger problem is a mistake.

**Priti Patel:** The Minister is incredibly generous in giving way, and I thank him. Delays are the scourge of commuters on the country's train network, and of course they all get upset when trains are cancelled or delayed. Is there more the Minister can do to hold franchisee companies to account, with respect to how they communicate with customers and give compensation to rail users?

**Andrew Jones:** My right hon. Friend makes a powerful point. She gave a powerful speech, which recognised how transport investment, alongside other investments, can drive an economy. The work that she and colleagues have done on producing a business case has been highly effective. She asked whether I would work with her and of course I will, as I will work with all colleagues, to maximise the benefits of the rail investment we are putting in. As to communication, rail companies can do more. We should be looking at all digital and other means of communicating with customers to keep them informed. There are mechanisms through the franchise agreement for keeping the companies accountable. However, I also regularly meet the Rail Delivery Group, and through those and other regular meetings, with individual operating companies, I have already highlighted the issue of communication with their customers. I will continue to do so, but my right hon. Friend is right that there must be improvement on that.

I was saying a few things about how our network has played a role in the increasing economic growth of the past few years, and how that combination of the public and private sectors, working together, has delivered improvement. That includes private sector skills driving investment for passengers and rail freight. However, that success has also resulted in challenges. We have been open about facing such challenges, including in our programme of infrastructure works in the current investment period, and in the rail structures we inherited. That was very clear and it is why we have taken action and changed our approach. The work of the Select Committee has been very helpful in that respect.

In March 2018 we published our new approach to rail enhancements, called the “Rail Network Enhancements Pipeline: A New Approach for Rail Enhancements”. We have a knack of creating very difficult-to-say acronyms. In September the Secretary of State announced that he had appointed Keith Williams, a respected industry figure. He has expertise in driving customer service excellence, and therefore he is incredibly valuable as we seek to reform the rail industry to become more passenger-focused, and to lead a root and branch review of the railway. The Government's new approach to enhancements has, as Members will be aware, been a key focus for the Transport Committee. The Williams review is a really exciting moment for our industry. The structures that we have had have helped to turn around decades of decline. We have gone from many years of decline to rapid growth. As many people now use the rail network as did in the 1920s—with all the challenges that come with that, which I shall come on to. The structure has helped to achieve the growth, but it is not clear to me that it will help us take things forward for the next stage. That is what Mr Williams has been asked to consider, and it is an interesting prospect.

The approach being taken learns lessons from CP5, responding to the recommendations of the Bowe review. It is quite profound. We are replacing a once-in-five-years plan with a rolling pipeline of investment, which was a key recommendation of the Committee. I can entirely see why both the review and the Committee made that recommendation. We will be able to respond flexibly to changes in circumstances, and emerging priorities. Unlike in CP5 where certainty—I know we have talked about it—often turned out to be frankly illusory, the supply chain can be confident that once we have made a decision we will stick to it. Those concerned will know exactly how far the commitment extends, for funding and delivery. I completely agree with the principle of transparency to help people plan accordingly. We shall be transparent about the progress of individual schemes as they move through the pipeline, and throughout the control period, but the point is that we are not simply making one announcement at the start of a cycle.

The RNEP has five stages, through which enhancement schemes move from concept to delivery, with increasing levels of detail and development required at each stage. We call them “determine”, “develop”, “design”, “deliver” and “deploy”. A theme runs through them, from “determine”, where the opportunity is identified, to “deliver”, where the solution is provided. Not all projects will progress through all the stages. Each stage is preceded by a decision point, where we will decide whether the scheme is ready to advance to the next stage, whether more work is needed, or whether there is a better way of achieving things. We commit to progress only to the next stage—not all the way to completion.

**Lilian Greenwood:** I completely understand the point that just because something enters the enhancements pipeline that does not mean it will reach the end. That depends on its progressing through the gateways. However, I should be grateful if the Minister set out clearly which parts of the enhancements pipeline will be transparent to the House and the wider industry. Will we know what things are in all the stages, or will we know only about the latter stages, once something has been committed to delivery? It would help us if we could be clear on that point.

**Andrew Jones:** My intention is that we should be as transparent as we can without giving a running commentary on schemes that also present challenges in the managing of expectation. I intend to be transparent about progress as they move through the pipeline—in the phrase I just used—and that suggests each stage of the process.

**Lilian Greenwood:** So is the Minister saying that when something moves from one stage of the pipeline to another, there will be an announcement to let us know?

**Andrew Jones:** Yes, exactly. What form it will take I do not know, but as schemes progress through, from “determine” to “develop” and so on, we will be transparent about it.

The objective is to secure value for the taxpayer by progressing schemes only when we have an appropriate understanding of how much they will cost, how long they will take, and the benefits that will be delivered. That is in great contrast to CP5, where that did not happen.

**Priti Patel:** As the Minister will know, the Great Eastern main line taskforce is currently working to that very pipeline, for the next business case. Funding will be incredibly important for any project that enters the pipeline. I want to ask the Minister something on which I have previously pressed the Secretary of State. Will there be an opportunity to look at cross-Government funding that covers, for example, money from other budgets, such as local government and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy? As the Minister knows, the GEML case made in 2014, which will be made again, looked across at the economic benefits of rail investment, and considered economic growth, too. That effectively means that we must look at new funding mechanisms that go across the Treasury, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, the Department for Transport and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, so that we bring the economic benefits that many colleagues have spoken about in the debate.

**Andrew Jones:** My right hon. Friend is as wise as ever. Once a Treasury Minister, always a Treasury Minister, I suspect. The point about bringing things together was, I think, at the heart of such things as the national productivity investment fund, which is about making sure we have, and control, the levers to drive economic productivity—productivity being at the heart of the UK’s future economic success. I see rail working alongside Departments to open up opportunity—commercial, residential, trade and so on. I see that future of collaboration as the way we will take forward some of our projects across the network.

**Daniel Zeichner:** In the interests of transparency, I am trying to understand the pipeline process. The Minister knows of the huge frustration in my region about the delays with the Ely junction. How do we find out where in the pipeline such a project stands now?

**Andrew Jones:** One simple way, of course, is to ask the Minister concerned. I will find out exactly where we are with the Ely junction and respond to the hon. Gentleman. Significant works are planned around Ely,

but there are a number of junctions around Ely—I have reviewed a map of them in the past few weeks—and I will need to remind myself specifically which one that might be.

Let me go back to the changes to CP6 from CP5, which create a direct contrast. I think it is fair to say that in CP5 we overcommitted to projects at too early a stage, meaning that later we had to change the scope or cancel altogether, increasing the uncertainty and the impact on the industry’s ability to plan for investment and delivery. The RNEP sets out the Secretary of State’s four priorities for rail enhancements across the country, and we will not progress any enhancement that cannot clearly demonstrate how it meets at least one of them. It is important that those priorities remain applicable to the whole country so that the network can be improved fairly and as a whole.

I welcome the fact that the Transport Committee’s report shared a similar approach to our own in promoting engagement with third-party proposals for rail schemes. On 20 March last year the Department published its guidance for market-led proposals and launched a call for ideas for the same. That call for ideas ran between 31 May and 31 July last year. We received 30 responses. DFT officials have assessed all of them and will now work with promoters to move their schemes forward, although I stress that they will still be market-led. We will be transparent about schemes as and when they progress into the pipeline.

The question was whether this has stalled. No, it has not. We certainly want to see new entrants into the market and ideas being brought forward. I am absolutely clear that not all ideas to drive forward our network will come from SW1—that would be silly.

**Lilian Greenwood:** I thank the Minister for confirming that 30 proposals were received by the Department. I know that he does not want to raise expectations or to give us too much information, but will he at least confirm how many of the proposals are being progressed? Of those 30, how many are the Department taking forward? When might we expect to hear more about which those are, and where in the country they might relate to?

**Andrew Jones:** I cannot remember off the top of my head. I looked at the schemes but cannot remember the answer. I will have to write to the hon. Lady with the details.

We spent a bit of time discussing electrification. The hon. Lady expressed some concern and asked whether we had ruled out electrification. Clearly the answer is no. Our railway infrastructure investment in CP6, however, is about securing positive outcomes, not necessarily specific outputs or inputs. We want to secure benefits for rail users and to do so in the best way possible, rather than simply building more railway for its own sake. Passengers expect high-quality rail services, and we are committed to electrification where it will deliver passenger benefits and value for money.

We will also take advantage of state-of-the-art new technology to improve journeys. The hon. Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) talked about digital rail. Certainly, technology has a role to play. It is one of the exciting opportunities in the sector. We are already progressing a number of digital rail schemes, using the

£450 million secured under the autumn statement 2016 to begin the roll-out of that vital technology. I agree with his points.

Our new approach is designed to provide the maximum possible certainty of investment and a sustainable pipeline for the supply chain. That will provide benefits balanced for the whole country. I met the Railway Industry Association and understand entirely its point about how unwelcome “boom and bust” is. One former Chancellor and Prime Minister talked about putting an end to boom and bust—I am not sure that he would use that phrase again—so I will be cautious in my language and instead say that we will smooth the pipeline of work so that the industry can plan appropriately—skill up and scale up.

However, I suggest that the industry should look at a £48 billion budget pipeline over the next five years and think, “Fantastic!” This Government are buying rail like no other Government in British history. We live in a bumper time for our railways, in terms of rolling stock investment, enhancements, new lines and maintenance. I would imagine—this is what we see—that a lot of people look at this and think, “I want to get some of the great work being done by the UK Government.”

Another aspect of technology to promote is how it can deliver outcomes. That includes the introduction of new bi-modal trains, which reduce disruption to passengers resulting from heavy infrastructure works. The new bi-modal trains are being delivered into service with Great Western, LNER and TransPennine, bringing modern traction technologies on to Britain’s railways.

We continue to promote the use of new technology across rail. Recent franchise competitions have included requirements for bidders to develop innovative solutions around rolling stock technology that will, among other things, reduce emissions on the network. I am keen to take forward the decarbonisation agenda, which the hon. Member for Nottingham South mentioned, and it remains an absolute priority. I will work with the industry and will publish that report—it cannot happen soon enough. I am talking about publication of the decarbonisation report and about working with different types of traction, such as hydrogen-powered trains, which I have read about. I look at the opportunities that they present to improve air quality radically, and I think, “We want some of that in the UK.” It will certainly be a priority.

**Lilian Greenwood:** The Minister is being characteristically generous in taking interventions. I welcome the news that the decarbonisation report will be published. Will he clarify whether he has received that report from Malcolm Brown, the former CEO of Angel Trains? Will the Minister tell us a little about what is in it, or when he will share that information with us?

**Andrew Jones:** We have received a further draft within the past few days. It is not the absolutely final version of the report, but I understand that we are very near it. I hope to read it, but I think that I should read it when it is finished, rather than in draft form—to be fair to Mr Brown. As soon as we have more information, I will keep the hon. Lady posted.

Regional spend has been a concern in this debate and more broadly. The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) kindly said that I was definitely listening—to confirm, I am definitely listening,

and definitely Yorkshire. The Government are clear that there should be a balance of rail investment across the whole network, to the benefit of the whole country. The Government and the Select Committee alike agree that capital spending in one part of the network can deliver benefits further afield.

I must stress, however, that the Department for Transport does not allocate funding on the basis of per head of population. Our railway is a network, with spending in a particular area benefiting users up and down the country.

**Jim McMahon:** Does the Minister agree that part of the problem with how schemes are assessed is that heavy consideration is given to economic return or gross value added? A mile of track in London will therefore always deliver more economic return than a mile of track in Manchester, Wales, Scotland or anywhere else, simply because of that economic assessment. Surely, to rebalance the UK, there has to be a levelling up in addition to that economic criterion.

**Andrew Jones:** I understand the hon. Gentleman’s point, and if that were the only consideration I can see how it could lead to inappropriate decisions, but that is not entirely the case. For example, the transpennine rail upgrade, which will be the biggest enhancement on our network over the next five years, would simply not be happening if we accepted his point. But I understand where he is coming from: we have to balance not only economic return and national efficiency, but the possible role in rebalancing our national geography. The lack of investment in some parts could easily be seen as a factor in economic performance.

Our decisions follow a rigorous and fair appraisal process that ensures spending goes to the projects and programmes where it is needed, delivering value for money for taxpayers and passengers. Sometimes that means that spending appears higher in some areas than in others. We cited various figures, but the numbers quoted are frequently from the IPPR. I have some reservations about the IPPR reporting, because it simply adds up future spending regardless of how far it extends. For example, its analysis includes 16 years of planned expenditure on HS2, where the most costly sections—because of land prices—are in London, but only five years of planned spending on maintenance for the other parts of our network. It includes locally funded spending by TfL, but not local, equivalently funded spending in other cities, which will result in a poor sample.

We look at data in a number of different ways. Investment in Birmingham, for example, could benefit users in Penzance, Edinburgh—anywhere across our network—and, of course, the west midlands. We look at two measures: where the investment is made and where the benefits will be felt. The numbers quoted so far on where spending is taking place largely have not taken into account where benefits are felt. However, spending figures going forward, as shown by the national infrastructure and construction pipeline, show that the Government expect to spend £248 per person in the north, compared with £236 in the south. There is an element of the phasing of schemes driving the individual spend in an area.

The rebalancing toolkit has been considered, which we have developed to support authors of strategic cases to assess how a programme or project fits with the



[Andrew Jones]

objective of spreading growth around the country. I was asked whether it is being used. It is being used in the development of the transpennine rail upgrades and the Northern Powerhouse Rail business cases. The rebalancing toolkit is designed to help with the basic planning. It includes a checklist of questions to consider and potential evidence that can be used to help describe the rebalancing case for a project or programme in its strategic case. It is an ingredient. Does it need to be used in every single case? Given the amount of money we spend and the amount of time it takes us to plan our projects, I do not think it should be mandatory everywhere, but certainly it is an ingredient in making the right decisions. The toolkit's objective is to make decision making more consistent by improving the focus, quality and transparency of the rebalancing evidence in the business case.

Let me answer some questions asked by colleagues. The transpennine rail upgrade offers the fantastic prospect of the north being the centrepiece of the next spending period. It is a £2.9 billion first phase of a scheme. Electrification will be a part of the proposals. It is phased to deliver the best benefits to passengers over the period. Freight will most certainly be considered; that is why we are also taking forward options for the development of the Skipton to Colne reconnection. It should be viewed as a phased activity.

The advice we have received from Network Rail is that if we spend any more money on that network during this period, with the amount of interventions required to deliver the schemes we will bring the northern rail network to a halt for just about every weekend over the next five years. We have taken the view that it would be an unacceptable price to pay, which would have a huge detrimental economic impact. We have listened to the industry experts and that is the advice they are giving us, so we are delivering this major project in phases. The criteria are about delivering the best benefits to passengers early, but our ambitions are not reduced at all.

**Ruth Cadbury:** Is it about merely measuring the benefit for the passengers? Are any other wider impacts assessed and measured, such as the impact on the environment and local areas, particularly where there are regeneration and economic development aspirations?

**Andrew Jones:** The wider considerations are taken into account. This is part of a broader plan. As the business case is created, it looks at economic benefits and environmental benefits. It is a wider case.

The hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth asked about devolution. It is being considered as part of the Williams review, but the principle of devolution is a sound one. The suggestion that the Secretary of State is not supportive of Crossrail and the London Mayor is not correct. For example, TfL has run into some financial difficulties over the Crossrail cost overruns. We are helping it with a £2.1 billion credit facility, which it will pay back—it is a loan, not a grant. That is an important indication of how we are supportive of Crossrail and the London Mayor.

**Rachael Maskell:** I would like to return to the transpennine route. From meetings with officials, my understanding is that the challenge is not in the tunnel

but across three bridges. For that reason, the electrification programme has not been advanced between Huddersfield and Stalybridge, which is the real game-changer. The challenge is also to make the necessary upgrades to accommodate future freight. Will the Minister assess the advice from Transport for the North to ensure that the proper full upgrade is brought to the line? It would have a significant impact on reliability and will drive efficiencies in the system.

**Andrew Jones:** I am very keen for that line to be upgraded and will ensure that all the opportunities to progress it are considered. I want to make it absolutely clear that there is no loss of ambition, but at the same time we must be very careful when industry experts tell us that if we do any more we will bring the network to a halt for just about every weekend in five years. That is the advice from senior levels in Network Rail. On getting on with it, that cannot happen soon enough as far as I am concerned.

**Lilian Greenwood:** We still have 42 minutes left, but I do not anticipate that we will take that long. On the transpennine electrification, I accept the Minister's point that we do not want excessive disruption, but will he accept that it is better to do the right thing, which will lead to cost-effective operations, environmental benefits and reliability benefits in the longer term, even if that sometimes means that delivery of the scheme will take longer? Will he commit to talk to Rail North about how the maximum benefits can be achieved in the long term, rather than a short-term approach that could bake in disbenefits over a very long period?

**Andrew Jones:** I will continue to talk with all the different bodies across the north to maximise the benefits. We are not taking a short-term approach; a short-term approach would be to get on and do it right away. We are taking the approach to deliver it in phases to maximise the benefits. At each stage we are also future-proofing it. That principle is already being implemented.

The hon. Member for Bradford South (Judith Cummins) talked about Northern Powerhouse Rail. I am also very keen for Bradford to be well served by that. Indeed, Transport for the North is developing the proposals for Northern Powerhouse Rail. That is great—it will be from the north, for the north. I went to Transport for the North's last board meeting, at which I was going to receive the strategic outline business case. Transport for the North had to pull that business case at the last moment, but I will go up to its next board meeting; I do not criticise it in the slightest for that. The hon. Member for Nottingham South just mentioned the principle of getting things right for the longer term, and in pulling the business case, Transport for the North was making sure that it does that.

Northern Powerhouse Rail is a very exciting project. The only point I made when I said I would come back for the next board meeting was that I wanted Transport for the North to get on with the project promptly. Northern Powerhouse Rail and HS2 are linked in lots of ways, and any delays to Northern Powerhouse Rail could compromise other projects, so I urged speedy progress.

Colleagues mentioned HS2. I take the opportunity to confirm that HS2 remains a critical project for the Government.

**Jim McMahon:** In the light of the comments by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, what representations has the Department for Transport made to reassert the case for HS2? Is the Minister confident that if there were a value-for-money review, the project would make it through?

**Andrew Jones:** I could answer that in a few ways. First, it is clearly right that the Treasury takes a view on managing the efficiency and delivery of public projects, because so much money is involved. We are spending half a billion pounds a week more on capital projects than the last Labour Government. We are catching up on investment.

What representations do we make? Of course there is regular dialogue between Ministers from all Departments, and certainly between the Department for Transport and the Treasury at both official and ministerial level. The Government remain entirely committed to HS2, which is part of the rebalancing of our national network. We need capacity on the network, and HS2 will deliver it.

**Jim McMahon:** The Minister has given way extremely generously, and I am grateful for that. Has the Treasury initiated a review of HS2, or did the Chief Secretary's comment just reflect her personal view?

**Andrew Jones:** I am not the Minister with responsibility for HS2, so the day-to-day correspondence does not come across my desk, but the Government are entirely committed to HS2. The Treasury is right to say that we will look at projects to ensure that they come in on budget and on time, and that we do not see project-creep in terms of cost. The Treasury has been sighted, for example, on the way we are re-planning our investment process to ensure that decisions are made in as informed a way as possible so that there are as few surprises as possible.

Let me be absolutely clear to everybody that HS2 is a critically important project. Work is already under way to deliver it. The hon. Gentleman made the point that the appetite for it grows the further north one goes, and I am happy to echo that entirely. HS2 presents fantastic regeneration opportunities, about which I have had conversations with Judith Blake in Leeds, Andy Burnham in Manchester and Andy Street in the West Midlands.

The hon. Gentleman also highlighted the industrial relations issues that blight some parts of our rail network. The Government are keen to see a second person on trains. Indeed, we have said that there will be no blockage from the Government if that is what everybody wants. We can make changes to any agreements. Indeed, we have gone further than that and said that we will provide financial support. I have made those comments to the unions and the company. The dispute is between those two parties, but the Government can play a role in creating an environment to help them get around the table and talk, and I think I have done that. I want to see them get around the table and talk and, as they do so, stop the strikes, which have had a detrimental impact on the economy of the north.

I have not yet addressed the comments by the hon. Member for Inverclyde (Ronnie Cowan) about devolution to Scotland. Rail is devolved to Scotland. The Scottish Government set their own high-level output specification.

The statement of funds available is above the Barnett formula for CP6. Off the top of my head, having discussed Scottish rail issues with colleagues in the Adjournment debate on Monday night—that was very late, so I understand that not everyone will have been present—I think it is £4.85 billion. There is significant funding available for the Scottish rail network, and the Scottish Government have control over rail.

**Ronnie Cowan:** This is not just about funding; it is also about control and management. When ScotRail is run by the Scottish Government and Network Rail is run by the UK Government, that can obviously fall between two stools. That is what we seek to address. We want the responsibility to go with the railway.

**Andrew Jones:** I just point out that decisions about what happens are taken north of the border. We have a national rail network, which cuts across all the nations of the United Kingdom, but decisions are made north of the border. I have had conversations with the Scottish Transport Minister, and I fully understand where his responsibilities start and mine finish.

We have accepted many of the Transport Committee's recommendations, and I hope I have made it clear that our new approach through the RNEP is clear, logical and fair, and makes sense. We want that approach to lead to better outcomes for passengers, certainty for the supply chain and the industry, and a much more balanced portfolio of investment. I know that colleagues are hungry for investment. We are catching up on decades of under-investment in our rail network and other modes of transport by Governments of all colours. It is clear that we all agree that rail plays a huge role in our national economy, and that is why we are investing in it at record levels. I look forward to keeping the House and the Committee updated on our progress.

3.57 pm

**Lilian Greenwood:** We have had an excellent debate. I thank all those who took part, including my Select Committee colleagues and Members from across the House. I particularly thank the Minister for his willingness to engage so constructively. He can be in no doubt about the strength of feeling across the country—from Essex to Yorkshire, Lancashire, Cambridgeshire and Sussex—about the need for rail investment to be shared more fairly. Members, their constituents and businesses want to hear not only that the Government are listening, but that they will respond. Of course, this is not only about fairness. Failure properly to invest will hold our country and its people back. Effective rail networks and transport networks in general are key to tackling poor productivity.

I am pleased that the Minister has received the rail industry's decarbonisation report, even if it is only a draft. I look forward very much to hearing what it says and what the Government intend to do in response. I hope he listened to the concerns a number of us raised about the transpennine route upgrade. It is important that the Government deliver on the promise of a wholly electrified line, which would benefit passengers, freight, the economy and the environment.

I welcome the Minister's comments about the transparency of the enhancements pipeline. We look forward to receiving from the Department more information

[*Lilian Greenwood*]

about which schemes are progressing through the pipeline and further details of the market-led proposals that are in development, which have the potential to improve our rail network and provide much-wanted work for rail companies up and down the country. Of course, enhancement work tends to be quite different from day-to-day maintenance and renewal.

We are in agreement about the level of investment that is going into our network, whether through the money committed in CP6 or through some of the major projects, including HS2. On that we can agree, but I have no doubt that the Committee will continue to scrutinise the work of the Department, to make sure that the investment goes in and to ensure that when new services are developed to benefit from that investment,

they are delivered effectively. That has not been the case in the previous year. We all regret the problems with the delivery of the new timetable. There has to be learning from that and we have to move on, particularly so that passengers feel the benefits that they know they have been paying for, for some time. We look forward to future debates, in Westminster Hall and on the Floor of the House, on this matter.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered the Fourth Report of the Transport Committee, Rail infrastructure investment, HC 582, and the Government response, HC 1557.

4 pm

*Sitting adjourned.*



# Written Statements

Monday 7 January 2019

## HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

### Winter Preparedness

**The Minister for Health (Stephen Hammond):** This Government recognise that winter, with demand placed on services with colder weather and seasonal flu, is a challenging time for the NHS as it is for health services around the world. DHSC Ministers meet weekly with our systems leaders in the NHS to ensure that our services are equipped for winter to support those who need them.

We have been busier than ever, but our NHS has been rising to the challenge over the festive period.

The latest data to November shows that compared to last year, we have seen 3.6% more attendances per day at A&E, and that over 1,600 more patients per day were seen within four hours so far this year. Despite that, the published NHS winter operational updates show that in December there have been fewer ambulance handover delays and diverts to other A&Es compared to last year. This means ambulances spend less time at hospitals and more time on the roads reaching patients.

#### *Ahead of winter*

We started the run up to the winter period with over 2,200 more doctors and 1,600 more nurses on our wards than just a year ago, bringing the total increase since 2010 to 16,500 more doctors and 13,400 more ward nurses

We also increased NHS funding by £1.6 billion at the start of this year, to support and improve A&E and elective care performance.

On top of this, in advance of winter, more than £420 million has been provided to help the NHS this winter:

£240 million for adult social care—allowing councils to plan to provide care for 40,000 more people.

£145 million capital funding to hospitals for winter improvements—to upgrade wards and redevelop A&Es—the benefits of which the NHS expects will bring the equivalent of an additional 900 beds.

£36.3 million has been invested into the ambulance services for new vehicles and ‘make-ready hubs’. This will pay for more than 250 new ambulances, with 100 delivered by Christmas Eve.

The NHS has continued to work to improve services in advance of winter, to help people avoid a hospital visit or admission, and get them home quickly if they do have to stay. This has included:

Increased access to GP appointments at the evening and weekends. The latest figures (August 2018) show that full extended access was available for 40 million people, which is an increase of over 4 million from March 2018.

Fully embedded clinical streaming in A&Es following our investment ahead of last winter of £100 million, which means patients are directed to the most appropriate service.

Improved NHS 111. Half of calls to NHS111 now receive clinical input and ahead of this winter we have rolled out 111 online across the country so that the public can access care advice and services through digital channels and reduce additional pressures on A&E. 91% of the population have access to NHS Digital’s 111 online service.

Work to standardise services provided by urgent treatment centres and increasing public awareness of this as an alternative to A&E for minor illness and minor injury.

Increased implementation of ‘hear and treat’ and ‘see and treat’ by ambulances—reducing unnecessary conveyance to hospitals.

Joint working between hospitals, councils and other local partners to reduce long lengths of stays in hospital and helping improve transfers to community and social care. The published NHS winter operational updates show that the number of beds occupied by patients staying more than 21 days in hospital on average per day is down by more than 2,000 (12.5%) this winter so far, when compared to the equivalent period last year.

Extending the flu vaccination programme—already the most comprehensive in Europe—even further. Vaccination remains the best line of defence against flu and this year, we have more effective vaccines available than ever before.

This winter we have also encouraged all healthcare workers to be vaccinated, are funding the vaccination again for frontline social care workers, and have extended the offer to staff giving direct care in the voluntary managed hospice sector. Free vaccine eligibility has also been extended to include children up to nine years old (Year 5) so that all two to nine year olds are now offered the vaccine.

#### *Performance over the next few weeks*

The NHS continues to make some progress in rising to the seasonal challenges, but we also know that there is no room for complacency at this early stage of winter.

There are clearly a number of hospital trusts where the situation has been challenging. The most recent statistics showed that 75% of all 12-hour trolley waits occurred in just 10 trusts.

In addition, NHS England and NHS Improvement continue to monitor NHS performance daily. They are supporting hospitals nationally and, working with regional teams, will maintain a close grip and oversight during winter of their performance.

The Care Quality Commission will be continuing to monitor hospital services over the winter months with over 30 visits to hospital emergency departments planned. The CQC is able to undertake further visits in response to any emerging risks identified.

And we will go further to support this through our long-term plan to guarantee the future of the health service—backed by an extra £20.5 billion a year in real terms by 2023-24.

[HCWS1232]

## TRANSPORT

### Ferries

**The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling):** The Government have entered into three contracts with ferry operators to provide additional ferry capacity and services into the UK as part of no-deal EU exit contingency planning.

While the ambition of Government is to ensure an orderly exit from the EU, the Department for Transport has been undertaking a wide range of work to mitigate the impact on the transport system of a no-deal EU exit.

Significant work has taken place to understand the effect that this would have on the UK border and the impact on flows of goods between the UK and EU. While the Government have made clear they are committed to ensuring frictionless movement across the UK border, the scale of the potential disruption to the Dover Straits, if additional customs checks were introduced in Calais, Coquelles and Dunkirk, where freight services disembark, could be very significant. Given the importance of these routes, contingency work is being undertaken to mitigate potential impacts and ensure that goods can continue to flow into and out of the UK as freely as possible.

A priority for Government is to ensure that the Port of Dover and the Eurotunnel can continue to operate at the maximum possible capacity. The Government are therefore working with both organisations and our French counterparts in Calais, Coquelles and Dunkirk so that any disruption or drop in throughput is managed effectively and mitigated.

There is a clear willingness to reach agreements which secure the continued operation of these vital trade routes in all scenarios and the Government remain confident that there will not be major disruption to the flow of goods across the border. Nevertheless, the potential for a decline in throughput remains possible in a worst-case scenario and the Government are therefore planning for all eventualities.

As one of several contingency measures being undertaken, the Department for Transport has completed a procurement process to secure additional ferry capacity between the UK and the EU which can be used for critical goods such as medical supplies in the event of disruption to cross-Channel crossings. A negotiated procurement procedure without prior publication was concluded as allowed for by regulation 32 of The Public Contracts Regulations 2015. An accelerated competitive process was carried out in order to ensure that capacity can be in place in time for a no-deal exit while at the same time securing value for money for the taxpayer. The Department approached a number of shipping providers capable of providing additional freight capacity in order to ensure fairness for the market and also engaged external expertise to ensure value for money for the taxpayer.

Bids were evaluated on the basis that they met our strategic aims of providing additional freight capacity for a no-deal Brexit scenario. Bids were reviewed against a number of criteria, including journey time, quality of delivery plans, and the pricing submitted by bidders.

The bids we received to provide capacity were subject to technical, financial and commercial assurance as part of standard due diligence procedures and consistent with that undertaken on all Government contracts. This included a price benchmarking exercise to ensure that the taxpayer was getting good value for money, and assurance on the delivery plans of our bidders.

The Department commissioned external advice from three respected professional advisers to support this work. Three contracts were agreed with operators totalling c.£103 million.

Two contracts went to established operators, Brittany Ferries (£46.6 million) and DFDS (c.£42.6 million). These contracts provide for additional capacity between the UK and EU on existing routes, via the provision of additional services and additional vessels. The contracts agreed with them include early termination provisions and other typical contractual provisions to ensure Government have the right protections in place, such as in the event of an operator becoming insolvent.

The routes agreed with Brittany and DFDS are away from the Dover Straits, and will run from the Ports of Immingham and Felixstowe (DFDS) and Poole, Plymouth and Portsmouth (Brittany) to destinations in Germany (Cuxhaven), the Netherlands (Vlaardingen) and France (Caen, Cherbourg, Le Havre, and Roscoff).

The third contract was awarded to Seaborne Freight (£13.8 million), a new operator to provide a new service between Ramsgate and Ostend. Seaborne Freight has been preparing for some time to operate services on this route. The management team of Seaborne has extensive experience in the shipping and maritime sector, including the operation of ferry services on cross-channel routes, freight brokerage, port management and vessel chartering.

While the broad contract structure is the same for all three contracts, including the provision that payment will only be made in arrears and on the successful provision of services, the Seaborne contract is also subject to the achievement of a range of key milestones including in relation to finalising funding and vessel chartering agreements.

As with many operators in the sector, it is not uncommon that they do not own their own vessels and will be chartering them through third parties. The Department has reviewed their plans for sourcing vessels with the support of external advisers. A number of large institutional investors are backing this service and the Government's contract represents a small part of the overall investment required by Seaborne to open this route. These lenders undertake their own rigorous due diligence before making financial commitments, providing a further level of assurance to Government. Seaborne and my Department are also working closely with Thanet Council to ensure that Ramsgate Port is ready to take new services. A programme of work to prepare the infrastructure is under way.

In total the additional freight capacity delivered by these three contracts will be equivalent to around 8% of normal flows across the Dover Straits. While this will not be sufficient to mitigate the full level of disruption possible in a worst-case scenario, it will enable the Government to provide essential capacity for the highest priority goods including medical supplies.

In terms of next steps, the Department for Transport will provide support to and oversight of all operators to ensure that these services are delivered to meet the terms of the contracts agreed.

I will provide further updates to Parliament at the appropriate points.

[HCWS1233]

# Written Statements

Tuesday 8 January 2019

## CABINET OFFICE

### Cabinet Committees and Implementation Taskforces

**The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Mr David Lidington):** Today I am announcing the creation of a new European Union Exit and Trade (Preparedness) Sub-Committee, which will oversee and ensure effective delivery of plans for an orderly exit from the European Union. This new sub-Committee will replace the former European Union Exit and Trade (Domestic Preparedness, Legislation and Devolution) Sub-Committee, which will be disbanded. An updated list of Cabinet Committees and Implementation Task Forces (ITFs) will be made available on [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk). The Borders Inter Ministerial Group and the European Union Exit Inter Ministerial Group will also be disbanded.

[HCWS1238]

## TREASURY

### Double Taxation Convention: UK and Cyprus

**The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mel Stride):** A protocol to the double taxation convention with Cyprus was signed on 19 December 2018. The text of the protocol is available on HM Revenue and Customs' pages of the [gov.uk](http://gov.uk) website and will be deposited in the Libraries of both Houses. The text will be scheduled to a draft Order in Council and laid before the House of Commons in due course.

[HCWS1234]

## EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION

### General Affairs Council

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr Robin Walker):** Lord Callanan, Minister of State for Exiting the European Union, has made the following statement:

I will attend the General Affairs Council in Brussels on 8 January 2019 to represent the UK. Until we leave the European Union, we remain committed to fulfilling our rights and obligations as a full member.

The provisional agenda includes:

#### *Presentation of the priorities of the Romanian presidency*

The Romanian presidency is expected to present its presidential priorities for its six month tenure. The priorities are: a Europe of convergence, a safer Europe, Europe as a strong global actor and a Europe of common values.

#### *Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027*

Ministers and the Commission will discuss progress on the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) negotiations.

#### *Co-ordinated response on disinformation*

Ministers are expected to discuss the "action plan against disinformation" which was agreed at the December European Council. The plan comprises commitments to tackle the systematic spreading of false information created to deceive and mislead audiences, with the intention of causing harm or obtaining political, personal or financial gain.

### *Legislative files*

The Commission is expected to provide an update on the state of play of live legislative files, including those in the Commission work programme 2019.

[HCWS1236]

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### Asylum

**The Minister for Immigration (Caroline Nokes):** The United Kingdom has a proud history of providing an asylum system that protects and respects the fundamental rights of individuals seeking refuge from persecution. This system includes supporting asylum seekers who would otherwise be destitute while their asylum claim is assessed. I am grateful for the attention Members of this House, including the Home Affairs Committee, have given to this matter.

I have always been clear about this Government's commitment to ensuring service users are provided with safe, secure and suitable accommodation and are treated with dignity and respect. I have listened to the concerns of local authorities and have reinforced my commitment to working in partnership with them in this area. I am also mindful of this Government's commitment to provide value for money for the taxpayer. Today I am pleased to inform the House that we have procured contracts for asylum accommodation and support to deliver on each of these commitments.

New contractual arrangements will be put in place in September of this year.

Initial accommodation, dispersed accommodation, transport and associated support services will be managed as integrated services on a regional basis.

Clearsprings Ready Homes has been awarded the contracts in the south of England and Wales;

Mears Group has been awarded the contracts in Northern Ireland, Scotland and the north-east, Yorkshire and Humber region; and

Serco has been awarded the contracts in the north-west of England, and the midlands and east of England regions.

Advice, issue reporting and eligibility assistance services will be integrated into a single, nationally operated end-to-end service; the contract for these services has been awarded to Migrant Help.

The contracts were designed after extensive engagement with local government, non-governmental organisations and potential providers. The contracts offer a number of improvements on the current arrangements to make them more sustainable and include changes to improve the customer journey and conditions for service users, addressing many of the recommendations in the Home Affairs Committee's reports on asylum accommodation. In particular, the contracts will:

Provide assistance to asylum seekers to apply for support and throughout their time in the accommodation and support system.

Require accommodation providers to develop close working relationships with local authorities, liaise and consult with local authorities on the location of properties and share appropriate information with them.



Require providers to establish working relationships with the voluntary sector and local community-based support organisations and networks in order that they can signpost SUs to local services.

Set clear requirements for the standards of the accommodation that meet the standards used for social housing across the UK.

Require providers to have proactive maintenance plans and to regularly inspect and report on the findings of the inspections of their accommodation.

Provide service users with a single point of contact, independent from accommodation providers and the Home Office, to report issues with their accommodation and to provide advice in relation to their support throughout the whole process.

Set clear timescales within which repairs must be made, with a clear escalation process for service users.

Enhance the approach to safeguarding through a range of measures including improved health screening and support in registering with a GP, improved safeguarding training and awareness of staff, the provision of more adapted rooms for service users with specific needs, and the provision of face-to-face advice and support for those who need it.

Ensure that service users receive clear induction materials to help them settle into their initial accommodation and dispersed accommodation in local areas. This will seek to ensure a better understanding of the support that is being provided as well as how to navigate services in local communities.

Support service users into mainstream services if they are granted asylum or to return to their home country if are refused.

Gather feedback from service users about their experience of accommodation and support to monitor provider performance and improve the services that are provided.

Following the award of the contracts today, the Home Office will work closely with the providers to mobilise the contracts and transition services users to the new arrangements. We will communicate directly with our services users and stakeholders to ensure they are aware of the changes and how they will affect them.

We will be working extremely closely with local authorities to ensure a smooth transition and will be involving them ever more closely in the operation of the new contracts as they go live.

[HCWS1237]

#### **European Union JHA Opt-in Decision: Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund 2021-27**

**The Minister for Immigration (Caroline Nokes):** The Government have decided not to opt in, under the UK's JHA opt-in protocol, to a proposal establishing an asylum, migration, and integration fund (AMIF) 2021-27.

The intended fund would not come into operation until the start of the next multiannual financial framework (2021), after the UK has exited the European Union and after the end of the proposed implementation period. As such, the UK would not be able to benefit from the fund as a member state.

Until the UK leaves the EU it remains a full member, and the Government will continue to consider the application of the UK's opt-in to EU legislation on a case by case basis, with a view to maximising our country's commitment to protecting and enhancing our ability to control immigration.

[HCWS1235]

# Written Statement

*Wednesday 9 January 2019*

## CABINET OFFICE

### EU Exit and Northern Ireland

**The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Mr David Lidington):** The Government are today publishing a paper, “UK Government commitments to Northern Ireland and its integral place in the United Kingdom”, which outlines a package of commitments to the people of Northern Ireland as we leave the EU—giving Northern Ireland a strong voice and role in any decision to bring the backstop into effect, and in its implementation in that scenario.

These commitments underline Northern Ireland’s integral place in the United Kingdom and reflect that it is the only part of the United Kingdom sharing a land border with an EU member state. They seek to address some of the questions that have been asked about the backstop in that regard. We recognise that these alone will not address all of Parliament’s concerns—including for those who have focused on changes from the EU. But it is right that we look to do what we can as a Government to safeguard the interests of the people and businesses of Northern Ireland, and respond to some of the key concerns that have been raised.

The commitments include:

Setting out that no new areas of EU law would be applied in a backstop scenario without seeking the agreement of the Northern Ireland Assembly;

Ensuring unfettered access for Northern Ireland businesses to the Great Britain economy;

Providing a strong role for Stormont before the backstop could be triggered;

Giving the Northern Ireland Executive a role in Northern Ireland-specific discussions between the UK and EU under the structures established in the withdrawal agreement;

Outlining that there would be no regulatory divergence between GB and Northern Ireland in areas covered by the backstop in any scenario in which it applied;

A guarantee that there would be no change to north-south co-operation through the protocol, preserving the arrangements under strand II of the Belfast (“Good Friday”) agreement;

A powerful voice for Northern Ireland in future relationship negotiations—putting the voice of the Northern Ireland Executive, along with the other devolved Administrations, at the heart of that work.

The Government are publishing this paper ahead of the commencement of the meaningful vote debate on the withdrawal deal.

I am placing a copy of the paper “UK Government commitments to Northern Ireland and its integral place in the United Kingdom”, and a copy of “Special meeting of the European Council (Art. 50) (13 December 2018)—Conclusions” in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS1239]





# Written Statements

Thursday 10 January 2019

## BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

### Outer Space Act: (Isle of Man)

**The Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation (Chris Skidmore):** The Government intend to extend, to the Isle of Man, the provision for a limit to be set on an operator's liability to indemnify the Government against claims brought for loss or damage arising from regulated space activity.

Under the Outer Space Act 1986 (the OSA), operators are required to indemnify the UK Government for any claims brought to the Government for damage or loss arising from activities regulated under the OSA.

Before 2015, this indemnity had no limit, meaning that operators were fully liable for any damages their activities caused. This unlimited liability was seen by industry as a commercial disadvantage and a provision was included in the Deregulation Act 2015 to amend the OSA, introducing a limit to the operator's indemnity.

Extending the provision for a limit to be set to the Isle of Man, would have the effect of creating a contingent liability for the UK Government for amounts above the indemnity limit in respect of licences issued under the OSA as extended to the Isle of Man by way of the Outer Space Act 1986 (Isle of Man) Order 1990.

The OSA was applied to the Isle of Man in 1990 and the Government of the Isle of Man has requested that the indemnity limit in the amended OSA is extended to them, so that operators based on the Isle of Man will not be at a disadvantage in comparison with their UK counterparts.

The Government have agreed to extend the indemnity limit to the Isle of Man on the basis that the current letters of agreement that are in place with the Government of the Isle of Man are to be updated and formally exchanged following Parliament's approval of this contingent liability. The updated letters will set out that the Isle of Man Government will meet any liability incurred as a result of Isle of Man space activity, above any indemnity limit set in a licence, that is not covered by insurance. However, the letters maintain the assurance that a request for any contribution from the Isle of Man Government will not be for a sum large enough to destabilise the Isle of Man economy.

When a Government Department proposes to undertake a contingent liability in excess of £300,000 for which there is no specific statutory authority, it is required practice for the Minister concerned to present a departmental minute to Parliament giving particulars of the liability created and explaining the circumstances; and to refrain from incurring the liability until 14 parliamentary sitting days after the issue of the minute, except in cases of special urgency.

As a matter of record, I will be laying a departmental minute today.

[HCWS1242]

## Energy Council: December 2018

**The Minister for Energy and Clean Growth (Claire Perry):** The Energy Council took place on 19 December 2018. The UK was represented by the Deputy Permanent Representative to the EU, Katrina Williams.

*Communication from the Commission: A Clean Planet for all*

Miguel Arias Cañete, Commissioner for Climate Action and Energy, introduced the European Commission's Communication "Clean Planet for all: A European strategic long-term vision for a prosperous, modern, competitive and climate-neutral economy". It stressed the need to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions by mid-century, and that the EU was well placed to lead efforts to mitigate climate change.

All member states intervened, and all broadly supported the Commission's communication. A number supported the Commission's call for net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. The importance for businesses and citizens to inform the debate on reducing emissions and for the transition to be realistic was mentioned, as was the need for Europe to reduce its dependency on coal and invest in renewables. The importance of interconnection and the need to take account of energy security and competitiveness was raised. The importance of gas infrastructure was also mentioned.

In its intervention, the UK welcomed the communication and emphasised the urgency of addressing climate change. It pointed out that the UK Government had sought advice from the Committee on Climate Change on long-term targets. It also gave an overview of the action being taken to make the transition to a more flexible and smarter energy system.

Some member states considered nuclear energy to be an important option for decarbonisation, and called for technology neutrality. The UK said that it is important that member states are able to choose from all routes to decarbonisation.

*Clean energy package*

The presidency reported that it had reached agreement with the European Parliament on all elements of the clean energy package. It noted that the European Parliament and Council had now formally adopted the directive on renewable energy (recast), the regulation on governance of the energy union and the directive on energy efficiency (recast). Publication in the *Official Journal* was expected on 21 December 2018.

On the regulation on risk preparedness in the electricity sector, the presidency said that the regulation should give member states enough time to develop their plans for responding to risk. Regarding the regulation establishing a European Union Agency for the Co-operation of Energy Regulators (recast), it thought the outcome would allow the agency to function efficiently.

The presidency informed Ministers that in the early hours of the 19 December it had closed the two most complicated files: the regulation on the internal market for electricity (recast) and the directive on common rules for the internal market in electricity (recast). It commented that the deal would allow the internal energy market to operate efficiently and that contracts awarded under capacity mechanisms will be subject to limits on

emissions of carbon dioxide. Furthermore, consumers will be able to choose their suppliers freely, and request dynamic price contracts and smart meters.

The Commission, congratulating the presidency, noted that completion of the energy union was one of President Juncker's 10 legislative priorities.

Comments made by individual member states included recognition of the value of national energy and climate plans, but regret about the deal struck on limits on carbon dioxide emissions for contracts awarded under capacity mechanisms, and concern at the difficulties involved in opening up interconnector capacity and in meeting energy efficiency objectives.

*Any other business items*

The presidency informed the Council about the state of play on the revision of the gas directive. A number of member states, including the UK, called for faster progress and challenged the latest compromise proposals, but others expressed concern about proceeding with the revision.

The presidency updated Ministers on the connecting Europe facility negotiations, saying that it had secured a partial general approach at the Transport Council. It then provided an update on the hydrogen initiative.

The Commission provided an update on the status of marine energy and external energy relations. A number of member states supported the Commission's calls for more action to make marine technology competitive.

There was a brief discussion on the appointment of the director general for the International Renewable Energy Agency.

Finally, the incoming Romanian presidency presented its work programme, stating its priorities to be formal agreement on the clean energy package, to make progress on the gas directive, the tyre labelling regulation and the mandate for changes to the energy community treaty.

Ministers had an informal discussion over lunch on energy security and external dimensions of energy policy.

[HCWS1241]

## TREASURY

### Contingent Liability Notification

**The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Glen):**

I can today confirm that I have laid a Treasury Minute informing the House of the contingent liability that HM Treasury has taken on in authorising the sale of a portfolio of Bradford & Bingley (B&B) and NRAM commercial loans, acquired during the financial crisis under the last Labour Government, to a consortium formed of Arrow Global Ltd and Davidson Kempner European Partners LLP, who are specialist asset buyers.

On this occasion, due to the sensitivities surrounding the commercial negotiation of this sale, it has not been possible to notify Parliament of the particulars of the liability in advance of the transaction documents being signed. The Chairs of the Public Accounts Committee and Treasury Committee were notified in confidence ahead of the transaction being agreed.

The contingent liability includes certain market standard time and value capped warranties confirming regulatory, legislative and contractual compliance. In addition, there are further remote fundamental market-standard warranties. The maximum contingent liability arising from all contractual claims is approximately £61 million. The impact of the sale on a selection of fiscal metrics is as follows:

- public sector net debt is reduced by £61 million in 2018-19;
- public sector net borrowing is increased by a total of £7.9 million by 2022-23;
- public sector net liabilities is increased by £30 million in 2018-19; and
- public sector net financial liabilities is increased by £30 million in 2018-19.

UKAR will incur an accounting loss of £30 million on the transaction in 2018-19. UKAR is expected to make an overall profit in 2018-19. The net present value of the assets if held to maturity was estimated by UKAR's advisors using Green Book assumptions. UKAR received less than this estimated hold value in exchange for the assets. The Government should not be a long-term owner of financial sector assets and it is right that these assets should be returned to private hands.

I will update the House of any further changes to B&B and NRAM as necessary.

[HCWS1240]

# Written Statements

*Friday 11 January 2019*

## ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

### Year of Green Action

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Dr Thérèse Coffey):** We are committed to being the first generation to leave the environment in a better state than we found it.

Friday 11 January marks the first anniversary of the publication of the 25-year environment plan. Over the last 12 months, we have reduced plastic waste by introducing one of the world's strongest microbead bans, setting out plans to ban plastic straws, cotton buds and stirrers and extending the 5p plastic bag charge, and overhauling our waste system with a comprehensive resources and waste strategy. We have laid our landmark Agriculture Bill before Parliament, transforming our farming system for the first time in 50 years to reward farmers for protecting and enhancing the environment. We have committed to a green Brexit with plans for the first Environment Bill in 20 years and a new environmental watchdog to hold Government to account. On the international stage the UK is at the forefront of combating the illegal wildlife trade. Our landmark Ivory Act put one of the world's toughest bans on the sale of ivory into law and hosting the fourth and largest illegal wildlife trade conference in London in October has led to the UK and 64 other countries declaring significant political and practical commitments to tackle the illegal wildlife trade.

The plan also announced a year of green action in 2019 to draw together targeted actions to make it easier for people to get involved in improving the natural world and spread the word about environmental issues. It will provide a focal point for organisations, individuals, communities and businesses to learn more about their environmental impact and take action to reduce it.

The year of green action is an opportunity for everyone to get involved and enthused about restoring nature, from gardeners to major transport network providers. With individuals, voluntary organisations and businesses all having a part to play; we would like to see industry leading the way in raising environmental standards as well.

The focus for activities in the year of green action will be on connecting with, protecting and enhancing nature. We will be promoting environmental action through partners, a dedicated website for showcasing partner activity, social media, and events throughout the year.

The 25-year plan puts children and young people at the heart of the year of green action and we want to see them playing an active part in decision making for their future. We are partnering with the charity Step Up To Serve, to help encourage environmental youth social action through their #iwill4nature campaign.

Civil servants will be encouraged to use some of their dedicated volunteering time for taking green action, working with partners on environmental projects.

Parliamentarians can play their part in the year of green action by promoting the messages of environmental sustainability.

[HCWS1244]

## WORK AND PENSIONS

### Universal Credit

**The Minister for Employment (Alok Sharma):** Universal credit is a vital reform. It overhauls a legacy system which trapped people out of work. As we move to the next stage, known as managed migration, it is vital that universal credit works for all.

To deliver this, the Government will seek powers for a pilot of managed migration so that the Department cannot issue any more migration notices once 10,000 people have been awarded universal credit through this process. This approach provides the opportunity for the Government to develop the best support for claimants.

This entails replacing the current regulations laid before the House with two separate statutory instruments.

The first is a negative statutory instrument to provide for the severe disability premium gateway. This prevents legacy claimants who are in receipt of the severe disability premium from moving naturally to universal credit and allows them to continue to claim legacy benefits until they are moved over as part of the managed migration process. We are committed to bringing this important extra protection into force on 16 January and this provision ensures that we will meet that commitment.

A second affirmative statutory instrument will contain the remaining regulations as laid on 5 November 2018. These deliver our commitment to provide the vital transitional protection for claimants who are moved by the Department, which is worth over £3 billion for claimants over 10 years. These also provide for transitional payments to those claimants who were previously in receipt of severe disability premium and have moved to UC before the gateway came into force.

In addition, we are including a new provision in this statutory instrument, which will mean that once 10,000 claimants have been moved onto universal credit as part of managed migration, no further migration notices can be issued. In this way the Government are legislating for "piloting powers" rather than the migration of all claimants. This is in line with suggestions from both the Secondary Legislation Scrutiny Committee and the Work and Pensions Select Committee. The Government will report on our findings from the pilot before bringing forward legislation to extend managed migration.

The pilot will begin—as planned—from July 2019 and does not affect the timeline for delivering universal credit, which will be completed in 2023.

The current legislation provides that, from 1 February, new claims to universal credit will support a maximum of two children, regardless of the date of birth of the children.

The Department has looked again carefully at this issue with particular focus on the families making a new claim whose children were all born prior to the



implementation of the policy. We have concluded that including these families would not be right and therefore they will be entitled to support for any children born before 6 April 2017, the date that the policy was introduced. I am bringing forward the necessary legislation to enable this change.

The policy to provide support for a maximum of two children ensures that parents in receipt of benefits face the same financial choices when deciding to grow their

family as those supporting themselves solely through work. Parents who support themselves solely through work would not usually see their wages increase simply because of the addition of a new child to their family. Exceptions are in place to support those who are not able to make decisions about the number of children in their family.

[HCWS1243]

# Written Statements

Monday 14 January 2019

## DEFENCE

### National Shipbuilding Strategy

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Stuart Andrew):** As stated in the National Shipbuilding Strategy, Sir John Parker has agreed to review the progress that has been made on implementation. I am pleased to announce that Sir John has begun the review process and will report to the Secretary of State for Defence by the summer.

[HCWS1246]

## ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

### Clean Air Strategy

**The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Michael Gove):** Today, the Government published their ambitious Clean Air Strategy, building upon an extensive consultation process last year.

Air pollution is the UK's top environmental risk to human health, ranking alongside cancer, heart disease and obesity in its impact. It causes more harm than passive smoking. The actions outlined in this Clean Air Strategy will save society £1.7 billion every year by 2020, rising to £5.3 billion every year from 2030.

This comprehensive strategy shows how we will tackle air pollution and meet our legal targets to reduce five key, damaging air pollutants (nitrogen oxides, ammonia, volatile organic compounds, particulate matter and sulphur dioxide) by 2020 and 2030. The new strategy also sets out our world-leading ambition to reduce public exposure to particulate matter in line with World Health Organisation (WHO) guidelines. The Government are committed to halve the number of people living where concentrations of particulate matter are above this limit by 2025, but we want to go even further than this, and so we will set a new, ambitious, long-term air quality target.

Transport is a significant source of some types of air pollution, and we are already acting to tackle emissions from this source, with our NO<sub>2</sub> Plan, investing £3.5 billion in cleaner vehicle technology. The Government are also reaffirming their commitment to end the sale of conventional new diesel and petrol cars and vans from 2040.

However, transport is not the only source of pollution; this strategy will reduce emissions coming from all sources. Burning wood and coal to heat in homes makes up 38% of the UK's harmful particulate matter emissions. This is why we will ensure only the cleanest fuels will be available for sale and only the cleanest stoves will be available to buy and install by 2022. We will also make existing clean air legislation easier to enforce, and work with local authorities to increase the rate of upgrades of inefficient and polluting heating appliances.

The agriculture sector accounts for 88% of UK emissions of ammonia. Our Clean Air Strategy sets out the concerted action we will take to tackle ammonia from farming by supporting farmers to invest in infrastructure and equipment that will reduce emissions. We are also introducing new regulations which require farms to use low-emission farming techniques as well as regulations to minimise pollution from fertiliser use.

We will continue to support investment in clean air and, in partnership with UK Research and Investment (UKRI), we have launched a joint research programme worth £19.6 million to promote cleaner technologies. This will support the UK to continue to become world leaders in clean technology.

The Government want to help people live well for longer, and this strategy supports the Department of Health and Social Care's prevention strategy, and the NHS 10-year plan. We have also improved how we count the cost of air pollution, publishing revised damage costs today, which show the cost to society of air pollution is greater than previously thought. These costs reflect our improved understanding of the long-term health impacts of air pollution, incorporating the costs of additional health conditions such as heart disease and childhood asthma. This new work means that the estimated benefits of this strategy are even larger than previously anticipated.

This strategy is a key part of our 25-year plan to leave the environment in a better state than we found it. The Government will shortly bring forward an Environment Bill which will include primary legislation on air quality.

Government cannot act alone in tackling air pollution and our strategy sets out how we will work with businesses, farmers and industry to implement lasting solutions to reduce air pollution, and the importance of each of us taking action and playing an important role in cleaning up our air for the next generation.

[HCWS1248]

## FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

### Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting: Update

**The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Jeremy Hunt):** In April, the UK hosted the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM). The summit was the largest of its kind in our history. Forty-six Heads of Government and 49 Foreign Ministers met and agreed a range of actions to build a Commonwealth that is fairer, more sustainable, more prosperous, and more secure.

As Chair-in-Office, the UK has continued to work with the three pillars of the Commonwealth—the Commonwealth Secretariat, its member states, and its organisations and networks to deliver on commitments made at CHOGM. To support this work, the UK announced over £500 million of projects under the four themes discussed at the summit. An overview of these commitments and projects has been placed in the Library of the House and I am pleased to report progress in a number of areas today.

To build a fairer Commonwealth, the UK is supporting nine Commonwealth member states to deliver 12 years of quality education for girls by 2030. I co-chaired the first meeting of the Platform for Girls' Education with the Kenyan Education Minister, Amina Mohamed, in September. The Platform will work together throughout the UK's period as Chair-in-Office and report on progress ahead of the CHOGM 2020 in Rwanda. The UK has also partnered with the Secretariat for Pacific Communities to launch the Pacific Commonwealth Equality Project, which will enable Pacific leaders to champion and advance human rights by strengthening the capacity of their countries to deliver on their international human rights commitments. Reinforcing the belief that effective Parliaments are one of the principal institutions of any functioning democracy, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association launched updated benchmarks for democratic legislatures in November. Following the offer made by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, a number of Commonwealth countries have expressed interest in reviewing and reforming outdated legislation that makes it possible to discriminate on the grounds of sex, gender identity, or sexual orientation. The Equality and Justice Alliance has held the first meeting of its Group of Experts, convened the first regional dialogue of high-level champions of reform, and has engaged national and regional civil society to support this work.

To build a more sustainable Commonwealth, the UK is delivering on the Commonwealth Blue Charter by helping member states protect and sustainably develop the ocean. Twenty-three Commonwealth countries have signed up to the UK and Vanuatu-led 'Commonwealth Clean Oceans Alliance' (CCOA) to tackle marine plastic pollution. Two of these countries joined the Alliance at the first CCOA Ministerial Meeting chaired by my noble Friend Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, Minister of State for the Commonwealth, in the margins of the Sustainable Blue Economy Conference in Nairobi in November. During her visit to Kenya, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister also announced a Young Leaders' Plastic Challenge Badge to help an estimated 100,000 young people in the Commonwealth become leaders in raising awareness about reducing plastic consumption. In response to the challenge of climate change, the UK and New Zealand are also providing support for the establishment of a Regional Pacific Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) hub, which will help Pacific Island countries implement the Paris agreement.

To build a more prosperous Commonwealth, the UK is helping member states harness trade and investment as a means of delivering inclusive economic growth and prosperity. The Commonwealth Trade Facilitation Programme is helping member states implement the World Trade Organisation (WTO) trade facilitation agreement, creating more efficient customs procedures and boosting intra-Commonwealth trade. Scoping missions have already taken place in Eswatini, Tonga and Zambia; and technical support has already been delivered in Sierra Leone and Malawi. In October, Guyana became the first country to partner with the UK-funded Commonwealth Marine Economies Programme to develop a national maritime economy plan. The programme is supporting the sustainable development and growth of 17 Commonwealth small island developing states. To support inclusive and sustainable trade, the UK has partnered with the International Trade Centre to deliver

'SheTrades Commonwealth'. The project aims to promote women's economic empowerment by helping women-owned businesses to trade internationally. Following its launch in Bangladesh, Ghana, Kenya and Nigeria, over 2,300 women entrepreneurs have registered with the initiative and 518 companies have attended capacity building events.

To build a more secure Commonwealth, the UK is enhancing co-operation on cyber security by helping member states identify and address vulnerabilities and gaps in capacity. In support of the Commonwealth cyber declaration, the UK has partnered with the World Bank to deliver national cyber security reviews in a range of member states. We are on track to meet the commitment for every Commonwealth member state to voluntarily undertake a review by CHOGM 2020. The UK is also enabling Commonwealth countries to strengthen their national responses to modern slavery. This will include a legislative drafting seminar in March 2019 that will bring together parliamentarians from across the Commonwealth to consider how their legislation and wider national responses to modern slavery can be strengthened. Further training on how to tackle online child exploitation will be provided to 19 Commonwealth countries over the next 18 months.

Finally, we have sought to strengthen co-operation in international organisations. In Geneva, my noble Friend Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon hosted a meeting of Commonwealth Permanent Representatives to discuss greater co-operation between Commonwealth missions in advance of the Human Rights Council. New Zealand has hosted two similar meetings to discuss WTO reform. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister also included a passage on the Commonwealth in her speech to the UN General Assembly. She spoke explicitly as Commonwealth Chair-in-Office on behalf of the Heads of Government of 53 Commonwealth countries—over a quarter of the UN membership—to reaffirm their shared commitment to work together within a rules-based international system to address shared global challenges.

[HCWS1247]

## HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

### Patient Rights and Responsibilities

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Jackie Doyle-Price):** I have today laid before Parliament a report on the effect of the NHS Constitution. The report has also been published on [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk), alongside an updated version of the handbook to the NHS Constitution.

The NHS Constitution, like the NHS, belongs to us all. It sets out the principles and values that underpin the NHS in England, and the rights to which patients, the public and staff are entitled, and pledges that the NHS has additionally made towards them. It also makes clear the responsibilities which we all have for supporting the NHS to operate fairly and effectively, and explanation of these has been strengthened in the handbook. We must all play our part in helping to make the NHS as good as it can be for ourselves, for our children, and for our grandchildren.



The report is based on an independent survey of staff, patients and the public. It describes how they view the impact of the Constitution, and its value in promoting and raising standards of care.

Many of us are increasingly turning to authoritative sources, such as the NHS website, for information on what they can expect from the NHS, how we can use it well, and how we can look after our own health.

In strengthening the patient and public responsibilities section in the Constitution handbook, which reflects our response to recommendations made in the House of Lords report on the long-term sustainability of the NHS and Adult Social Care, we have made clearer that patients and the public have a vital role to play in ensuring that the NHS remains sustainable, with its resources focused on those who need them most.

We have a dedicated NHS workforce, who work incredibly hard to deliver high quality care to all those who need it, when they need it. Despite the pressures they are under, they remain proud to be a part of the NHS, and firmly support the need for a Constitution. Awareness of the Constitution among staff is high, and among those who feel informed about the Constitution, more than ever said that it positively influences their day to day work. This highlights the Constitution's ability to empower and enthuse staff to do their best for patients. As we work with the NHS to take forward its new long-term plan, published on 7 January 2019 and underpinned by a funding settlement that will see the NHS budget grow by £20.5 billion in real terms by 2023-24, the Constitution continues to represent everything that the NHS stands for.

[HCWS1245]

## WORK AND PENSIONS

### Pensions Age and Working Age Benefits

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Guy Opperman):** The Government's reforms to the welfare system are designed to support those who need it and help people into work. We have reduced pensioner poverty to close to historically low levels and

the triple lock on the state pension has helped lift the incomes of millions of pensioners. Since 2010, we have increased the annual level of the basic state pension by £1,450. In 2018-19 we will spend £121.5 billion on benefits for pensioners and by 2023-24 this rises to £143.5 billion.

In 2012, Parliament voted to modernise the welfare system to ensure that couples, where one person is of working age and the other person is over state pension age, access support, where it is needed, through the working age benefit regime. This replaces the previous system whereby the household could access either Pension Credit and pension age Housing Benefit, or working age benefits.

Pension Credit is designed to provide long-term support for pensioner households who are no longer economically active. It is not designed to support working age claimants. This change will ensure that the same work incentives apply to the younger partner as apply to other people of the same age, and taxpayer support is directed where it is needed most.

I set out to Parliament last year that this change would be implemented once Universal Credit was available nationally for new claims. Today I can confirm that this change will be introduced from 15 May 2019. The change is being brought into effect in Great Britain through a Commencement Order<sup>[1]</sup> under the Welfare Reform Act 2012. There will be an equivalent Order to introduce the change for Northern Ireland.

Couples with one partner under state pension age who are already in receipt of Pension Credit or pension-age Housing Benefit at the point of change will be unaffected while they remain entitled to either benefit.

In February 2017, Government published an employer-led strategy "Fuller Working Lives: A Partnership Approach", which sets out the importance of fuller working lives for employers and individuals. It also sets out action Government are taking to support older workers to remain in the labour market.

<sup>[1]</sup> The Welfare Reform Act 2012 (Commencement No. 31 and Savings and Transitional Provisions and Commencement No. 21 and 23 and Transitional and Transitory Provisions (Amendment)) Order 2019.

[HCWS1249]



# Written Statement

Wednesday 16 January 2019

## EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION

### General Affairs Council

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr Robin Walker):** Lord Callanan, Minister of State for Exiting the European Union, has made the following statement:

I represented the UK at the General Affairs Council (GAC) meeting on 8 January in Brussels. A provisional report of the meeting and the conclusions adopted can be found on the Council of the European Union's website at:

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/gac/2019/01/08/>

#### *Presentation of the priorities of the Romanian presidency*

The Romanian presidency provided an overview of the priorities for its first presidency, which began on 1 January 2019. The priorities of the presidency are organised around the four pillars of: a Europe of convergence, a safer Europe, Europe as a stronger global actor and a Europe of common values. The presidency reminded Ministers of the challenges that lay ahead during its six-month tenure and called for strengthened cohesion among member states.

#### *Multiannual financial framework 2021-27*

Ministers discussed the progress required on the multiannual financial framework (MFF) negotiations over the course of the Romanian presidency. The presidency indicated that it

intended to include the MFF on the agenda of every meeting of the GAC during its six-month tenure, with the intention of reaching an agreement on the negotiations in the European Council in autumn 2019. The Commission reiterated the need to reach agreement by autumn and indicated that it wished to see agreement on spending in areas such as Digital Europe and a new partnership with Africa.

#### *Co-ordinated response on disinformation*

Ministers discussed how to respond to the threat of disinformation, taking into consideration the forthcoming European parliamentary elections. The discussion followed a number of recent initiatives at EU level on tackling disinformation, such as the "Joint Action Plan against Disinformation", which was endorsed by EU leaders at the December European Council. Ministers discussed which elements of the action plan should be prioritised.

I intervened to stress the importance of co-operation with third parties, including NATO. I also underlined the value that the UK placed on the support and co-operation it received from member states following the attack in Salisbury last year, when we worked closely and shared information on the Russian disinformation campaign.

#### *Legislative files*

The presidency provided an overview of various legislative files that it wanted to advance during the coming months, including: the MFF 2021-27, the digital single market, the banking union, security-related files and Brexit preparedness proposals. The Commission pressed for the conclusion of as many files as possible before the European parliamentary elections.

[HCWS1250]





# Written Statements

Thursday 17 January 2019

## DEFENCE

### No-deal EU Exit Contingency Planning: Call-out Order

#### **The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mark Lancaster):**

A new order has been made under section 56(1B) of the Reserve Forces Act 1996 to enable reservists to be called into permanent service in support of the HMG contingency planning for a no-deal EU exit scenario.

Defence is committed to assisting the Cabinet Office co-ordinated work programme to ensure that there are effective and proportionate contingency plans in place to mitigate the potential immediate impacts leaving the EU, under a no-deal scenario, might have on the welfare, health and security of UK citizens and economic stability of the UK.

Reserve forces will be on standby to deliver a range of defence outputs such as: reinforcement of regular sub-units, liaison officer roles and the provision of specialist skills. A particularly important role may be the planned reinforcement of regional points of command, to enable their 24/7 operation and resilience. We would also expect reserves to be drawn upon to support the implementation of contingency plans developed by other Government Departments.

The order shall take effect from the beginning of 10 February 2019 and shall cease to have effect at the end of 9 February 2020.

[HCWS1254]

## ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

### Environment Council

#### **The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Dr Thérèse Coffey):**

I attended the EU Environment Council on 20 December in Brussels. Mairi Gougeon MSP, the Scottish Minister for Rural Affairs and Natural Environment, also attended. I wish to update the House on the matters discussed.

#### *CO<sub>2</sub> emission standards for heavy-duty vehicles regulation—general approach*

Council reached an agreed position (“general approach”) on the regulation on CO<sub>2</sub> emission standards for heavy-duty vehicles. The European Commission had proposed an indicative 30% reduction in emissions by 2030, with a 15% reduction by 2025.

A full roundtable heard Ministers set out their respective positions. The UK intervened calling for greater ambition for 2030 and stressing the need to agree a strong overall package of measures. The presidency presented a revised proposal; the key element being a binding 2030 target, which was sufficient to achieve a general approach. One member state abstained.

#### *Regulation on LIFE—partial general approach*

The presidency introduced its compromise text for a partial general approach of the LIFE programme (the EU’s financial instrument supporting environmental,

nature conservation and climate action projects throughout the EU), to run from 2021-27. In this revised text, the presidency reintroduced the role of the LIFE committee and placed greater emphasis on geographical balance; member states welcomed the adoption of the partial general approach. While all could support the agreement, a number of member states intervened to restate their preference for higher co-financing rates.

#### *“A Clean Planet for All”: a long-term strategy for EU greenhouse gas emissions reductions—exchange of views*

The Commission introduced its long-term strategy on climate, which was published on 28 November 2018, which recommends that the EU aims for net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, following which the Council held its first exchange of views. The Council agreed that the strategy should be discussed in multiple council formations in the coming months. Interventions focused on the aim for net zero-emissions, the importance of just transition, the recognition of specific national and regional circumstances, the contribution of technology to decarbonisation, and the role of national long-term strategies.

The UK intervened to highlight that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) special report on 1.5 degrees underscored the urgency of tackling climate change, and welcomed the strategy as a serious response that also underlines the benefits of taking action, and stresses the need to ensure that no one is left behind in the transition. The UK highlighted the action being taken across the UK to tackle climate change, and the role of clean growth in the domestic industrial strategy. The UK welcomed the focus in the strategy on carbon capture usage and storage (CCUS), given its vital importance in reducing the costs of decarbonisation and the need for collaboration to scale up CCUS, and also highlighted the need to consider nature-based solutions.

#### *AOB items*

The following items were also discussed under any other business.

#### *1. Report on recent international meetings: United Nations framework convention on climate change 24th session of the conference of the parties*

The presidency, Commission, and Poland, which held the presidency of the 24th session of the conference to the parties (COP) to the United Nations framework convention on climate change (UNFCCC), presented on COP24, which took place in Katowice, Poland, on 2 to 14 December 2018. The agreement of the rulebook underpinning the Paris agreement was welcomed as a significant achievement.

#### *2. Report on the implementation of the EU strategy on adaptation to climate change*

Council noted the information from the presidency.

#### *3. The “Graz Declaration”—Starting a new era: Clean, safe and affordable mobility for Europe*

Council noted the presidency presentation on the Graz declaration, which was agreed at October informal Environment Council (29 and 30 October).

#### *4. Measures at EU level to create the conditions for discontinuing the use of the environmentally problematic substances contained in plant protection products*

Council noted the information from the Belgian delegation on plant protection products.

5. *Intermediary sessions of the meeting of the parties to the convention on environmental impact assessment in a transboundary context (Espoo convention) and the protocol on strategic environmental assessment (SEA)*

Lithuania, supported by Luxembourg, presented information concerning the draft recommendations of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Espoo Convention Implementation Committee regarding the Ostrovetz new nuclear project in Belarus. These recommendations will be tabled for possible endorsement by the intermediary session of the meeting of the parties to the convention in February 2019.

6. *Current legislative proposals*

The presidency and the Commission provided an update on current environmental legislative proposals: regulation on taxonomy; directive on single-use plastics; the regulation on persistent organic pollutants (POPs) (recast); the regulation on environmental reporting; the directive on drinking water (recast); and the regulation on CO<sub>2</sub> from cars and vans.

Several member states welcomed the proposals, in particular the progress on the single-use plastics directive. On the recast of the drinking water directive the Commission urged all member states to show flexibility and work together to make swift progress. The UK intervened to welcome the progress on single-use plastics, and outlined the work being done across the UK to tackle plastic waste. On drinking water, the UK noted the recent progress towards a compromise on materials in contact with drinking water, but indicated that there were still outstanding concerns, and on persistent organic pollutants (POPs), the UK intervened to support the Council position on Decabromodiphenyl ether (a flame retardant) and the existing approach for updating the annexes.

7. *Report on recent international meeting—convention on biological diversity (CBD) and update from the UK on the London illegal wildlife conference*

The Commission and presidency reported back on the recent international meeting on the convention on biological diversity (CBD), in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt on 17 to 29 November. The UK intervened to welcome progress so far and to highlight the commitment that needs to be shown from Governments, civil society and business in order to develop an ambitious post-2020 biodiversity framework.

Following this, the UK gave a short update on the outcomes of the London illegal wildlife trade (IWT) conference held on 11 and 12 October 2018, outlining the importance of member states continuing to work together to tackle this important issue, and the need to treat IWT as a serious organised crime.

8. *The future of European environment policy—Towards an 8th EU environment action programme*

Council noted the information from the presidency on plans to develop an eighth EU environment action programme.

9. *Environmental and climate ambition of the future CAP*

Council noted the information from the German delegation, supported by the Luxembourg delegation.

## FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

### Foreign Affairs Council

**The Minister for Europe and the Americas (Sir Alan Duncan):** My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs will attend the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) on 21 January. It will be chaired by the high representative of the European Union (EU) for foreign affairs and security policy (HRVP), Federica Mogherini and will take place in Brussels.

#### *Current affairs*

The HRVP is expected to cover Venezuela, the Democratic Republic of Congo and may also raise Syria.

#### *Disinformation*

Ministers will discuss implementation of the EU joint action plan on countering disinformation that was approved at the December European Council. We will be pushing for adequate funding to allow for full implementation and a robust process of review to ensure that the plan achieves its objectives. We will also seek to highlight our leadership on this issue and willingness to collaborate with EU partners after March 2019. Russian state disinformation was a pre-cursor to conflict in Georgia in 2008, the invasion and illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 and has been used across EU countries since. We have successfully countered a disinformation campaign targeted against UK interests across Europe following the Salisbury attack.

#### *EU-LAS*

Ministers will discuss the EU-League of Arab States (LAS) summit that will take place in February in Egypt. The summit is the first of its kind and offers an opportunity to deepen the EU's relationship with members of the League of Arab States. The UK will support the EU's ambition for the summit to cover a range of priority topics including migration, Yemen and Syria. We are expecting that the FAC will discuss the decision by some members of the LAS to re-establish diplomatic relations with Syria. The UK will be clear we have no plans to do so.

#### *EU-ASEAN*

The FAC will discuss regional issues and the future of the EU-ASEAN relationship ahead of the EU-ASEAN ministerial on the same day.

#### *Council conclusions*

The Council is expected to adopt conclusions on Nicaragua, ASEAN and possibly Yemen. With the French and Germans, we are also seeking approval of conclusions on Iran that should reaffirm the EU's continued commitment to the JCPOA whilst also highlighting our concerns about Iran's regional and ballistic missile activity.

[HCWS1252]

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### Counter-Terrorism and Border Security Bill

**The Minister for Security and Economic Crime (Mr Ben Wallace):** I am today placing in the Library of the House the Home Office's analysis on the application of Standing Order 830 of the Standing Orders of the House of Commons relating to public business in respect of the Lords amendments to the Counter-Terrorism and Border Security Bill.

[HCWS1251]

[HCWS1253]



# Petitions

Monday 7 January 2019

## BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

### Green Deal Scheme

*The petition of residents of Kilmarnock and Loudoun,*

Declares that the Government backed Green Deal Scheme has affected petitioners as we have suffered a detriment both to our finances, our private and family lives; further that many vulnerable residents have invested their life savings in good faith, and others have accrued up to £17,000 in debt to pay for the work that was carried out; and further that in many cases the installer did not apply for building warrants and as a result we are unable to sell our properties or have the assurance that they are safe to live in, or can be insured.

The petitioners therefore urge the House of Commons to ensure that the Government will compensate and protect people who have found themselves suffering a detriment because of the Government backed scheme, and take steps to ensure that this cannot happen in the future.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Alan Brown, *Official Report*, 23 October 2018; Vol. 648, c.246.]

[P002271]

*The petition of the residents of North Ayrshire and Arran,*

Declares that the Government backed Green Deal Scheme has affected petitioners as we have suffered a detriment both to our finances, our private and family lives; further that many vulnerable residents have invested their life savings in good faith, and others have accrued up to £17,000 in debt to pay for the work that was carried out; and further that in many cases the installer did not apply for building warrants and as a result we are unable to sell our properties or have the assurance that they are safe to live in, or can be insured.

The petitioners therefore urge the House of Commons to ensure that the Government will compensate and protect people who have found themselves suffering a detriment because of the Government backed Scheme, and take steps to ensure that this cannot happen in the future.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Patricia Gibson, *Official Report*, 23 October 2018; Vol. 648, c. 245.]

[P002272]

The petition of residents of residents of Linlithgow and East Falkirk,

Declares that the Government backed Green Deal Scheme has affected petitioners as we have suffered a detriment both to our finances, our private and family lives; further that many vulnerable residents have invested their life savings in good faith, and others have accrued

up to £17,000 in debt to pay for the work that was carried out; and further that in many cases the installer did not apply for building warrants and as a result we are unable to sell our properties or have the assurance that they are safe to live in, or can be insured.

The petitioners therefore urge the House of Commons to ensure that the Government will compensate and protect people who have found themselves suffering a detriment because of the Government backed scheme, and take steps to ensure that this cannot happen in the future.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Martyn Day, *Official Report*, 11 December 2018; Vol. 651, c. 253.]

[P002304]

*Observations from the Minister for Energy and Clean Growth (Claire Perry):*

Consumers can obtain appropriate redress where they have suffered detriment under the Green Deal. A process for handling complaints was established under the Green Deal Framework (Disclosure, Acknowledgment, Redress etc.) Regulations 2012. The consumer makes a complaint to their Green Deal Provider, the company responsible for the work undertaken. Where this is not resolved satisfactorily, the consumer may approach the Green Deal Ombudsman or the Financial Ombudsman Service, depending on the nature of the complaint. Their decision is binding on the Green Deal Provider.

Where the consumer remains unsatisfied with the redress offered through those channels, or if the Provider is in liquidation, they may refer their complaint to the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy for consideration. Where the Secretary of State is satisfied there has been a breach of the regulations, he may impose the sanction of reduction or cancellation of the Green Deal loan. This is the full extent of the Secretary of State's powers to provide redress to consumers in relation to the Green Deal.

For one particular Green Deal Provider, that has dissolved, additional arrangements have been made whereby complainants can approach the Green Deal Finance Company who are able to make offers of loan cancellation or reduction where the complaint is accepted and there is evidence of substantive loss.

The Government are undertaking a fundamental review of the Green Deal. We published a Call for Evidence in October last year and a summary of responses this summer. We are now considering the next steps to develop policy proposals and will continue considering what changes could be made to the Framework.

### Review the regulations and control of fireworks

*The petition of residents of Linlithgow and East Falkirk,*

Declares that the petitioners believe that the use of fireworks is increasing in terms of frequency and that the resultant nuisance of noise and perceived danger from explosions are growing with the ever increasing size and power of fireworks available within the UK; further that fireworks can cause severe distress to people suffering from PTSD or other mental health issues and to animals.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to review the existing legislation for the regulation and control of fireworks; further that consideration be given to legislating for a ban on private use and limited fireworks to licensed displays; and further that considerations be given to promoting the use of silent fireworks as an alternative

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Martyn Day, *Official Report*, 20 November 2018; Vol. 649, c. 834.]

[P002288]

*Observations from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Kelly Tolhurst):*

The Government take the issue of public safety very seriously. The Government have recognised the strong feelings and concerns that many people have regarding fireworks. We want to reassure the petitioners that there is a comprehensive set of legislation in place to closely regulate the supply, storage, possession, use and misuse of fireworks to ensure public safety.

Together, the restrictions set out in the 2003 Fireworks Act, the Fireworks Regulations 2004 and the Pyrotechnic Articles (Safety) Regulations 2015, provide a regulatory framework that allows for the safe enjoyment of fireworks by the public while minimising the risk of fireworks harming individuals, property or animals. In addition, the availability of fireworks to the public is restricted by a licensing scheme for retailers which only allows for their sale without a licence during the traditional firework periods around 5 November, New Year's Eve, Diwali and the Chinese New Year.

Local Authority Trading Standards have powers to take action against those who sell fireworks illegally, including those selling fireworks without an appropriate licence, or outside the normal selling period, or to underage people. This also includes the sale of illegally imported fireworks and internet sales.

We recognise that the noise from fireworks can be distressing to some, and so there is in place a noise level limit of 120 decibels on the fireworks that are available for consumer use, which has not been increased in recent years. Consumers can now also choose to buy from a wide range of low noise fireworks.

While noting that legislation is in place, the Government have listened to the concerns around the potential for distress to be caused by fireworks to individuals, as well as to livestock, pets and wildlife. The Office for Product Safety and Standards is working with industry, retailers and others to promote the safe and responsible use of fireworks through guidance and public education and to ensure that appropriate action is taken against those that break the rules. The Office's recent campaign on firework safety reached over a million consumers.

Fireworks have played a part in the UK's history, and have been used for celebrations by many of our cultures for many years. We recognise the enjoyment they bring to many people and the important role that they play in bringing communities together in celebration or remembrance. The Office of Product Safety and Standards has been asked to develop our evidence base on firework safety to ensure we have a thorough understanding of all the issues, but there are no plans for further regulation in this area at present.

# Petition

Monday 14 January 2019

## OBSERVATIONS

### HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

#### Changing Places Toilets

*The petition of residents of Falkirk Constituency,*

Declares that the petitioners believe that over a quarter of a million people with profound and multiple learning disabilities, as well as other disabilities that severely limit mobility, cannot use standard accessible toilets and need personal assistance to use the toilet or change continence pads; further that their needs can only be met by Changing Places toilets with adequate space and equipment, such as hoists; further that the need for these facilities is growing with the number of people with complex disabilities and increased life expectancy; further that 'British Standard 8300:2009 Design' of buildings and their approaches to meet the needs of disabled people recommends that Changing Places toilets should be provided in larger public buildings and complexes; and further that the current lack of Changing Places toilets is leading to thousands of disabled people experiencing a risk to injury and lack of dignity as families are forced to risk their own health and safety by changing their loved one on a toilet floor.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to proactively promote the installation of Changing Places toilets in all large public places, including Government buildings; and further to amend existing equality legislation to specifically require that Changing Places toilets should be provided in addition to standard accessible toilets in venues such as city centres, shopping centres, arts venues, hospitals,

transport hubs like train stations, airports and motorway service stations, leisure complexes, sporting stadiums and arenas, in order to enable all disabled people to go out, go to the shops, attend hospital appointments, enjoy community life and travel with the same dignity as everyone else.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by John Mc Nally, *Official Report*, 3 July 2018; Vol. 644, c. 294.]

[P002162]

*Observations from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Rishi Sunak):*

The Government recognise that providing Changing Places toilets is important and gives severely disabled people and their families the opportunity to visit public places which they otherwise would not be able to and can therefore make a huge difference to their quality of life.

We have been committed to promoting accessibility and the Government have been urging relevant building owners to consider installing Changing Places toilets, where they can. This is why we have worked with the Changing Places campaign to increase the number of facilities. The Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with contributions from devolved governments, provided £70,000 to develop an online map that helps carers and disabled people find Changing Places toilets. There are now over 1,200 Changing Places toilets across the UK, up from just 140 in 2007.

Although the increase in numbers and action by forward looking building owners is to be welcomed, provision is haphazard, so we need to go further. We therefore announced our intention to consult in December 2018 on how we can increase provision of Changing Places toilet facilities in specific new, large buildings commonly used by the public, including a potential change to building regulations.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ministers-act-to-increase-changing-places-toilets-for-severely-disabled-people>





# Ministerial Corrections

Monday 7 January 2019

## HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

### Mental Capacity (Amendment) Bill [Lords]

*The following is an extract from the speech by the Minister for Care, responding to the comments of the right hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones), in the debate on Second Reading of the Mental Capacity (Amendment) Bill [Lords] on 18 December 2018.*

**The Minister for Care (Caroline Dinéage):**... The right hon. Gentleman also mentioned 16 and 17-year-olds. We have given very careful thought to how to include 16 and 17-year-olds and to how the Bill will interact with other legislation including the Children Act 1989, and we are very comfortable that it works alongside existing legislation. It is also a Law Commission recommendation to bring the provisions in line with the Mental Health Act, as he will be aware.

*[Official Report, 18 December 2018, Vol. 651, c. 757.]*

*Letter of correction from the Minister for Care (Caroline Dinéage):*

An error has been identified in the response I gave to the right hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones).

The correct response should have been:

**The Minister for Care (Caroline Dinéage):**... The right hon. Gentleman also mentioned 16 and 17-year-olds. We have given very careful thought to how to include 16 and 17-year-olds and to how the Bill will interact with other legislation including the Children Act 1989, and we are very comfortable that it works alongside existing legislation. It is also a Law Commission recommendation to bring the provisions in line with the **Mental Capacity Act**, as he will be aware.

## FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

### Traidcraft and Fair Trade

*The following is an extract from the Westminster Hall debate on Traidcraft and Fair Trade on 18 December 2018.*

**The Minister for the Middle East (Alistair Burt):** The hon. Member for Strangford asked about modern slavery, and I shall say a little more about that. At last year's UN General Assembly the Prime Minister launched the "Call to Action" to end forced labour, modern slavery

and human trafficking, in which specific commitments are set out, to address modern slavery at the national and international level. It has been endorsed by 43 countries so far. On the International Day for the Abolition of Slavery, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development announced a £40 million package of new funding, forming part of the overall £150 million spend that the Prime Minister committed the Government to at the UN. That package of support will help more than 500,000 vulnerable men, women and children, and includes £13 million for the second phase of the work in freedom programme, the UK's £20 million contribution to the global fund to end modern slavery, and the £7 million of DFID support to Nigeria.

That is all in addition to existing DFID programmes such as the £8 million regional women and girls protection programme operating in Greece and the Balkans, protecting girl and women refugees by providing shelters and strengthening national counter-trafficking mechanisms, and the £22 million responsible business programme, which is spreading responsible business approaches.

*[Official Report, 18 December 2018, Vol. 651, c. 227WH.]*

*Letter of correction from the Minister for the Middle East:*

Errors have been identified in the speech I gave in the debate on Traidcraft and Fair Trade.

The correct responses should have been:

**Alistair Burt:** The hon. Member for Strangford asked about modern slavery, and I shall say a little more about that. At last year's UN General Assembly the Prime Minister launched the "Call to Action" to end forced labour, modern slavery and human trafficking, in which specific commitments are set out, to address modern slavery at the national and international level. It has been endorsed by **84** countries so far. On the International Day for the Abolition of Slavery, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development announced a £40 million package of new funding, forming part of the overall £150 million spend that the Prime Minister committed the Government to at the UN. That package of support will help more than 500,000 vulnerable men, women and children, and includes £13 million for the second phase of the work in freedom programme, the UK's £20 million contribution to the global fund to end modern slavery, and the £7 million of DFID support to Nigeria.

That is all in addition to existing DFID programmes such as the £8 million regional women and girls protection programme operating in Greece and the Balkans, protecting girl and women refugees by providing shelters and strengthening national counter-trafficking mechanisms, and the **£30 million** responsible business programme, which is spreading responsible business approaches.





# Ministerial Correction

*Tuesday 8 January 2019*

## TRANSPORT

### **Rail Fares: Cheltenham and London**

*The following is an extract from the Adjournment debate on Rail Fares: Cheltenham and London, on 19 December 2018.*

**Andrew Jones:** Cheltenham Spa is a fantastic place; I know it very well, actually. It has regular services to and from Birmingham, Bristol and London, with services operated by Great Western Railway and CrossCountry. To support improvements to the amenities of the station itself, a masterplan for the station has been promoted, with the local authority playing a leading role. My hon. Friend mentioned increased car parking. Additional

car parking is a key element within the planned package of improvements, with a new multi-storey car park planned.

*[Official Report, 19 December 2018, Vol. 651, c. 952.]*

*Letter of correction from the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Andrew Jones).*

An error has been identified in the speech I gave during the debate on Rail Fares: Cheltenham and London in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk).

The correct statement should have been:

**Andrew Jones:** Cheltenham Spa is a fantastic place; I know it very well, actually. It has regular services to and from Birmingham, Bristol and London, with services operated by Great Western Railway and CrossCountry. To support improvements to the amenities of the station itself, a masterplan for the station has been promoted, with the local authority playing a leading role. My hon. Friend mentioned increased car parking. Additional car parking is a key element within the planned package of improvements, with **additional car parking space** planned.



# Ministerial Correction

Wednesday 9 January 2019

## EDUCATION

### Apprenticeships and Skills Policy

*The following is an extract from the Westminster Hall debate on Apprenticeships and Skills Policy on 8 January 2018.*

**Anne Milton:** With respect to the drop in level 2 apprenticeships, which was mentioned earlier, we are not absolutely sure what is behind the figures. Some

90% of starts are still at levels 2 and 3, and of course employment is high, but we need to dig deeper. [*Official Report, 8 January 2019, Vol. 652, c. 94WH.*]

*Letter of correction from the Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills (Anne Milton):*

An error has been identified in the speech I gave during the debate on Apprenticeships and Skills Policy.

The correct information should have been:

**Anne Milton:** With respect to the drop in level 2 apprenticeships, which was mentioned earlier, we are not absolutely sure what is behind the figures. **Some 87% of starts** are still at levels 2 and 3, and of course employment is high, but we need to dig deeper.





# Ministerial Correction

*Wednesday 16 January 2019*

## HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

### Mental Health Support Teams

*The following is an extract from Health and Social Care Questions on Tuesday 15 January 2019.*

**Luciana Berger** (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister will know that the Health and Social Care Committee interrogated the Government's plans on mental health for our young people. We found a massive gap: many schools that are passionate about their students' mental health have had to cut the provision that they previously provided, including the educational psychologists, the councillors, the pastoral care workers and the peer mentors. Can she tell us—as the Education Minister could not tell us—what her plans will replace? We know that an army of those professionals are no longer working in our schools.

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** I know that the hon. Lady is very passionate about all this, and I can say to her that, in rolling out this additional support, we do not want to

crowd out anything that is there already. It should genuinely be working in partnership with the provision that has already been undertaken, but we recognise that we need to be rolling out further investment. We are introducing a new workforce that will have 300,000 people when it is fully rolled out, but we must ensure that we invest in the training in such a way that it will be effective.

*[Official Report, 15 January 2019, Vol. 652, c. 1004.]*

*Letter of correction from the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, the hon. Member for Thurrock (Jackie Doyle-Price):*

An error has been identified in the response I gave to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger).

The correct response should have been:

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** I know that the hon. Lady is very passionate about all this, and I can say to her that, in rolling out this additional support, we do not want to crowd out anything that is there already. It should genuinely be working in partnership with the provision that has already been undertaken, but we recognise that we need to be rolling out further investment. We are introducing a new workforce **that will treat 300,000 people** when it is fully rolled out, but we must ensure that we invest in the training in such a way that it will be effective.





# Ministerial Correction

*Thursday 17 January 2019*

## TREASURY

### **Money Laundering and Transfer of Funds etc Regulations 2018**

*The following are extracts from the debate on the Money Laundering and Transfer of Funds (Information) (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2018 on 8 January 2018.*

**John Glen:** There has been an 80% reduction in Scottish limited partnerships.

*[Official Report, Second Delegated Legislation Committee, 8 January 2019; c. 10.]*

**John Glen:** Work is being done across the Treasury, the Home Office and the MOJ to look at how we can refine that.

*[Official Report, Second Delegated Legislation Committee, 8 January 2019; c. 11.]*

*Letter of correction from The Economic Secretary to the Treasury:*

Errors have been identified in my contribution to the debate on the Money Laundering and Transfer of Funds (Information) (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2018.

The correct statements should have been:

**John Glen:** There has been an 80% reduction in **new registrations of** Scottish limited partnerships.

**John Glen:** Work is being done across the Treasury, the Home Office, **the NCA and law enforcement agencies** to look at how we can refine that.

